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# Music as Instrument of Diversity and Unity

Notes on a Namibian Landscape

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## Preface

This essay is based on a decade of ethnomusicology research undertaken mainly in the northern and central areas of Namibia since 1993. During this period, data were collected, audio and video recordings made, and the accuracy of information checked by linguists and cultural insiders. The discussion also rests on my personal involvement in educational reform and arts curriculum design in Namibia. During my attachment to the Nordic Africa Institute as Guest Researcher in the programme "Cultural Identities in and of Africa", I was provided access to many Nordic publications, older missionary documents and other publications not available in Namibia, which contributed a new facet to the research. The opinions in this paper are, therefore, an expression that intermingles my own experience with "hard" data and documentation.

*Minette Mans*

## 1. Introduction

The diversity of African cultures delights us. Nations, on the other hand, should be unified. Does a form of tension exist between these two visions? Over the past decade of political and cultural changes in southern Africa, several noted leaders have expressed the need for people to form a liberated African identity within the general framework of an African Renaissance, implying a resurgence of pride in African arts and music. The way these notions are interpreted by the State and its various forms of government apparatus through legislative, legal and educative systems, will ultimately feed into the school system and cultural institutions, such as arts galleries, music schools, museums and broadcasting networks. Clearly, State ideology has a potentially huge impact upon cultural practices within a country. This is evidenced in the literature on post-Second World War Japanese songs, the Red Guard Songs of China and South African resistance songs, among others.

In Namibia and South Africa, both of which recently emerged from the apartheid system, celebrating Africanity, redressing the wrongs of the past and being in touch with a global economy pose great challenges. It is expected that government institutions work towards strengthening the feeling of national unity and, therefore, the position of ruling party and State. At the same time, there are attempts to acknowledge, respect and improve knowledge about the diversities that enrich these two countries, thereby redressing past cultural injustices and imbalances. The former project is clearly fundamental to nation-building, while the latter contains both the source of unique cultural richness and the remnant of divisive apartheid politics. The challenge is to maintain a delicate balance between unity and diversity. The reality of balancing the demands of governance and population positions the hope for nation-building and reconciliation against the potential for confrontation embedded within diversity. The apparent conflict of interest between unity and diversity brings to the fore many cultural, historical and identity issues facing “new” nations, including the ways in which these find expression through musical performance. The possibility of ideological conflict lies at the junction between the political landscape, which does not provide a very broad scope or terrain, and the cultural landscape, which is rich both in time and contextual space.

In many ways, music and its attendant identities are a powerful force that can be utilized by and against the State. Indeed, music<sup>1</sup> is more than just expression. It creates unity, or sows the seeds of divisiveness. Sadly, diversity is often seen to be the precursor of divisiveness, rather than being celebrated as a product of human creativity and ingenuity. In this essay, reference to the diversity of cultures and music does not imply the reinscription of racism in the negative sense, but implies a positive process of identity formation and community self-assertion.<sup>2</sup>

That politics and identity influence contemporary musical practice became evident in a recent Namibian television panel discussion.<sup>3</sup> The panel consisted of artists, musicians and arts educators. In answer to a question on the nature of art, the majority of panel members stated emphatically that the purpose of art was nation-building. Having stated above that music wields political power, one nevertheless wonders: is the major purpose of music nation-building? Does the statement made by panellists reflect a post-modern African musical understanding or is it a conscious response to the contemporary Namibian socio-political situation? How is music affected by the political drive towards unity?

Although issues of unity and diversity touch on many spheres of humanity, including identity, power, gender and poverty, for the purpose of this essay unity and diversity should be read within the framework of musical identities where “difference” has long been considered a positive trait. In this essay, I will construct an argument in terms of which the role of indigenous Namibian music is described and interpreted from different angles—of unification and of diversity. The changing Namibian cultural landscape is drawn in terms of time and place: recent history, current trends and the management of change in different areas. The concept of landscape is used to indicate a conceptualisation of the possibilities and values residing in the surrounding world. It refers to the meanings assigned to cultural and political practices within the framework of individual interpretations of signs. Within a landscape there are signs to be interpreted, and every sign means something to somebody within his or her context. In this essay the object of focus is music as it appears in Namibia in current and in memory landscapes. This provides a framework for the arguments that follow. I will outline notions of nation and state-initiated strategies to create unity. This is placed against the remembered landscape of musical traditions, which have developed distinct identities over time. The key to my discussion lies in seeking intersections in the zones of diversity and unity.

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1. It must be noted that throughout this text the use of the term “music” includes dance when referring to the more traditional settings in Africa. In fact, in Namibia, it is often the name of the dance that acts as identifier for a particular category of music. In reference to European and North American music, dance is not automatically implied.
  2. In American hip hop, for example, it is important to realize that for many participants, hip hop has historically been about asserting black or African American identity.
  3. “Talk of the Nation,” Namibian Broadcasting Corporation TV, February 2002. Discussion on *Policy on Arts and Culture*.

### Taking music seriously

"Why is it that to be taken seriously, art must take on the job of politicians, social workers, psychologists, educationists and economists?" asks artist Vinassa (1993:56).

Given the fact that the musical arts, despite their cohesive and compelling power, are relegated to the very lowest level of national priorities, musicians and music educators know what it is to be considered as irrelevant, extraneous, "other." Vinassa, therefore, merely underlines the fact that those involved in music practice, research and education are continually compelled to justify their existence in relation to the larger government bureaucracy. And yet, music has been known to contribute to the development of nations, or their destruction, overthrowing many national and cultural restrictions and transcending many boundaries. Bresler (2002:27, 28) confirms the importance of the arts to global education and underlines Geertz's society-based concept of art as the exploration of a collectively formed sensibility whose foundations "are as wide as social existence and as deep." Bresler (*ibid.*) continues: "Art, then, is about understanding society, and what it values." To understand music is to expand the universe of human discourse. Therefore, to understand our society and the changes it is undergoing, we should explore the musical arts and their current evolution.



## 2. The musical landscape—bands of unity and rhythms of diversity

Based on the legacies of Saussure (1957), Peirce (1966) and Barthes (1977), we can consider “music” on a primary level as a signifier of a culturally based organization of sound. This can lead to an ethnomusicological analysis of the processes of sound production and the structures of that production. But on the second level, the connotations of music link up with far wider systems of meaning and introduce ideological issues such as society, class, race and gender. It is upon this level that this essay focuses.

In terms of geographic space, Namibian music-dance practices can probably be described and generalized as following three broad, culturally mixed bands across the territory. This is not entirely surprising, as there is a tendency for the natural landscape to be inscribed upon bodies and revealed in dance and its music. In this way performance anchors and creates a sense of belonging to the landscape.<sup>1</sup> In certain ways these bands correspond to the practices of neighbouring regions. In the north, music has much in common with the countries north of Namibia<sup>2</sup>—with music and dance revolving around the use of drums, call and response singing, the retention of many ritualistic traditions, the celebrations of lineage, places and animals, and a dance focus on hips, feet, pelvis and shoulders. In the south, the influence of South African musical styles and ethos are obvious, with many correspondences between music of the Afrikaners (Boers), Germans, Namas and Rehoboth Basters. This includes a predominance of choral style singing, partner dances, waltz rhythms and keyboard instruments. In the central band, the area with most urban development, the main characteristic is the multicultural and multi-period mix with strong “global” and regional musical tendencies. This might be seen as the “new” Namibian music, but can also be interpreted as a loosening of ties with any established Namibian identity in an effort to embrace “world” culture. Within each of the above bands the reciprocal musical interaction is greater than between adjacent bands.

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1. See discussions on the importance of identity and place by Stokes (1994), Crandall (2000), Seeger (1987) and Gottlieb (1992).

2. To the north lie Angola, Zambia and Zimbabwe, to the east Botswana and to the south South Africa.

It is typical to find one or two generic performance categories in each broad culture group. These generic categories<sup>1</sup> of song-dances tend to be mainly for entertainment, but in certain cases also have ritual links. They all have an extensive repertoire of songs, but are characterized by fixed, immediately recognizable rhythm and tonal structures. In the rural areas, people, therefore, might hear the sound of drums or clapping from afar and recognize it as music for drinking, for mourning, for healing, or whatever else the purpose may be. Examples of these generic categories are (in different areas) *ondjongo* (Ovahimba), *uudhano* (Owambo), *udano* (Kwangali), *siyamboka* (Valozi) and *namastap* (Nama, Damara). Most of these performances act as musical signs identifiable by Namibians from “other” cultures. All of them are performed very regularly, even in present times, and all of them have become characteristic of the diversity of Namibian music.

Within these broad horizontal bands, Namibian musical identities can be drawn roughly in patches corresponding to larger language groups and proximity to urban areas. These patches are an historical remnant of the imposition of “homelands” based on the ethnic perceptions of apartheid rule. Languages have particular musical significance. They inform musical practices not only because they are core cultural factors, but also because the rhythms and sounds of language dictate musical structures in a fundamental way in musical landscapes that are mainly vocal.

Within the commonality of vocal music, one of the most striking forms of “difference” is the manner in which vocal tone defines identity. In the north-eastern parts, women’s vocal tone is clear, sharp and thinly pitched—almost child-like. Such a voice signifies musical strength and confidence, carries well and gives energy to the music. By contrast, women and even children in the north-west produce their singing tone deep in the throat and “force” this tone with a slow tremble or vibration at the end of each text phrase. This lends a certain “weight” to text phrase endings, which often coincide with pauses in familial lineage incantations. In the geographic regions between, however, women sing in a “normal” middle or speaking register, but construct certain melodies in a manner that seems to ebb and flow quite gently, almost murmuring in some cases. In this area, men create high, strong, almost wailing tones in their solo songs, thus presenting a timbre quite different in character from that of the women.

In the central Namibian band, some of the music is incantative and relatively free-rhythm, for example the praises of Ovaherero. This means that the rhythm is not clapped or drummed or danced, but based upon the verbal rhythms of individual texts that people create in praise. Songs in Khoekhoe, by contrast, are full of linguistic clicks and aspirations, giving the music a percus-

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1. Categories refer to broad culturally conceived classifications of music/dance, generally associated with specific events. Each category has a well-constructed repertoire or collection of music (songs).

*2. The musical landscape—bands of unity and rhythms of diversity*

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North



Central



South

sive sound. Although many of the Khoekhoe songs have assimilated certain characteristics of Western music, they are nevertheless unique because of the language (see discussion further on).

Within the broad African cultural memory landscape, there are many commonalities. A commonality is, for example, the manner in which music is intertwined with dance. Both the dance and its music find an integral place in cultural cosmologies, important life changes and daily events. As a result, communication with and praise of forefathers is common practice. Praise songs or incantations are performed in praise of ancestors, cattle, rain, a place (such as a good grazing place) and oneself. Play is another common thread that runs throughout the region. It includes an extensive array of music-dance performance styles and very often, mixed gender performances. These include *ondjongo* (Ovahimba), */gais* (Damara), *omutjopa* (Ovazimba), *onyando* (Ovazimba), *namastap* (Nama, Damara), *pela* (Valozi), *epera* (Kwangali), *omuhiva* (Ovaherero), *oudano* (Owambo), *omupembe* (Owambo) (the latter three being gender specific). The notion of play is embedded within the structure of action and response within these forms.

The “white” music of the country has, by and large, retained many characteristics of descent. Thus German or Afrikaans songs are sung in their respective communities mainly for entertainment and worship. Common too is the performance and acquisition of North American musical trends, especially Country music. At German-style annual carnivals, the music performed is reminiscent of “oom-pah” brass bands, sometimes mixed with a Country blend.

