

# What Right Have We To Interfere?

## Rigor, Integrity, and Grace in the Context of Criticism

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### Prelude

In his treatment of the musical history of Shona culture in Zimbabwe (2000), Thomas Turino underscores missionaries' "direct oppression of indigenous Shona music and dance" (113) in the first half of the 19th century. He has also charged me - a Christian ethnomusicologist attempting to encourage the creation of local hymnodies - of living a "profound contradiction" (Schrag 1996). Are missionaries an inherently destructive force, living in an imaginary world?

Michele Kisliuk, in her rigorous and human ethnography of BaAka music culture in the Central African Republic, *Seize the Dance!* (1998), recounts her involvement in a battle with an American missionary for the musical soul of the BaAka. She states, "The threat of cultural annihilation for BaAka at Dzanga was looming not so much because of change . . . but rather because of a campaign [by missionaries] that threatened to dismantle the cultural tools to *cope* with change" (p. 166). Do missionaries weaken ethnic groups' abilities to respond to rapid social transformation?

In a paper entitled "Ethnomusicology as Tool for the Christian Missionary" John Vallier charges missionaries using ethnomusicology of dishonesty, insensitivity to other cultures, benefiting from their work through the accumulation of spiritual capital, and fomenting spiritual conflict (2003; see also Schrag & Coulter 2003). Are we guilty?

In this presentation, I will explore criticisms of missionary involvement with music that originate in three communities. The first source of criticism comes from non-Christian ethnomusicologists' observations of the frequent negative results on local musics stemming from

Christian missionary activity. Another source of criticism springs from the relatively small community of non-Christian ethnomusicologists who are aware of and have responded to Christian missionary ethnomusicologists. Third and finally, I will bring some of my own critique on our activities.

I will organize my discussion around six dangers these criticisms point to in our attitudes, work, and communications, and propose protective measures that will support the strengthening of profound, respectful relationships with music-makers around the world that. My hope is that these reflections, when applied to all of our work, will result in cutting-edge creativity flowing from deep encounters between Christian truth and local culture.

## **What Right Have We to Interfere?**

The answer to the title of this presentation is surprisingly easy: All that we need. First, we have mandates from our leader, Jesus Christ, to enter into the world in His name. Out of obedience to Him and wanting to help others worship Him, we must intentionally interact with the world (Matt. 28:18ff; cf. also discussions in Piper 1998, Best 1993; Corbitt 1998). Second, because of the long history of missionary misunderstanding and injury of local musics, we have not only a right, but a responsibility to reflect on our own work, and influence missionary communities as much as possible. Third, a substantial history of activism and periodic reflection by non-Christian ethnomusicologists also argues for intentional involvement of ethnomusicologists in doing good (see, for example Seeger 2003; Lomax Hawes 1993). Fourth and finally, we are a human community like any other. In the relativistic academic philosophical context many of us work in, we are on the same moral plane as anybody else. No longer is it a valid position to extol the validity of any cultural position except that of evangelical Christians.

So we have not only the right, but also the responsibility, privilege, and joy to say and do something to interfere with music and worship around the world. [Should we go eat now?] That decided, I want to discuss the equally important question of “How?”

## Historical Context

*Stream of our Missionary Forebears.* Many of our missionary forebears discouraged the use of indigenous music and dance in the church. In Africa, reasons for this include 1) associations with competing indigenous beliefs and rituals; 2) a general ideology of European cultural superiority; 3) the desire to promote a deeper sense of universal unity between Africa and Europe and America; 4) and ethnocentric views about uncivilized nature of the "Dark Continent" (Turino 113). By the mid-1900s, these attitudes resulted in a theological and philosophical milieu in many Protestant missions and the churches they had planted around the world in which local musical forms were at best ignored, and at worst, demonized.