In the urban landscape, ethnicity plays a lesser role and is largely submerged under transnational identities. Among black and white urban youth, the popularity of R & B, rap, raga, kwaito and reggae is notable, and these sub-cultural identities are expressed in dress, mannerisms and language. These songs often express matters of the day, such as a song by Richardo Mosimane that asks “Whose Renaissance is it anyway?” On a more traditional urban level, choral singing and gospel music are growing in popularity, especially through school and church programmes. Not many of the general urban population, however, involve themselves directly in performance except during worship and nationalistic events, such as the celebration of Independence Day or Africa Day. Their contact with music is more indirect, through listening to recordings and watching music videos. The European tradition of “classical” music is also well represented in the urban areas, more particularly among, but not limited to, the white population. This is evidenced in several ensembles, opera societies, a symphony orchestra and many brass bands.

Being an arid country, Namibian musics are not as strongly reliant on drums as many other African cultures,<sup>1</sup> yet the philosophy of the drum is embedded within rhythmic texture, action and language. The Bantu language root *ngoma*, for drum, is found in all the Namibian Bantu languages<sup>2</sup> and in a transformed version as *g!omah* in Ju/'hoansi, !Kung, Hai//om and Kxoe and *!gomakhas* in Khoekhoe. *Ngoma* means more than just a drum. It implies a holistic understanding of drum, music, dance, Life Force, healing and energy, first fruits and food.<sup>3</sup> In the above Khoe-San languages, the terms *g!omah* and *!gomakhas* refer to musical bows. Attaching this important term, which appears to have been borrowed from Bantu languages, to the musical bow attests to the fact that the bow has pride of place in many indigenous cultures, including those that speak Bantu languages. More than in many other African cultures, I suspect, Namibian music is often the music of the philosopher and poet. Songs and praises are sung and/or played on the bow by wandering individuals, often when herding cattle or goats. This music is often described as “loneliness music” and conversely also as being “played when I feel happy for something.”<sup>4</sup> (This contrasts with “normal” happiness, which is often related to social events or the drinking of alcohol.)

In order to illustrate why and how the political environment affects musical practice, I outline the contemporary situation in Namibia below.

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1. The arid climate eliminates the availability of wood as a natural resource for the making of drums, although clay pots were used in some areas in the past, and plastic containers, tins, pipes and planks are adapted for use as drums in some areas.
  2. This includes Otjiherero, Setswana, Silozi and its dialects, Thimbukushu, Oluzimba, and the group of seven languages locally referred to as Oshiwambo.
  3. The term *ngoma* can be seen as embedded within and reflecting a Bantu philosophy and holistic approach to music. This is discussed in Mans 1997.
  4. According to the statements made by several musicians during field research 1993-2000.

### 3. A musician's perspective on Namibian statehood and budding nationhood

Namibia represents a fairly common form of the “nanny” state—a patriarchal nationalism where the people are presided over by the typical male Head of State. Government is engaged in helping, guiding, educating and developing, also reprimanding, chastising and even censoring the nation. The image of the President, Dr. Sam Nujoma, as “Father of the Nation” characterizes both State and SWAPO<sup>1</sup> as a political party. This image is represented prominently in many offices and homes (see picture below) and is replicated in many indigenous songs, ranging from those emanating from pre-independence exile camps, through semi-religious songs and contemporary pop songs to play songs. This patriarchal image transcends the cultural barriers of different language groups: hence it reflects a national image. Similarly, songs about “Tate Sam” and the liberation struggle can be heard in several different languages across the region.



Meme Suama's lounge with pictures of the President

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1. South West Africa People's Organization, the current majority political party.

The broad background of recent Namibian political history and the country's occupation by the South African apartheid regime are well known. So too is the fact that there was an untoward emphasis on ethnic and cultural differences, which was used to isolate "differing" groups and to create social division. Yet, the emphasis on difference as ensconced in the "separate development" policy ignored the unique and intrinsic beauty of the musical arts of different ethnicities. Rather, through education and public media, indigenous people were encouraged to strive towards the "superior" culture of the oppressors. "Difference" was used to sow distrust and suspicion, as well as convey a message that indigenous musics, indeed, indigenous cultures as a whole, were inferior. This political technique was implemented for over a century by colonial administrations and settlers. This had the expected result of a widespread feeling of cultural and artistic inferiority among the local population. Foreign, imported art and music is still believed to be better than the local or "own." In an attempt to address and reverse this perception and contribute to the development of a nation with a positive self-image (to use rather archaic psychological terms), I set about my research. The aim was to gather and collate information on indigenous music and dance and to bring this into the educational reforms we were working on. The long-term goal is to contribute to an appreciation of "other" cultural practices, hand in hand with learning to value one's own.

Since Namibia's political independence in 1990, there has been a resurgence of the expression of diverse cultural identities. This freedom to celebrate cultural diversity is laid down in the National Constitution and in the education policy under the rubric of "unity in diversity." Understandably, the reigning government seeks to redress the divisive heritage of the apartheid system by calling for unity through the expression of national identity, despite warnings against the "myth of homogeneity" (Tapscott, 1995:164). The current situation indicates an apparent dualism—freedom of diverse cultural expression on the one hand, and the insistent call for unity and national identity on the other. While the overriding state sentiment is towards nationalism, there is an acknowledgement of the complex internal situation in the addition of "in diversity." Thus this phrase could be seen as an attempt to create a sense of cohesion, straddling the potential divisiveness of the two concepts. On the other hand, the building of a national ideology, whether based on the notion of a welfare state's universal aims or by the imposition of dominant cultural values and institutions, will be corrosive of subordinate ethnicities and identities (Rex, 1996:1). Thus, disparate population groups have to be convinced that, despite their obvious differences, they share an identity—a basis for collective interest and loyalty. In reality, the cultural and racial divisions of the past have not completely disappeared, and certain forms of cultural expression are even now conceptualised ethnically and described by means of derogatory labels. A nation should be based on internal processes of community building as much

as economic and development visions, yet in the process of nation-building Namibians are encouraged to ignore historical and cultural differences and avoid discourse on race (Kober, 1997). Because of the past, no attempt is made to promote one culture as national, leaving the impression that unity implies that existing cultural ties should be relinquished in order to adopt a yet-to-be-formed Namibian culture.



## 4. Political (con)texts in music

Nowhere is the current dilemma felt more keenly than in musical expression. Historically learned patterns of separatism and ethnicity are proving hard to overcome (Markusic, 2000:5), despite the prevailing sense of patriotism and nationalism. Hence, musicians vacillate between wanting to express their individual (cultural) and national (political) identities. The former would establish a stronger sense of cultural identity within the broad African scene, while the latter would be politically and vocationally expedient as well as confirming the sense of political victory following independence. Clearly, musicians seek an area of balance between the search for the national unifying commonalities, and enjoyment of the creative but potentially divisive differences.

The long struggle towards political independence for Namibians was typically underscored by the cry for liberation and freedom. These concepts were embedded in and reinforced by freedom songs. The research undertaken by Sabine Zinke (1992) in the SWAPO exile camps shows that apart from songs formally categorized as freedom songs (*omaimbilo emanguluko*), the texts of entertainment, spiritual and children's songs also affirmed the sentiments of freedom and liberation. This continues to be evidenced in my own research, especially in Oshiwambo-speaking areas. Freedom songs originating in exile camps and local resistance movements in the 1970s and 1980s are still sung by young and old. At the time of the struggle, their texts in indigenous languages were usually not understood by whites and were initially considered simple folk songs. This allowed people to sing in support of the armed liberation struggle and express their resistance without fear of being understood by the enemy. The songs, therefore, established a "symbolically oppositional character" (Rice, 2002:26). Having established a strong identity within these songs, people continue to perform and teach them to reaffirm this sense of cohesion, of belonging, even when circumstances have changed.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, these songs serve historically to preserve the atmosphere, leading characters and events of the struggle in the form of brief vignettes. The following are examples:

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1. This continues, e.g., during a recent employee strike at the University of Namibia, (Feb. 2003), we once again sang these freedom songs and others from South Africa, lending strong cohesion and unity to the strikers.

a)

*Tate Sam Nujoma ongwakotora ehi retu ko uyara womundu*

Father/mister Sam Nujoma took back our land (from the invaders) and is responsible for the people.

(Recorded by M. Mans in Otuzimba, 1998, sung by women playing *ondjongo*. Language: Otjhimba.)

b)

*Sam Nujoma e li koshipundi*

Sam Nujoma has the chair/seat

*Hambeeleni Nujoma*

We praise/thank Nujoma

*Dhengeri Botha, Malan a satenda*

Beat/strike Botha, Malan and his brood

(Recorded in Oshukwa, 1999, played by women. Language: Oshindonga.)

c)

*Manga Botha*

While Botha

*A li yende talishongola*

Is limping,

*Manga Opulana*

While PLAN<sup>1</sup>

*A yi yende yaukilila*

is walking straight

*Opo tushiwe tuninge*

So that we are able to do

*Osamangela*

Osamangela (referring to a dance-play style)

*Osamangela uu sa Aha!*

uu sa Aha! (emphasizing sounds)

(Recorded by M. Mans in Omahale village, 2000, played by children at the home of meme Sara Lukileni. Language: Oshindonga.)

d)

Some songs contains texts with incipient racism, such as:

*Ozomburu ka zeno nganda mazekwatere mo ndjira*

White people (Boers) don't have homes, they bear children on the road (meaning like whores)

(Recorded by M. Mans in Otuzimba, 1993, sung by women playing *ondjongo*. Language: Otjhimba. )

In example (a), following the “taking back of the land,” the President is praised for keeping one of the promises of the armed struggle, that is, liberating the land. But he (representing State) is reminded that the responsibility towards his people did not end there. Being “responsible” is also symbolic of the status of a parent, and, therefore, a form of praise. The songs (b) and (c) clearly relate to the armed liberation struggle, Botha having been the South African President at that time and Malan a general in the South African Defence Force. The fourth example (d) shows a form of what is often referred to as “reverse racism,” but is more likely to be a form of cultural conservatism. A person (like the researcher) who is quite clearly living outside known cultural restrictions

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1. People's Liberation Army of Namibia

(travelling and sleeping in a car during a field trip) is described, albeit in less than flattering terms, with some amazement.<sup>1</sup>

These texts give a brief insight into a musical practice that is fundamentally nationalistic, with the greater national freedom from oppression coming to the fore. These songs that inculcate pride in the achievements of the liberation army are an expression of a very particular cultural identity—the identity of the masses fighting for their freedom against the oppressors. Within texts such as these, the enemy is kept alive in oral history, and the name (if not the identity) of P.W. Botha is as well known today as in the 1980s. The songs also serve a different purpose, however—that of grounding the nation's identity in the armed liberation struggle. Through sometimes romanticized images of the horrors of war, members of the population are drawn together. But in a dichotomous positioning, those who know these songs are considered inside members, comrades and heroes, and those who do not are outsiders, even suspect. Lines of identity in terms of “own” and “other” are thus currently being constructed in relation to the armed liberation struggle rather than the post-colonial promises of reconciliation.

In a post-independence state, the increased stress on the development of national unity and national identity could be seen as normal, considering that “state formation encompasses the continual process of struggle for internal control, extraction of resources and political unification, and external security” (Du Pisani & Lamb n.d.:1). But, having achieved the desired political emancipation, we now find ourselves in a situation where “[e]leven years after the defining moment of independence our political life is profoundly non-emancipatory” (Du Pisani 2001:6). This statement expresses some of the disillusionment that follows the initial post-independence “honeymoon” period. Despite espousing a liberation ideology during the struggle leading to independence, it has since become clear, according to Du Pisani, that of SWAPO's ideological labels only that of nationalism presently has meaning. Melber (2002) describes the present situation as a move from “controlled change to changed control” in which “loyalty to a party is considered patriotism.” This development is consolidated in the entrenched xenophobia and extensive bureaucratic network that might be described as an extension of the clan system.

On the whole, however, African governments might have reason to fear diversity (which is often confused with “tribal”). The fear of losing control leads government officials throughout Africa to periodically issue declarations against the divisive forces of “tribalism.” Aidan Southall assumes that “[m]odern ‘tribalism’ is partly media confusion, masking something else, partly the expression of manipulation by both dominant and dominated in a heterogeneous post-colonial state” (cited in Peltola, 1995:39). Very often, gov-

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1. It may, however, also be a more general racially based criticism.

ernments assume that tribe or ethnic diversity “[are] synonymous with conflict and disunity” (Gecau, 1999:28) and strive towards a mono-ethnic national identity. But this assumption ignores the many other forms and levels of diversity (such as class, profession, gender, etc.) in modern African societies. Nevertheless, it is not unusual in Namibia to hear warnings against the revivification of apartheid through cultural diversity. Hence Mattes (1999:263) echoes a common sentiment in considering democratic consolidation “particularly elusive in states characterised by racial, ethnic or religious diversity.” Clearly, these are characteristics of Namibian and South African societies, and one might expect democratic consolidation to be problematic.

In contrast with present-day European states, which were carved out through a long and bloody history of warfare, resulting in confluences of state and cultural boundaries, African states and their borders were created artificially by previous colonial powers for economic exploitation and geo-political reasons. These state boundaries were drawn without consideration of, or consultation with, indigenous societies and their economies, cultures, or histories.

[In Africa] ... these boundaries [by colonial powers] were arbitrarily drawn, usually with geographic convenience or political expediency in mind, and tended to cut across ethnic, tribal, religious and linguistic ties. In the process they often divided established political units, giving an artificial character to the resulting states. This was to have a dramatic impact on the consolidation of African states, as coercion, often in extreme forms, regularly had to be used to deal with inter-group tensions and conflicts, as well as rebellions and revolts. (Du Pisani & Lamb n.d.:3)

Similar to other African nations, Namibian borderlines cut straight through several cultural groups, yet enclose diverse ethnicities and their cultures. Inhabitants, therefore, have familial ties across borders and some groups like Valozi in the Caprivi have expressed a much criticised desire to strengthen ties with kin rather than nation.<sup>1</sup>

It is in this transitional landscape of political unification that diversity and difference may be seen as potentially problematic. To smooth away one of the cultural differences—language—English was introduced as sole national language. Government hoped that the use of English to communicate across cultural and class divides would act as some kind of neutralizing force. Naturally, it was not that simple to counteract the many forces at play. Communicating in English currently places a huge burden on the State in terms of written translations and interpreters in public domains such as law courts. For the semi-literate people of the rural areas it is but one more problem to overcome in the struggle to embrace the modern world.

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1. This was acted upon in the “secession” and brief armed insurrection in 2000, as a result of which previous presidential candidate Mishake Muyongo and others were forced to flee the country. One of their stated reasons for the secession attempt was their continued marginalization under the present regime. This is described in many websites and recent Namibian studies.

Referring back to the aforementioned democratic consolidation, Namibian democracy ostensibly creates an egalitarian basis for all citizens, but this might be a means to suppress difference, because difference may pose a threat to public order, unity and to the State itself. “Cultural diversity can be rich, but it can also be problematic,” says Minister Nahas Angula<sup>1</sup> (2002) in a discussion about culture in education. The reluctance to countenance difference may stem at least partly from the needs-driven (as opposed to a rights-driven) democracy in Namibia. In a needs-based system, the State identifies the needs (hospitals, schools, pensions, roads, etc.) of its people and sets up the required structures to fulfil those needs. In return, the State demands unity and loyalty from its people. In a rights-driven democracy, the state is obliged to balance citizens’ rights (to freedom of speech, minority rights, claims against government, etc.) against the greater good of the state. In return, citizens are expected to elect the appropriate officers and contribute (via taxes and other means). The balance of power in the two forms of states differs, as the state in a rights-driven democracy is answerable to citizens on a more egalitarian basis of negotiation and accountability, while in a needs-driven system the state carries the load of responsibility and accountability. Berman (1992) warns that “the more indispensable the state is to all modern people and peoples, the more oppressive and dangerous it is bound to be” (ibid. 39, 40).

Within this framework one can justify Minister Angula’s (2002) statement that Namibians all share certain fundamental needs—for rain, for peace and prosperity. It is when he continues by saying that educators and researchers should focus on these commonalities rather than culture, which (he says) is actually superficial and of relative unimportance, that one may take issue. Far from being superficial or superfluous, the culture expressed through indigenous music is a complex system of knowledge and meaning, and can contribute to reconciliation, peace and prosperity. Furthermore, “culture is as much part of the treasure of the landscape as are its faunal, floral and marine resources” (Impey, 2002:9) and if treated as a resource, could contribute much to Namibia’s development. Musical culture is a form of Indigenous Knowledge that is now being considered important globally. During the “Global Knowledge for Development” conference and several UNESCO conferences it became clear that “multiple wisdoms have to be preserved, and not just one wisdom.”<sup>2</sup> That musical systems are diverse only attests to the creative initiative of different individuals, communities and societies.

Cultural expression is an important means of contributing to a shift in societal values. Understanding this, government hopes that a unified nation

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1. Currently the Minister of Higher Education, Vocational Training and Technology, previously Minister of Basic Education and Culture.
  2. See *IK Worldwide. Linking Global and Indigenous Knowledge*. The Hague: NUFFIC (Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education), January 2002.

would be one without racial or ethnic strife. Through its stress on the importance of a national cultural identity, it promotes active construction of a national identity. If asked, however, what constitutes “the” Namibian culture or personality, people are unable to supply the answer because there is, as yet, no singular Namibian culture or identity based on shared values. It is often described as a “mosaic”, implying disparate pieces fitted together loosely to create the impression of a larger but broken picture. This is not unusual or strange. There is no all-encompassing Namibian, or indeed African, identity, just as there is no singular Asian or European identity. Amina Mama (2001:9) confirms this, and adds that Africans “seem to be constantly seeking the integrity and unity that the notion [identity] implies, without succeeding in securing it or coming to terms with it.” Apart from there being no unifying African identity, there is also (Mama continues on p. 10) “no substantive apparatus for the production of the kind of singularity that the term seems to require.” Therefore, the pretence that a real unified national identity exists is misleading. Identity represents a process that cannot be forced. As the prominent anthropologist Clifford Geertz stated some thirty years ago:

Nationalist ideologies use cultural devices to demonstrate the process of collective self-definition, to provide feelings of pride and hope connected with symbolic forms so that these can be consciously described, developed and celebrated. (1973:252)

In the absence of open discussion on the divisions of the past and internal processes of community building, the State turned to legislative and systemic strategies for nation-building.

## 5. Strategies for nation-building in the cultural sphere

In Namibia, the post-independence State seeks to become a nation-state in the full sense of the word. A nation is “the broadest imagined community which people are willing to obey voluntarily and give valued resources such as taxes and national service” (Mattes, 1999:267). Although individual experiences of nation-building may be unique, the primary aim is usually to create an environment where there is a shared linguistic, religious and symbolic, and, therefore, cultural identity. Nation-building involves “... a process that seeks to unite different, unrelated and sometimes incongruent population groups into an integrated and identifiable nation” (Du Pisani and Lamb, n.d.:6). To this end, there is usually a build-up and strengthening of ideology and new symbols to accelerate national unity—a flag, an anthem (in a “neutral” language), a national airline, armed forces, a television network, a currency and a university. In addition to these official symbols, it was clear that the Namibian government needed to embark on a process that would encourage social healing to mend the rifts of the apartheid era, hence, the emphasis over the past decade on the creation of a new nation. Steps had to be taken to ensure that the importance of unity was widely understood and accepted. The strategies that the post-independence government has employed to foster nation-building have included a cultural policy, education policy and reform and the use of the media.

### 5.1 The creation of a cultural policy

The process of creating a cultural policy in Namibia took several years and came to a halt several times. As I have discussed this at length elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> suffice it to say here that the creation of a cultural policy in a young nation is a positive step, even if some of the strategies utilized were questionable. As a member of the initial group that workshopped the first few versions and the draft construction of the new national *Policy on Arts and Culture* (2001), it was clear that there were underlying agendas. During a dormant two-year period when it seemed that the draft had been shelved, the questions that addressed issues of advocacy and structures within the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture were apparently swept under the carpet. These included fundamental value questions, mainly about the motivation for a policy that discriminated

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1. Creating a Cultural Policy for Namibia. *Arts Education Policy Review*. vol. 101:5, May/June 2000 ISSN1063-29, pp. 11–17.

between arts and culture, as though the arts are not one form of the expression of culture. By this division a statement is made to the broad population—that there are “arts,” which are located within formal structures such as galleries, a conservatoire, cinemas and theatres; and then there are “crafts” and “cultural music and dance,” which, by implication, are of “lower” standard and do not qualify as art.<sup>1</sup> Dissenting voices were easily quelled by removing the draft work from the appointed action group. The draft policy was then presented in penultimate form at an open conference where it was hotly debated. This conference generated much enthusiasm and input. Unfortunately, not many of the proposals were incorporated into the final form, which appeared in public for the first time after Cabinet had approved it.

Clearly, this policy is grounded in the politics of nationalism. It voices the state’s call for unity in its ambitious sub-title “Unity, Identity and Creativity for Prosperity” as well as its vision statement in which every sentence begins: “We envisage ourselves as a united and flourishing nation ... ” (MBESC, 2001:2). On closer scrutiny, many policy points are seen to be mainly administrative terms of governance that reinforce centralized arts control within the Ministry. The policy does not confront the deeper underlying issues of identity that underpin nation-building.

To clarify the relationship between Namibian music and nation-building, a qualification of the concepts *cultural identity* and *national identity* is needed.

Much has been written about the different aspects or forms of identity. These perceptions and understandings, like identities themselves, seem to undergo constant change, for example:

According to anthropological folklore, in traditional societies, one’s identity was fixed, solid, and stable. Identity was a function of predefined social roles and a traditional system of myths which provided orientation and religious sanctions to one’s place in the world, while rigorously circumscribing the realm of thought and behaviour. One was born and one died a member of one’s clan, a member of a fixed kinship system, and a member of one’s tribe or group with one’s life trajectory fixed in advance. (Kellner, 1992:141)

Such a fixed structuralist understanding of identity would not suffice today. Post-structuralists describe subjective identity as “a construct of language and society, an overdetermined illusion that one is really a substantial subject, that one really has a fixed identity” (ibid.:142). Rejecting, therefore, the notion of a cultural identity as a fixed sameness among members, one could say that it involves both unification of commonalities and the defining of difference by the members of a group. Of course, the notion of having “an” identity as such is

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1. While nearly all members of the policy working group agreed that this was inappropriate, the objection was ignored, because the division protected the positions of the two directors who were functioning within one directorate. Although the prime minister has since operationally sanctioned this situation, the deeper issues embedded within the national policy were not addressed.



contestable. Few people are uni-cultural. They constantly form and adapt their own cultural identities through selective assimilation or repudiation of different aspects in the multiple cultures surrounding them. This active identification process takes form over a relatively lengthy period and involves the individual and group history of a community or society.<sup>1</sup>

Hence, identity formation, which is reflected and confirmed in many musical practices, rests upon the creation of imagined communities and draws boundaries between “us” and “them” in terms of various units such as association with family, gender, place of residence, economic position, employment and ethnicity. This means, in practice, that rural communities in Namibia can identify as “different” performances of the same song by communities not very far apart, and can, furthermore, identify which community’s performance it is! The song “Tanyaanda” serves as an example (see Mans, 2002d). These communities have developed recognizable musical identities within the larger shared Owambo culture. This is not unlike a pop group’s conscious development of image and sound, so that they may become and remain recognizable, identifiable, over a period of time.

Because they involve acts of “identifying with” aspects of culture, cultural identities have no firm or impermeable borders. They also include alliances and associations between groups, thereby spanning distance and time. For example, some areas of Namibia demonstrate a strong association with the music of Angola in their melodic constructions and rhythms, while others have incorporated and allied themselves with the more homophonic four beat popular music of South Africa. Through these alliances or preferences, the “own” musical culture clearly evolves and hybridises. It has been said that “one of Africa’s oldest arts is extraversion, the ability to draw in and creatively absorb materials from outside” (Barber, 1997:6). The resultant “hybridity” can be seen as “the visible face of a deep and ancient disposition that shapes the social, political and economic domains as well as the cultural” (ibid.).

Therefore, rather than denoting ethnic stereotypes, my view of cultural identity signifies the ways in which people perceive and experience their own culture(s) and those of others.<sup>2</sup> An identity is based on the conscious and sub-conscious decision to identify with significant cultural components which an individual perceives or becomes immersed in. This includes a culture’s hierarchical structure, values and phenomena. It is, therefore, acknowledged that there is a traditional, stable aspect to identity formation, but that cultural identities, “no matter how deeply felt, are from a historical point-of-view mixed,

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1. For the purpose of this essay, “community” should be read as a group who share certain characteristic livelihoods, values and beliefs at a local level, while “society” can be understood as an extension of several fairly similar communities on a wider plane.
  2. As such, it has been interesting to observe displays of aspects of Swedish cultural identity in the form of the emphasis and celebration of school-leaving, the disciplined behaviour at concert recitals, the celebration of remnants of pre-Christian customs, and so on. Yet a description of these as ethnographically interesting often elicits a vehement response from Swedes.

relational, and conjectural" (Waterman citing Clifford, 1988:10–11). Clearly then, identities are not an indication of timeless and static qualities but are rooted in complex histories, discourse and interpretations of inter-group relations. They are also influenced by access to education, employment and other opportunities (Cooper, 1998).

In the increasingly urbanized environment, people are confronted with "new" realities and find themselves removed from the familiarity of the rural community. This is often described as a more "modern" environment, while the rural areas are seen to be old-fashioned and not in tune with modern times.<sup>1</sup> Thus the political pressure that is exerted on certain cultural groups to "develop" and "join the modern world" creates a sense of transitoriness, instability and constant change, which leads to the breakdown of past forms, life values and identity. People experience a feeling that their identity has become out of date, or superfluous, and is no longer socially validated. At the same time, the negotiation of a "new" identity within these changed circumstances has its difficulties, because the environment contains so many possibilities. "In modernity, identity becomes more mobile, multiple, personal, self-reflexive, and subject to change and innovation." (Kellner 1992:141). Hence, in modern urban Namibian society identity is made and remade as fashion, education, circumstance and physical environment appear to demand.

What about national identity? According to Habermas it is necessary to separate the political from the cultural level of identities, in other words the legal systems of integration from the ethical (Andersen, 1997:37). This distinction is echoed by Mattes, (1999:273) who states that political and cultural identities belong to separate frameworks, with the latter only being relevant to politics "where cultural symbols are used politically." Rex (1996) observes the dual reference as having to do with "the major structuring institutions of the economy and polity" on the one hand and on the other, the "more domestic and communal sense practiced by dominant groups" as part of their way of life. National identity requires a shared and continuous history, a set of heroes, shared values, monuments, language, folklore, historic sites, distinctive geographical features, mentality and concrete cultural features such as national costumes, dishes, instruments and so on. As explained earlier, certain of these features exist in Namibia, but others require conscious construction. Hence, the current tendency in Namibia is that the state, through its "major structuring institutions" such as legislation and education, moves into the domain of way of life. In the absence of nationhood, the State "interpenetrates civil soci-

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1. This sentiment has been expressed to me on numerous occasions by students, by participants in development and cultural workshops, and even by the people who live in rural areas. See also Megan Bieseke's article, *To Whom it May Concern: Or, Is Anyone Concerned? The Nyae Nyae Ju/'hoan Tape Archive, 1987-93* (2000), and also David Crandall's *The Place of the Stunted Ironwood Trees*, (2000). In both of these, individuals and communities in the Nyae Nyae area and the Kaoko express their feelings about the world changing too rapidly for them to feel secure. This is a feeling also expressed by rural Afrikaners.

ety and limits its deliberative space" (Du Pisani, 2001:6), which is why cultural difference tends to be seen as a potential political danger.

As a political construct, it is possible for a national identity to be inclusive of different cultural identities. However, the deeper the perception of difference between groups is embedded, the more difficult it is to create a sense of national identity. Since gaining political independence, Namibia's citizens are said to be "defining, negotiating and legitimizing their identities in a new Namibian nation" (Markusic, 2000:1), not necessarily in terms of heritage or language. According to her research in one district, people whom she described as Oshiwambo-speaking identified themselves as Namibian first and foremost, and as liberators of the country. Those described as Damara, on the other hand, identified themselves primarily as Damara and tended to ascribe many of the present problems of poverty, crime and unemployment to oppression by the Owambo majority. Thus, in one way and another, certain social divisions on the grounds of ethnic or cultural boundaries of difference remain drawn. National identities may, therefore, be seen as exclusionary<sup>1</sup> and based on membership (or not) of a political cadre or shared experience, such as the liberation struggle. In the current landscape of political and economic transition, it could be said that peoples' cultural identities are themselves in transition.

Drawing together the strands of the above discussion on identity and the cultural policy, it can be seen that the ideologies of state are perfectly encapsulated in the above-mentioned *Policy on Arts and Culture*, despite its firm statement that there *will* be freedom to express cultural diversity and difference:

[o]ur first goal is to uphold unity in diversity. We understand by this that all Namibians feel free to practice any culture (provided this does not infringe on the rights of others) while still retaining a strong sense of loyalty to one nation. Unity is maintained by mutual understanding, respect and tolerance. (MBESC, 2001:3)

The policy, therefore, ostensibly advocates the space for difference by stating that nation-building should not take place by trying to create a single homogeneous culture, or by having one culture dominate others. It calls for diversity as a source of creativity (ibid.:10), but, throughout, it stresses that the end purpose of culture and arts activities is nation-building through unity. Artists who confirm this in their music are "good citizens," and those who do not are seen as suspect. Like other regional governments, the Namibian authorities are quick to criticize, even ban, theatre that criticizes government or its policies. These are described as undermining national unity. This was the case, for example, when Vickson Hangula's play, "The Play is Not Over," was banned for criticizing certain political figures. As loyal citizens, artists are expected to

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1. See Henning Melber's essay, "Namibia, Land of the Brave" (2002) and Tom Emmett (1999) for critical discussions of this issue.

demonstrate their gratitude to the nation. Hence, the sentiment expressed by the television panel at the beginning of this essay—that the purpose of art is nation-building—now becomes clear.

In this political environment, musical traditions that betray ethnicity or rural conditions, such as the song and dance of Ovahimba, !Kung and Ju/'hoansi, are singled out and dismissed by officials as “backward” and in conflict with the process of development. In a film by Lasse Berg,<sup>1</sup> a ministerial official speaks of Ovahimba customs as “of those days. We are not of those days anymore.”<sup>2</sup> Conversely, cultural troupes are indispensable to the public visage of State, providing welcome for visiting dignitaries and entertainment at state banquets—showing that Namibia “has African culture.” By and large, however, the nation would apparently be best served by patriotic music that uniformly supports the ruling party, its history and the new national symbols. Ironically, this is now firmly ensconced within the *Policy on Arts and Culture*, 2001.

## 5.2 Using education to create a nation

The first countrywide step towards the creation of the new Namibian nation came in the form of educational reform following independence in 1990. Dahlström (2002), one of the critical leaders in the educational reform process, provides an extensive description and critical analysis of this in his recent dissertation. English was declared the sole official language in order to create a “neutral” medium of communication that would also allow the country to become part of the “global village.” All these terms were used in the popular and state press and workshops at the time. Schools had to implement the language medium change immediately, beginning with Grade Eight, the start of secondary school, and phase the change in year by year. The Cambridge (IGCSE) system was acquired for the senior secondary level in all subjects, and included the possibility of Music. The rapidity with which systemic changes were brought about spoke of the enthusiasm for reform, but had a negative impact upon children, teachers and parents, due to the speed and lack of choice regarding the change. In addition, the depth of the apartheid legacy became apparent during the planning and the implementation phases of reform. With it came the realization that for education to change Namibian society and create a Namibian nation, fundamental philosophical, political and structural changes were required. This went far deeper than mere policy change. In reform meetings, the deeply entrenched attitudes of politicians, administrators, teachers and artists came to the fore and clashes were often unresolved. Furthermore, communication among the culturally diverse members of commit-

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1. “Last Years Rain Fell on a Monday,” directed by Lasse Berg, 1997.

2. This calls to mind a similar situation in Tanzania when certain customs of dress and initiation of Maasai and Waarusha were banned, thereby banishing the “primitive image of East Africa” (Lange 1999:41).

tees was often difficult and fraught with new power struggles as well as re-enactments of old hegemonies. Hence, cultural and political encounters were enacted between new and dated pedagogical approaches to arts education. These in turn became entangled with encounters between “colonial” and “African” contents, and the deeper issue of diversity in cultural values was misunderstood, ignored or misinterpreted.

Let me digress briefly to describe my involvement in the process. During the early 1980s I was involved in teacher education at a college for mainly black Namibian students. During this time I dealt with students from diverse classes, backgrounds and languages. Increasingly uncomfortable with my lack of knowledge and deeper understanding of the various musical practices in Namibia, I undertook my first research into this field.<sup>1</sup> The difference it made to my relations with students and to my insight into the problems they faced, was immense. This research continues. Following this, I led pre-independence arts education reform for teachers at that institution, and, as a result, was involved in initial drafting of the Basic Education Teacher Diploma (BETD).<sup>2</sup> I was later asked to chair the national Arts Curriculum Panel<sup>3</sup> tasked with curriculum development for formal arts education at all levels. For several years regular meetings were held and the five syllabus committees reporting to the Panel completed new syllabi for arts education from Grades One through Ten.<sup>4</sup> Several fundamental difficulties emerged, as can be seen below.

Similar to other countries in the region, (music) educators in Namibia are faced with:

- Diverse cultures within the classroom, often with little understanding or appreciation of one another’s cultural values.
- Issues relating to education system poverty, that is, poorly educated, poorly paid and under-motivated teachers, working in poorly equipped schools.
- A majority of educationally and economically poor homes, meaning that because parents lack formal education their homes do not contain books, for example, and the lifestyle of such families is based on survival in difficult circumstances rather than on the creation of an educationally facilitative environment. This does not mean that families don’t apply pressure on children to go to school, but that the supportive environment for studious activities is lacking. Education is seen almost solely as a vehicle for future

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1. The reason for this lack of knowledge can be found in the political environment prevailing in the apartheid decades before 1990. Having grown up in a white home, my contact with indigenous Namibian cultures was limited, although not totally absent.

2. See more detailed discussion of BETD in Dahlström 2002.

3. Such panels were set up for each major educational discipline on instruction of the (then) Minister of Education, Culture and Sport, at the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED) in Okahandja.

4. This was discussed and a philosophical approach rooted in an African aesthetic and reality was proposed in my doctoral dissertation, *Namibian Music and Dance as Ngoma in Arts Education*, 1997.

income generation rather than for its formative benefits. The luxury of the latter is only really found in more comfortable middle class homes.

- A bureaucratised education system that demonstrates little insight into the day to day problems of schools, teachers and learners, has little contact with the wider world of education and its developments and shows very little interest in arts education.

Aside from the potential for mishaps that is built into the points above, educational reform showed that in the arts more than in other disciplines issues relating to relevance (of philosophical approach, content and aesthetic values) became an area of conflict. This occurred because arts emanate from a point in the personal experience of a culture. Relevant knowledge for its members means understanding at some deep level what it is that has real meaning and value. It is through personal experience of a culture that decisions on what is worthwhile and what is not are made, thus touching upon “real” lived values at the heart of a culture.

To be relevant, education should meet both the present and the future needs of the learners, helping them develop competencies and understandings that are transferable in a variety of real life situations.<sup>1</sup> Learners have to feel that what they learn is meaningful. Content and methods should be practical, interesting, stimulating and valued by the learners. According to Floyd, the perceived irrelevance of education in parts of Africa exists partly because schools emphasise subject learning, they play little part in developing general literacy, and the programs they teach are not always considered to be relevant “to the practicalities and exigencies of daily life” (Floyd, 2001:14). One aspect of a relevant education implies that the heritage of knowledge of the whole population should be taken into consideration, so that contents and methods do not only reflect a dominant culture, as happened in the past. On the micro-level the cultural capital of the whole class should be reflected and on the meso-level that of the whole nation. This implies that the learning process should be contextualised.<sup>2</sup> In the past, both South Africa and Namibia had the same system with instruction in music and visual art only, based on Eurocentric content, values and meanings and exclusionary modes of assessment. Indigenous musical practices were ignored and undervalued. Even today it is very difficult to break through the (de-)value barrier, as was illustrated in a conversation with a senior politician and important freedom fighter who stated that “my children don’t need

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1. It is worthwhile, however, to note at the international level that the OECD Programme for International Student Development (PISA), aimed at “Knowledge and Skills for Life,” has not included music, or indeed any of the arts, in its programme.

2. To stress this idea, I coined the term “Arts-in-Culture” as the name of a new subject in the curriculum, where the arts would be approached from the perspective of its positioning within relevant cultural contexts. Although it was a struggle to get this term approved and to get certain “old guard” teachers to accept ownership of this concept, it has since lost its hyphens but is still in use in Namibian secondary schools and in the Basic Education Teacher Diploma and was adopted for certain programmes in South Africa.

to learn uudhano<sup>1</sup> at school. They can learn that on the street.” It is notable that these children, typical of neo-colonial elites, are encouraged to relinquish their “own” cultural arts practices (because they show “lack of development”) and to take ballet and violin lessons instead. This typical dissociation of the urban elite from “own” cultural traditions is common in southern Africa, as people strive to embrace traditions they regard as global and hence more “developed.” Are relevant African contents and meanings then without present-day value?

Relevant contents in musical cultures can be decoded by ensuring that music-dance education is informed by the total musical experience that has meaning for a learner. Relevance, therefore, means that the education:

- should arise from and construe similar allocations of *meaning* to practices;
- should reflect and respond to similar *value* systems;
- must be based on the *aesthetic value* and *quality judgments* that are embodied within the cultural system, recognising what a “good” performance entail; and
- should be constructed around and informed by the *ideations* or musical world constructed by that culture (see further on).

On a national level relevance means education for nation-building and economic quality of life. On an individual cultural level relevance means creating and maintaining value systems that contribute to quality of spiritual, social and individual life. The inherent diversities could greatly contribute to the stimulation of creative ideas.

### 5.3 Using broadcasting media

Control of a national broadcasting medium is known to be critical to most (new) governments. Television as a broadcasting medium tells us “something about how the political culture and its central values operate in praxis” (Andersen, 1999:30). In addition, this form of medium plays an important role in identity construction through the production of a range of desirable or undesirable images. The control of a national television channel provides government with a potent tool for the creation of the desired image of its leaders, the unity of “the nation” and selected cultural images. Obviously not all effects of television are positive or easy for government to control. Cameras might capture statesmen in less than flattering images,<sup>2</sup> news broadcasts on “foreign” channels might provide images and information that criticize politicians and policies, films and light entertainment programmes might inculcate unwanted cultural values. This is one of the reasons, one suspects, that the Namibian channel broadcasts so many hours of sport, which is politically safe and serves

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1. This is a generic form of song-dance in the northern regions and in the Oshiwambo languages.

2. See Melber’s description of President Nujoma’s reaction to the SABC broadcast of him reliving his days as a combatant (2002).

to cement national sentiments. Thus, the positive potential for wielding political power completely outweighs the negative, as long as the broadcast station remains fully within government control.<sup>1</sup>

How have the imagery of television and radio<sup>2</sup> been utilized for nation-building in Namibia? Initially the post-independence broadcasting reform was based on a “spirit of absolute elation.”<sup>3</sup> Changes were enthusiastically effected to structure, management and programming—change not for the sake of change, but for the “new” Namibia.<sup>4</sup> The daily broadcast scene opens and closes with the National Anthem, “Namibia, Land of the Brave,” thus clearly identifying it as a national broadcast.<sup>5</sup>

The three main goals of the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation’s work are “Inform, Educate and Entertain” (Gorelick, 2002). The programme schedules are similar to those elsewhere, with daily allocations of news, primetime shows for the family, weekend sport and films, afternoon and vacation shows for children and so on. Consisting largely of imported programmes, the NBC is increasingly producing its own documentaries and short films, as well as children’s programmes. Television is mainly English medium<sup>6</sup> and one of its educating tasks is to promote the indigenous heritage through the rediscovery of indigenous music, dance and rituals. The bulk of local content consists of news, parliamentary reports, panel discussions such as “Talk of the Nation,” political propaganda, particularly at election time, children’s shows and “cultural shows.” News reports are always organized according to a specific protocol, featuring news of the President first, followed by anything relating to government (in order of importance), then local news, regional and international news. Presently, the NBC is seen to be a political mouthpiece of the ruling party, and it is widely rumoured that the current Board Chairman himself is managing NBC by making appointments, creating structures and liaising directly with the President (who thus has final say) on broadcasting issues. Ironically, therefore, the present NBC has become something of a mirror image of the pre-independence SWABC.<sup>7</sup>

A large portion of the Namibian public does not have access to television. This is due to lack of infrastructure (e.g., electricity supply in rural areas) and poverty. Radio, therefore, plays an important role in such areas. After indepen-

1. In Namibia the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting serves this overseeing and controlling function.
2. A third, exceedingly potent medium for potential nation-building is of course the printed media, but for the purpose of a musical investigation I shall ignore newspapers and other printed media here.
3. Comments are from personal communications with Nahum Gorelick, the first Director General following independence.
4. Ibid.
5. Possibly an example of growing nationhood, the National Anthem is proudly sung by all Namibians on every conceivable occasion, drawing people together. Alongside the National Anthem, the OAU Anthem is always sung, thereby promoting the Pan African ideal.
6. Previously English and Afrikaans.
7. The South West Africa Broadcasting Corporation was known to be the mouthpiece of the South African apartheid government.



dence, a National Service was formed from the old English service, and broadcasts 24 hours in English. The other NBC radio services have structurally retained pre-independence ethnic identities, with a station allocated to each main language group. This retention of “ethnic” radio stations seems anachronistic, yet each has a very loyal following. Each station plays a mix of “own” cultural music, “other” Namibian and wider African music and also items from the global pop lists, especially African-American music. News from National Radio is repeated in regional languages, and other community items such as death notices, church services, events, educational and health materials are broadcast daily. National news and development programmes are aimed at the strengthening of national identity—being aware of the role, place and achievements of the nation in the region and world. Following conversations with listeners of different stations, it is my perception that it is particularly in the local items concerning cultural and social events that they find their cultural identities affirmed and sense of community strengthened. It is this sense of “imagined community” that makes them such loyal listeners.

The NBC also acts as a player in the music industry as it records local musicians for broadcasting. Because Namibia lacks opportunities for good commercial recording and distribution, most musicians head to Johannesburg, South Africa, for their studio work and recordings. For musicians just starting out in their careers the South African option is too expensive. Most musicians are, therefore, completely reliant on the NBC for recordings, publicity and a certain amount of promotion. The selection of these musicians could clearly be reliant upon their standing not only as musicians, but also as loyal citizens.

Diversity in contemporary music is, however, promoted through the annual or bi-annual NBC Music Makers Competition. Aside from pop music, this includes a special award for “original Namibian” entries and a category for “traditional music.” The finalists of this competition perform publicly for a panel of judges and enjoy live television broadcast and follow-up broadcasts.

The broadcasting medium is, therefore, clearly biased towards nation-building, yet it is an important player in the promotion of diversity, cloaked in the form of traditional heritage. However, as commercial networks increase in popularity, the assimilation of a commercial, globally acceptable sound does not promise a good future for diverse indigenous sounds.

## 6. Musical experiences of continuity and change

Having described some of the ways in which the state machinery works to transform the previously segregated people of Namibia into a nation, I turn now to more specific indigenous musical experiences in recent times. By indigenous I refer to music created by Namibians who are usually, but not always, situated within Namibia. In this scheme of things, indigenous music refers to musical heritage as well as contemporary popular music and categories such as the music of choral groups (religious, secular and popular “cultural” church music). Indigenous is, therefore, defined by historical, political, social and cultural boundaries, rather than locality.

Rather than reinforce the dualism of “traditional” versus “contemporary” music, I prefer to use the term *musical traditions*, which can be used irrespective of the restrictive timeframe of the past. Musical traditions exemplify the ever-changing musical forms created and performed over a period of time by specific cultural groups for a variety of social purposes. With time these practices develop and display a recognizable musical identity. In Namibia, there is evidence of different cultural strategies employed over time with discernibly different musical results. These range between purposeful attempts to bring about change, to relinquish certain practices, to blend old with new and to maintain a measure of cultural continuity. The different ways in which musical cultures deal with changing times guarantees cultural diversity, and may apply to an entire population group or to an individual musician.

### 6.1 Moving between zones of continuity and zones of continuous change

While musicians in towns and cities strive for new sounds and images in their music, there are other parts of the country where there is a strong consciousness of cultural identity and difference. The musical life of the latter tends to be distinctive and culture-specific, and occurs mainly in areas that have been marginalized by both previous and the present regimes. People in the rural areas of the Kaoko,<sup>1</sup> Caprivi, Nyae Nyae and southern Etosha have little invested in a national identity and more to gain by expressing individuality of culture. These rural areas remain isolated as a result of lack of infrastructure.

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1. Kaoko, previously referred to as Kaokoland or Kaokoveld, is not the current politically correct term. The political region, which now includes a large area to the south of it previously called Damaraland, is officially named the Kunene Region. Locals, however, still prefer to call the northern and culturally distinctive part of Kunene Region the “Kaoko”. It is for this reason that I use the term.

Roads are poor, most villages have no connection to the regional electricity and telephone networks and even radio broadcasts are impossible to pick up in some areas. As a result, people have not become accustomed to the ready-made entertainment of urban centres and, thus, music is often practised for ritual and entertainment purposes in ways that do not appear to have changed very much in the last fifty years.

Having a strong tradition of musical practice, my informants and friends in these areas show little regard for the notion of music as a nation-building force, except on special national occasions such as Independence Day. Then, even in these marginalized areas, there are many songs that celebrate SWAPO and national independence. Interestingly, this political music comes close to having a national character, sounding very similar in all parts of the country. SWAPO songs recorded in the Kaoko (Daems, 2001) and those in towns of the north, south and centre are characterised by their patriotic texts, movements and musical structure rather than by the culturally distinctive qualities of these different localities. The cultural ownership of such songs, however, remains in question. From interviews with members of Ovahimba, Ovazimba and Damara communities in the Kaoko, these songs are categorized as being adjacent to the musical framework that they regard as part of their cultural identity. In much the same way, many Westerners would see church songs as belonging to a shared church culture rather than their own Swedish, French or Greek cultures. The music of these political occasions, therefore, does not appear to belong to the cognitive framework of their culturally “owned” musical world (see below) and is recognized as “national” music but not as “cultural” music.<sup>1</sup>



Taking publication drafts and pictures back to the village. Interaction between my student assistant Hertha Lukileni and the Ovahimba family with whom I reside. Here Ozumo and Tjimbambi Tjidunda are visible.

1. Globally, the term cultural music is used in strange ways. Often, people tend not to see Western “Classical” compositions or sacred hymns as cultural music, despite the fact that they quite clearly are.

Within these isolated rural areas the continuity of cultural practice is valued. Nevertheless, their musical cultures have not been unaffected by various historical events. In a few examples discussed below, I illustrate the cultural strategies employed in changing circumstances.

### 6.1.1 Strategies of change

Over time, countless changes to societies might occur as a result of outside events, such as war, famine or colonial occupation. But *changes to cultures* are not imposed from outside. They are a result of conscious and subconscious decisions about the retention or relinquishment of certain beliefs or practices in ways large and small. Such decisions, which often only become noticeable after changes have already occurred, can be referred to as strategies for cultural survival. Most often, cultural changes occur as a result of the social impact of cataclysmic environment changes such as war, famine or repression. In Namibia this has included the events described below, among others.

a) *The reciprocal impact of colonial Christian missions.* During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries colonial adventurers, traders, settlers and missionaries moved ever deeper into territories occupied at that time by diverse groups of agro-pastoralists. Increasing numbers of mission stations and missionary activities across the country created a cultural environment where, on the one hand, “foreign” religious music was introduced, and on the other hand many existing indigenous musical practices were frowned upon as pagan and hence discouraged. Transformation (initiation) ceremonies and healing rituals, in particular, were targeted by missionaries, as these practices were seen to conflict with the Christian church paradigms. The church exercised its power to have certain practices abolished and discredited, which led to certain rituals being relinquished and church music being adopted by the new converts. Slowly, the numbers attending initiation and transformation rituals decreased and many of the songs fell into disuse. Today the Damara healing *arub* is practised surreptitiously, due to continuing church censure. Other ceremonies, such as the Mbalantu girl’s traditional marriage *olufuko* and a Valozi girl’s coming-of-age (*simbayoka*), have ceased to be practised.<sup>1</sup> Thus, while it is true that the missionaries cannot be held solely responsible for “killing the culture,” the encounters between them and the local populations had an impact so pervasive that certain musics went into rapid decline, “undesirable” practices were relinquished, and new (church) rituals and music were adopted and creatively assimilated. In a paper from 1918 that refers to the large reed pipe en-

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1. Among young Namibians nowadays, healing and initiation traditions are stigmatised and young people have generally discarded these practices. Most Aawambo girls today would strongly resist undergoing *olufuko* or *efundula*. (According to H. Lukileni, N. Namupala, E. Gabriel, A. Angombe, Windhoek 1999, 2000, who believe they speak for most young women today.)

sembles of the south, Hoernlé points out: "That the Hottentots are extremely musical is of course well known, and though they are little encouraged by the missionaries to keep up their national songs and dances, they have not yet quite forgotten them." (reprinted in Carstens, 1985:22). Clearly the feeling that missionaries had a negative impact upon indigenous music was an issue even then.

Missionary actions also contributed to changes in the status of women, as Christian marriages introduced monogamy, the notion of fidelity and a different distribution of tasks (Soiri, 1996:30). Because much of the moral teaching of the youth previously happened by means of their initiation and took place largely through the learning of a special repertoire of songs, the decline of these events meant that moral teachings were almost solely transferred to the domain of the church.

On the other hand, decline was not the only cultural change taking place. The missionaries introduced new forms of education to the local population. As Töttemeyer pointed out twenty-five years ago:

Not only did [the Finnish Mission] replace traditional religious ideas with Christian values and a Western orientation, but it also acted as an innovator and reformer in other spheres in the absence of—or perhaps because of the absence of—a colonizing nation. It strove for economic renewal and created new social codes of behaviour and new legal norms, thus inaugurating changes normally carried out by a secular authority. (ibid. 1978:30)

Musically, the mission introduced the hymnal and other liturgical music, which was slotted into the performance environment of religious services. From the evidence of songs spanning at least sixty "living" years,<sup>1</sup> musical traditions in "Owamboland" were based on separate songs for men and women and consist even today mainly of two-part songs with melodic parts arranged in parallel thirds. The introduction of four-part harmony of the hymnal, which included male and female voices, was, therefore, as far as we know, an innovation. North and south, the diatonic scale of European music was rapidly and creatively assimilated. Over time, many new songs have emerged in this genre and there have been several publications of Namibian hymnals, particularly by the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Namibia. New categories of song have also emerged in the form of youth songs, which are Christian in text, but which discard the strict meter of hymns and adapt rhythmically to include syncopations and movements. This illustrates how certain aspects of the imposed colonial music were assimilated and others discarded over time, undergoing creative changes, and finally emerging in new, definitely "African" forms.

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1. This refers to songs I have recorded, sung by the very elderly, hence still retained in living memory.

The assimilation of Western harmonies and melodies has had a particularly strong impact on the music of the Khoekhoe-speaking people in the south and central areas. Because Khoekhoe is fundamentally tonal—the vocal pitch and inflection dictates meaning—older melodies were constructed in such a way that pitch followed meaning. In order to adapt to “modern” Western music and still retain meaning, older texts and instruments as well as melodies were often discarded. Today cultural ownership is expressed in terms of the guitar, accordion and electric keyboard. They are considered to be traditional instruments by many Damara people, and song texts are adjusted to the tonal possibilities of the instruments.

b) *Migrant labour* (or the contract labour system introduced in Namibia in 1926) and its social impact have been extensively discussed in numerous studies.<sup>1</sup> This system resulted in fundamental changes in societies mainly in the central north and the north-east. As increasing numbers of men departed for up to two years at a time, women had to take over many responsibilities in the community and family and became more involved in local governance and economic self-management than among other populations in Namibia. As migrant labour was accepted by northern society, it came to be seen as a kind of rite of passage, replacing earlier transformation rites that young men underwent, such as fetching salt from the pans. The performance of songs relating to salt fetching became increasingly rare. In the latter half of the twentieth century, Owambo men who had been away on contract labour came to be considered “better” prospects as future husbands as they were potentially better providers.

The migrant system led to many creative changes in both men’s and women’s music in the central north. In the absence of the men, women continued to perform their songs and dances, but in the *uudhano* songs of Oshiwambo-speaking areas, there is no vocal part for men<sup>2</sup>. In practice, although a man may join in and play, it is not conventional and only happens when a man wants to add humour or spice, or is inebriated. Girls and smaller boys may and do participate.

For their part, the men who were working in towns often consorted with women and men of other cultures. Their own cultural profiles thus underwent diverse changes. As returning workers they brought home “hard-earned things” such as sewing machines and cycles. But they also brought radios and record-players, introducing new music into the family and community. Away from home men often clung to their religion and church, which provided sta-

1. Refer, for example, to P. Peltola (1995) *The Lost May Day. Namibian Workers Struggle for Independence*; G. Tötemeyer (1978) *Namibia Old and New. Traditional and Modern Leaders in Ovamboland*; M. Eirola (1992) *The Ovamboefahr: The Ovamboland Reservation in the Making*; and T. Emmett (1999) *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia, 1915-66*; among many others.

2. This is also the case in several other categories, but these may be gender-specific for other reasons, such as songs specific to female tasks and identities. Indeed, in four-part choral church music the women usually perform the tenor part, while only the bass is left to men.

bility and comfort. These days at weddings in the north, men perform solemnly by singing hymns. Simultaneously, women perform completely different traditional *ohango* songs. The effect of the two simultaneous performances, separated only by the bridal pair, is quite startling and indicates a strong gender-based musical identity.

c) Apartheid and its *cultural isolationism* led to forms of closure and restriction in the music of certain areas—preserving a strong sense of difference. During the apartheid regime (from the 1940s to 1990), cultural differences were used as a divisive strategy, with “retribalisation” being implemented in Namibia after 1948 (Silvester in Hartmann et al., 1998:140). By emphasizing the “otherness” of people with different cultural practices, the (South African) rulers of the time sowed suspicion and distrust, thereby strengthening the patriarchal role of the government as decision-maker and “provider,” and eliminating democratic process. Segregation involved people of different languages and cultures being settled in “homelands” and educated in the ruling Afrikaans language and their own language(s). They were not encouraged to integrate with members of different language or ethnic groups. The combination of geographical and political segregation in some cases led to forms of cultural isolation, where people retained existing practices with little assimilation from outside, with the result that these cultures developed and retained several unique musical qualities.

Evidence of such closure occurs in varying degrees, from almost complete stasis to partial restriction. Thus the vocal tones and phonic structures used by Ovahimba as well as Damara people are unique in Namibia and show little evidence of musical interaction with others.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the Damara music of the Sesfontein area is considered “historic” even by other Damaras further south. Petrus Namiseb, an active singer and performer in the Khomas region, has never heard songs like those of Sesfontein.<sup>2</sup>

Through isolation, both the process and environment of music-making within a cultural group becomes more firmly entrenched. The qualities and patterns making up the musical templates of the rather isolated groups described, appear to have turned inwards towards that which is peculiar to that society. Variations and changes continue to be made, but framed strictly within customary boundaries defined by history and practice. The cultural isolation led people to delve deeper into that which “belongs,” finding unity within the cultural group, and to reject aspects of new, different or “other” identities. Ironically, this confirmed the invented cultural differences and “otherness” that served the dominant colonial culture and its members so well.

1. I have compared recordings made by John Marshall, 1950-70 (Smithsonian Museum, Washington) and provided to me for identification purposes, with contemporary recordings in my private collection. Similarly, I have compared a video recording made by Willi Haacke and Leevi Namaseb in the early 1980s in Sesfontein with my own made in 1999, and found certain texts, movements and songs unchanged.
2. Petrus Namiseb, Khomas Hochland, 2000, personal communication.

It must be said that the notion of cultural closure does not imply that music has stagnated, merely that people explore and change mainly within the culturally accepted framework of their established identity. However, even apartheid was not able to keep musical sounds completely isolated, and even in isolation many of the rhythmic patterns employed in play and ritual resonate among other cultural groups within Namibia and across its borders.

d) *Exile and the armed liberation* struggle led to forms of musical rejuvenation and intercultural exchange. From the 1960s onwards, during the period of active political resistance against the South African occupation, many exiles settled periodically in camps of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) across the border, mostly in Angola and Zambia. In these camps, Namibians of different culture and language groups found themselves in a situation that bonded them in a common goal. The demands of this new society-in-exile with its different class and gender structures required adaptation. As well as expressing feelings of social cohesion (and homesickness), certain forms of music became important means of recreation, education and political expression. During this time, Sabine Zinke (1992) recorded several hundred different songs, mostly in Oshiwambo dialects but also in Khoekhoe, Rukwangali, Otjiherero, Silozi and Setswana. Musical performances during this period were usually subjugated to the aims of the cause, with the expression of patriotic fervour, hope for political freedom and hatred of the enemy being uppermost.

*Uudhano* (*oudano*) flourished in this environment, but the interaction with activists from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Angola and Botswana impacted all forms of music. Choral singing of resistance songs in four-part harmonies became predominant. Zinke's recordings (*ibid.*) show that an impressive number of songs sung in Oshikwanyama had taken on this character. But not only homophonic music was assimilated. Many current forms of *uudhano* illustrate cultural interaction with the musics of Congo and West Africa (e.g., *ndombolo*), even while retaining the resistance texts that date from the seventies and eighties described earlier.

Two forms of assimilation took place: one involved the assimilation of new tonal structures and musical performance modes into existing musical repertoires, and the other involved the adoption of new (foreign) movement styles and even complete songs, but utilised existing texts or created new ones in Namibian languages. This creative assimilation has, therefore, led both to variation of existing forms and the creation of new forms.

e) *Post-independence cultural revivalism* has arisen partly out of the growth of nationalism and need for social construction that has impacted many indigenous musics. New emphasis on cultural pride and on identifying "Namibian-ness" has led to the institution of cultural festivals and competitions all over the country. Concurrently, the pressure from tourists wishing to see "authentic" Namibian cultural performances has resulted in the establishment of numer-



ous “cultural groups” or troupes. Because of their unique cultural identities and the unscathed natural beauty, the more isolated areas of the country are the most popular cultural tourism destinations. Maintaining diverse ethnic cultural expression, therefore, potentially has direct economic implications for local inhabitants. To date, general face-to-face contact with tourists has been minimal, but as this expands the impact might be phenomenal.

Performances targeted at tourists mean a new performance environment and a resultant adjustment to the musical worlds of performers. The new environment requires new aesthetics, time-frames and structures. Whereas communal performances traditionally involve the freedom for “anyone who knows how” to perform, and where all onlookers are active participants, the new performance system involves rehearsed and choreographed performances for a non-participating but critical audience. Whereas “authentic” dance events could continue for many hours, simulated events now have to be compressed into a few minutes. This affects musical structure as well as the performance preparation of musicians and dancers.

Performers delve into their cultural histories and from the knowledge of the past create “new” performances, because

... songs, dances and ritual processes present rich repositories of local knowledge about the environment, and are particularly relevant signifiers of local meaning systems in a context where these systems may no longer be learned through apprenticeship or oral tradition, due to geographic displacement and rapid socio-economic transformation. (Impey, 2002:9)

The Uukumwe Culture Group, for example, is comprised of Kwangali, Mbukushu, Sambyu and Gciriku members, and has had a great impact on this genre. Firmly rooted in older traditions, their music now combines different traditions into one seamless performance. They base their performance on shared traditions, but in each section emphasise that which is peculiar to the specific performance category and language group, for example *litembu*, *kambamba* or *nondere*. This strategy of confluence and adaptation involves a creative merging and flowing together of shared qualities for new and different circumstances. In this way they are vivifying their music “through the effective uses of music and dance that are congruent with their distinctive world views and historical anomalies” (Kealiinohomoku, 1997:141).

f) *Contemporary forms of constructed, purposeful change* occur in different ways. For example, indigenous Namibian traditions are utilized by contemporary musicians not only in traditional events, but also in the commercial industry. Musicians have identified a niche for Namibian sounds in “world music.” By appropriating aspects of certain Namibian musical traditions, using certain timbres, rhythms and melodic structures, contemporary musicians hope to enter the local as well as the international market. This can create a “play of differences” (Erlmann, 1996) that might lead to the construction of a new identity.

To learn more about musical heritage, a group of musicians recently participated in workshops on the concepts and sounds of Namibian indigenous musical traditions.<sup>1</sup> In these workshops professional musicians and researchers worked together over several weeks. During this period an analysis of musical concepts and meanings in Namibia's musical traditions was applied to a new performance context. At its conclusion, public concerts were staged to showcase the outcome, and a new band called Sidade was formed and continues to perform. Their blend of music seems to indicate a constructive change in a new direction that unifies old and new.

While these musicians are forging a new Namibian identity, the general population continues to suffer from the entrenched sense of artistic inferiority, valuing foreign products more highly than the indigenous. In order to create music that is commercially viable within the country's borders it first needs to succeed on foreign soil. This factor compounds the fear that should music sound "too local," betraying sound characteristics of a Namibian identity, it may be construed as "tribal" and "backward." This perception forces many young musicians to seek musical opportunities outside the country, where they need to succeed before they are accepted as national artists.

In a second example, to cope with ever-changing urban environments, certain groups appear to have discarded some of their music, without really adapting or changing that music. Such appears to be the case with Afrikaans-speaking people, who in early days practised a syncretised dance-play (*volkspele*) that was an adaptation of early German folk music. Previously, small bands with accordions and guitars were common at social occasions, playing mainly *boeremusiek*. Nowadays, *volkspele* has all but disappeared as people have loosened their ties to the South African Voortrekker image. However, there are still bands that perform music reminiscent of *boeremusiek* in the central, eastern and southern areas, where the preferred social dance form in many communities is *langarm*. In addition, classical and popular Western music, especially American Country music, has replaced *volkspele* and *boeremusiek* among Afrikaners.<sup>2</sup> Again, this appears to indicate a relinquishing of the old, along with constructed forms of change and reinterpretation of new musics.

The contrast between the first and the second example is that the latter seeks unity with the larger global American sound rather than seeking a unity of Namibian music. It, therefore, seems that urban changes and individual strategies vary and include: *adoption* of non-indigenous music without change; new songs in various languages created in a *revival* of an older style, as in the songs of Jackson Kaujeua; *syncretisation*, as in the reggae of Ras Sheehama; and,

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1. Afro-Traditional Workshops for Musicians by Olivier, Dieyé and Mans, 2000, 2001, sponsored by the National Theatre of Namibia and the Franco-Namibian Cultural Centre.

2. Ironically, at the celebration of the 13 th Independence Anniversary, *volkspele* was performed by a group comprising black persons. Whether this indicates a continuation of the performance practice, or a form of transculturation, or a contrived reconciliatory act, remains to be seen.

in a few cases, *confluence* where Afrikaner, African and American jazz influences combine, as in the music of Reho Combo.

Another form of music striving towards change and unification is gospel music. Many charismatic churches use English as the medium of communication, thereby doing away with the cultural differences of language. The music performed includes Americanised gospel sounds as well as Namibian choruses, locally referred to as *uukorasa*. The new development of gospel dance, including worship and praise dances, according to Nantes (2001), allows for individualised creative development of musical ideas not limited to any Namibian culture, but displaying more contemporary media influences.

The examples above illustrate musical adjustments evolving from changes to the cultural environment. But it is important to understand that changes to a culture's music are not mere happenstance or a result of unidirectional influence. Musical practice arises from a deep understanding of that culture's values and beliefs, and a sense of how much new material can be absorbed before a point of no return is reached. Music is always characterised by complex structured systems of practice, which are informed by values and meaning, aesthetics and ideational constructions. To understand how music reflects value systems, it is useful to investigate the following.

#### 6.1.2 Understanding value systems

The standards and qualities by which a music or dance performance is judged are embedded within the cultural value system. This value system is broad and relates to the complete cosmology of a society. It, therefore, includes many values that fall outside the domain of musical practice, but it is understood that musical practices are embedded within the value systems of the culture from which they arise. These value systems function to form and guide the ideations that embody the deeper meanings and environmental frame of a performance.

In performance, one develops an understanding of one's place in a larger social context. One way of understanding value systems in music is to investigate these ideations. For example, the context in which a certain performance takes place provides the purpose and meaning. Divorced from the context, the performance itself becomes meaningless. The *n/om tzisi* (healing songs) of Ju/'hoansi may occasionally be sung for entertainment, but would soon lose meaning if they were not also sung to make the *n/om* (spirit) boil. This healing ritual exemplifies one of many ritual performances, including *arub* (a healing in the Sesfontein area); the three-phased Valozi healing (*nyakasanga*, *liyala*, *kayowe*); *onyando* (the Ovazimba celebration of boys' return from circumcision camp); *efundula* or *ohango* (girls' transformation in the central north but rarely performed nowadays); and *simbayoka* (a girl's transformation in the north-east, rare nowadays). These performances have practice-specific repertoires, with

songs and dances that would not ordinarily be performed for entertainment, although grandmothers in Omusati indicate that they teach *ohango* songs to their granddaughters even though the latter do not undergo the ritual.

To illustrate what is meant by value systems that inform musical practice, allow me to sketch the following two examples.

A nine-year old boy goes for his weekly music lesson in piano. His teacher is a middle-aged woman who herself, in earlier years, performed with a regional orchestra as soloist. She sets high standards. He has already mastered the exercises in the beginners' books, but for today he had to prepare a little Mozart minuet. Unfortunately, football practice at school kept him busy and he has not put in much piano practice. After correctly executing the scales requested by the teacher, he is asked to play the minuet, but he is nervous. It does not go well. Within the first measure he is corrected for missing the F sharp. He continues, but his meter is ragged and his quavers sound much like his crotchets. After several increasingly irritated corrections and repetitions by his teacher, his playing has deteriorated into a stubborn, wooden thumping of the notes and the teacher suggests that either he practise or he leave piano lessons. Both of them realize that, should he work really hard, it is likely to take him about six to eight years to reach the level where he can attempt a formal recital of the known classical repertoire.

In this example of a "classical" music tradition, typical values include discipline, commitment (practice), perfection and accuracy in performance, holding the (deceased) masters in awe, portraying (etically) the instructions of the composer, yet valuing individualism of interpretation and emotional expression. Exclusivity is a key value. For example, many look at modern art and criticize paintings by saying, "But I could paint that too! It required no special skill." The work of the artist is considered best if it portrays skills beyond the abilities of "ordinary" people. Therefore, the sketch above describes a common form of musical instruction that reinforces the values described above. It functions well to inculcate specialist values, if a child has the determination to complete his/her musical education. S/he is then thought not only to have survived a strict test of character and fortitude, but also to have an innate and superior ability or "talent." The majority of eager beginners drop out within the first two years. Musical participation is, therefore, limited to a select few.

A different picture, not meant to romanticize an African situation by any means, but based on experience, is this:

A nine-year old boy along with his friend and brother are herding the goats. In the distance, as sunset approaches, they hear the drums. They do not rush, because these drums are only warming up. The rhythm indicates *pela*, a gathering for some beer-drinking and dancing. While children will be around, the event is for adults. When they arrive back at the village, they take time to clean up and eat because they may be staying awake quite late. The rhythm of the drums has tightened up and become more intense, precise and energetic by

now. The kilindingilikindi of the *machakili* drum is keeping the singers in line, while the heavy timbres of the *mulupa o mutuna* calls the dancers. The children watch from the background. Over the past few months the little herd boy has been learning to play the *sikumwa* drum from his grandfather. This happens through imitation and kinesthesia—he listens to the pattern played by his grandfather, then imitates it. His grandfather sits behind him and takes his hands to assist his playing. This teaching only happens in quiet times, when they are more or less alone. While people are playing *pela*, however, he watches intently and imitates the different drum patterns by tapping on his thighs. He also performs the dance movements, because a good drummer must first master the dance. The children might also play *pela*, but they remain “outside” the real performance until they are considered old enough to be able to join.

Anybody who wants to, may play *pela*, but everybody knows who the best performers are, and tries to emulate their subtle move-and-pause actions and swings of the layered cloth skirt. People are usually supportive of all participation, even though they might laugh good-naturedly at some attempts, especially if dancers appear inebriated or purposely humorous.

This system betrays different values from the first. Musical skills are also developed over a fairly long period, but in a stratified communal setting where learning is paced and organized according to age-class. The main techniques for learning are observation and imitation of other performers through immersion within the total cultural context, hearing the music from birth and absorbing the whole repertoire over time, leading to eventual full participation in all the appropriate events. The system is egalitarian and inclusive within certain social hegemonies. Should one qualify by gender or age to take part, nobody is excluded. In this system there is no singular perfect interpretation, but good cooperation (synergy) among performers is highly valued. Here a good or masterly performance has much to do with energy and intensity of voice and body, and meaning of text. Superlative performers often belong to specific families and the training in these families commences at an early age. The master drummer or dancer is usually still alive and greatly respected, but also understood to have human frailties, and the next drummer is expected to equal or improve on the performance of his teacher.

Currently, the notion that a musician is an artist with superior and somewhat mysterious abilities, and that these abilities/talents endow him/her with innate knowledge how to perform—a notion that does not belong in older traditions—is fast becoming part of the contemporary cultural landscape of Namibia. Extended contact with global tendencies has a major impact. The present trend is likely to ensure that most of the practices mentioned above will decline, as more and more children leave their “village education” environments for formal schools and board away from home. From a “village” situation where everybody collectively became involved in a performance, many

people today are becoming hesitant to sing and dance because “they can’t.” Whereas in older traditions, boys and men were full and important participants in dance, boys are now more likely to say they cannot or do not want to dance, unless they feel they have been blessed with special talent. Thus, urban settings follow the trends of Western music experiences. It could perhaps be argued that rituals and practices that cease to have social value ought be abandoned, but much could also be learnt from these diverse practices that are rich in societal and musical information, values and history.

### 6.1.3 The ideational structure of different “musical worlds”

The term “musical world” refers to the way in which people, based on their cultural experiences and learning, cognitively construct an abstract system of knowledge and ideas by means of which they understand and interpret the wealth of music in their surroundings.

In a relatively closed cultural environment, the musical world of that culture is relatively uniform and contains the complete treasure and knowledge of all the different repertoires with their songs, melodies, rhythms, tonal qualities and instruments. These are preserved in the form of mental templates by means of which culturally “correct” sounds and movements are recognized and evaluated.

Different cultures have different ideations. This ideational system, the musical world, also includes the aesthetic standards by means of which performance and compositions are judged—what is the desired sound quality, tempo, interval, etc. Hence, as a member of a culture, one identifies with certain processes and environments or frames of music-making, thereby cognitively constructing a musical world.<sup>1</sup> The knowledge forms part of the *process* of performance, which includes the ability to perform and recall to memory examples of songs, rhythms or movements from the repertoire, and knowing how and when to improvise, embellish or vary existing music and dance patterns. The music is thus undergoing continuous small changes, keeping it fresh and interesting for the participants. The process is confined by the frame in which it is performed, in other words, the *environment*. This includes the rules regarding who may perform, in what order, which time of day or night, which repertoire belongs to the event, and so on. It is the frame that provides meaning, placing the words, music and movements within a ritual, entertainment, praise, mourning or political environment. One’s musical identity resides in the entire cultural context, but it involves identification with both the praxis and the environment of music-making, whether that be specific to a local culture, national or global (for example, music from the United States, which is culturally hegemonic in many places in the world, including Namibia).

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1. This is discussed at greater length in Mans, 2002 (c)

This complex system of knowledge forms the basis of a musical tradition. Because environments and histories differ, one finds diversity of musical worlds. Traditions provide a sense of stability and continuity, yet music is a medium through which rapid cultural change is wrought. It plays a fundamental formative and responsive role in identity. To be fully educated within a musical culture one needs to know the processual contents as well as the rules. Both process and frame are informed by history and social expectations, thus providing the basis for quality judgments and aesthetic meaning.

#### 6.1.4 Aesthetic values

Unlike the Kantian theory of aesthetics, my research indicates that aesthetic values, meaning how one judges the quality of something by criteria other than utilitarian, are embodied and embedded in cosmologies and social practice.

An aesthetic judgement is a judgement based on transcendent categories that are held to be timeless, or at least beyond time. The aesthetic is not evaluated according to criteria in which time would be relevant. The aesthetic object is not good because it is efficient or quick, but because it is good. (Thornton, 2000:24).

The notion of timelessness might not always apply, as one notices that aesthetic judgments are qualified even within a generation. Even a cultural outsider is able to recognize a superior execution. There is a clarity, skill and expressiveness that exceed those of other performers. The reactions of others (audience or onlookers) also provide clues to quality. Yet many qualitative subtleties are lost on the cultural outsider. Moreover, the standards by which we judge the quality of a music or dance performance are often misplaced.

Certain dances are judged by the amount of energy expended, for example *omupembe*, a dance where young men leap over the heads of others who are standing upright. Others are judged on subtlety and neatness and even smallness of movements, for example *epera*, where especially women execute small triple steps while shaking their shoulders and hips. Add to this the fact that youthful performances are judged by different standards to those of elders—not as one might imagine by lowering standards for older dancers, but by expecting an even greater level of assurance, subtlety and coolness. Some dances might demand that there be good synchronism among performers, while others look for individual expression, not merely of self, but of lineage, history and ownership. In certain areas, a high-placed nasal vocal tone is good, while in other areas, a deep throat tone with jaw-vibrations is good.

Although aesthetic judgments may be influenced by individual taste, they are firmly seated within a wider value system. They are open to change in the same way that variation may bring about change to the musical template, through repeated small adjustments within the cultural landscape. When

political, geographic and cultural environments undergo major changes, choices are made about the level of continuity required to maintain cultural identity. And this is the predicament in which many Namibians find themselves—whether to allow absorption into the broader national culture, relinquishing cultural statements of diversity, or whether to reaffirm and develop diverse identities.



## 7. As a finale

From the extensive discussion above, it can be seen that issues of diversity and unity in and through music are not as direct or simple as they might initially appear. The interfaces between the influence of State and its citizens are many. People respond to their histories but also create new ones. They respond to the powerful influences of contemporary living environments, but create their own interpretations thereof. Music is of course always informed by the social context or culture from which the performer(s) emerge and music articulates our knowledge of other peoples, places, times and things and ourselves in relation to them. Therefore, in itself, music-making represents and is social action. It remains a medium through which history, ideology, religion, emotion, education, social class and expectations are expressed. It is an instrument of both diversity and unity.

The potential for unity is there—to be found in the many cultural commonalities in the musics of Namibia: the prevalence of participative performance; the energy and vitality of song; the strong throat tones used in singing; the descending slides of phrase and long tone endings. The bands of music-dance practice, to which I referred earlier, are also indicative of areas of unity. Although there might be much that is different between north and south, each broad band shares many correspondences in music, aesthetics, ways of living and values.

Before any indigenous music can become part of “the” national identity, it would need to be valued and “owned” by a wide cross-section of the population. To date this has not happened. The question arises whether it would be of value to “nationalize” certain musics or material traits. Namibia has done this with a national bird (fish eagle) and animal (zebra), but no steps have been taken to identify the practices, qualities, characteristics or objects that might qualify for reification as “national,” such as a national instrument. Would such a decision be based on unity (identifying something we all have in common) or diversity (something unique and rare)? If it is common and pervasive and identified as national by force of its familiarity, it might be found in neighbouring countries as well. If it is unique to an area, its “otherness” is emphasized. Clearly, both of these are riddled with potential misinterpretations and disagreements.

There is much that makes each culture’s music unique, expressing diverse histories, cosmologies and future expectations. As a musical example, one may consider the different ways in which tonal structures are organized—in some

areas people use seven tones, in others five, others use four. Ju/'hoansi are known not only to use a system that most probably is deduced from the natural tones of the musical bow, but a system that is highly organized in terms of melodic structuration, bound by strict rules of progression but allowing individuated embellishments within the framework.<sup>1</sup> To allow this flourishing musical system to be submerged within the more widespread musical practice before it is even fully understood and appreciated would indeed be a great loss. Similarly, the subtleties and nuances of Ovahimba song-poetry, praise and humour, or the rhythmical intricacies of Valozi and Vaciriku drumming, the skill in the high elevations of Ngandjera *omupembe* and shoulder vibrations of Vaciriku dance, the superb appropriation and adaptation of a European waltz in *langarm* dance. These performances have qualities unique to this part of the subcontinent, and in some cases they are unique to Namibia.

Although African governments bemoan the changes that bring about the "loss of African identity," they generally do little to stem the tide. To me it is clear that music is one of the most powerful ways in which identity can be expressed. Yet there is a reluctance to value and support traditional arts and artists, seeing them as both trifling and troubling. This governmental attitude could explain why musicians hope that by indicating their willingness to throw themselves into the business of nation-building, they might secure their futures. Hence, one gets the feeling that indigenous music is increasingly interpreted in terms of financial and political viability.

The older socializing musical functions of ritual, celebration and self-delection are, as can be expected, on the decline. The State stresses the need for development, especially of "backward" (often culturally distinctive) communities. However, even though the construction of nationhood is necessary for political survival, it is a function that good art performs badly. There is danger in emphasizing only the economic and technological aspects of development, neglecting issues of cultural development issues. It is "the cultural perspective [that] gives hope of humanizing development policies to go beyond mere economic growth towards a more equitable, sustainable development of *societies*" (my italics, Arizpe in Kirdar, 1992:117). This involves delving deeper into the extant diversities and their meanings, not merely glossing over difference in the march towards unity.

According to Indian post-modern art critic Gayatri Spivak, "Art begins with disobedience" (Vinassa, 1993:56). The call for unity and nation-building could be interpreted as obedience of a kind, leading to politically correct, nationalistic music. The Namibian situation today shows signs of this tendency. Let us hope that the implementation of the *Policy on Arts and Culture* can guarantee performative and creative space for freedom of expression and even disobedience. As a musician and dancer, it seems clear to me that both individ-

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1. See Olivier 2000 for a fascinating discussion of this.

ual and cultural diversity can only enrich a nation, and can contribute significantly to its shared sense of values and belonging. This might involve a slower route towards nation-building, but certainly a more natural one, based on an understanding of national identity not rooted in an equation of State with either dominant majority or a mono-cultural ethnicity, but truly united in diversity.

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