*Vida Chenoweth Against the flow.* One person who responded forcefully to these attitudes toward music, and who has directly influenced many of us in SIL and beyond, is Vida Chenoweth. Vida popularized the Guatemalan marimba in European art music circles, performing in Carnegie Hall. She became a Christian, joined SIL, translated the New Testament into a Papua New Guinean language, and began interfacing with the academic ethnomusicology community in the 1960s. She developed a model of analysis of melody based on linguistic analysis of sound, i.e. phonology (see Chenoweth 1979). She also taught courses in ethnomusicology to a number of us at this consultation.

Vida argues vigorously in person and in print that missionaries should be supporting the existence and growth of local musics, and that Western music should have no part in our work

(Chenoweth 1984). Some of the attitudes and activities that characterize many of us now as a result of Vida Chenoweth, SIL, and their historical/philosophical context include

- a high valuation of the musical universe of every ethnic group, primarily defined linguistically;
- the importance of thorough research, practical understandings of a music system and its embracing culture;
- a close identification with and involvement in our host culture, an incarnational approach;
- the obligation we have to future generations of groups we work with. Vida believes that traditional musics are dying off, and that one of the most important things we can do is to record and archive local musics, and create generative analyses;
- an extremely high weight given to transcription and analysis of musical sound;
- the importance of communicating with our ethnomusicologist colleagues;
- a theological/philosophical approach that requires a narrow obedience to God in the tasks He gives us, leaving results - i.e. changed lives and cultures - to Him;
- a "Pure research" approach.

## SIL's Applied Ethnomusicology

Other ethnomusicologists in SIL have retained many of these emphases, while developing more explicit applications to missions. I here present three elements of SIL's applied ethnomusicology.

*Catalysis.* SIL defines a catalyst as the “activity of a facilitator that causes an event, namely, the expanding and deepening use of indigenous hymnody within a specific culture” (Schrag 1998:3). Examples of catalysts include commissioning songs, organizing members of a church as apprentices of traditional musicians, and workshops in which indigenous musicians compose new songs based on biblical passages that are then distributed on cassette. *The Catalyst and Research Library* serves as a repository for descriptions of the catalysts that have been successfully implemented, along with discussion of methodological issues, and a compendium of research aids that support the application of the catalysts.

So that the nature of a catalyst is clear, I here insert a long exegesis of the above definition, taken from the introduction to the *Library* (p. 3).

The facilitator may be an ethnomusicologist, an outsider closely associated with the people who make the music in question, or a member of this culture. This analogy carries an unfortunate connotation concerning the facilitator which I would like to address immediately. The idea of catalysis comes from the field of chemistry, and evokes images of a white-cloaked scientist disinterestedly measuring out various chemicals, and inserting them into petri dishes to see what happens; he or she plays a god-like, controlling role in the laboratory, and is not affected by what happens in the experiment. The facilitator in our definition, however, is someone who is as closely aligned with the culture in question as possible. She humbly recognizes her commonalities with the people she is trying to encourage, and is very aware of unequal power differences that may exist between her culture and that of these people. So, she is careful, humble, respectful, and develops her plan of action through a process of dialogue. And ultimately, she is affected by the dialogue, and the results of her work.

Though all analogies break down eventually, I think that we can profitably apply the concept of catalysis to musical situations in the following four-part process:

1. Background Research. Analyze a situation in terms of elements that are conducive and elements that act as barriers to Christian musical creativity.
2. Choice. Choose existing-or create new-catalysts to capitalize on the strengths in order to overcome the barriers of the specific situation.
3. Application. Apply the catalyst in an effective, efficient way that will reduce the chance of negative side effects.
4. Review. Review results, checking for acceptance and integration, and modify the plan accordingly.

Several hundred copies of *The Catalyst and Research Library* have been published, but there are currently no data about how often, to what effect, or by whom they have been used.

*Heart Music*. A second core concept developed by SIL ethnomusicologists is that of heart music, defined as “the musical system that a person learns as a child or youth and that most fully expresses his or her emotions” (63). This populist definition has gained wide currency as an analog to the concept of heart language, used in SIL’s communications with churches and governments to describe their efforts in translation and literacy. I have attempted to flesh this out elsewhere with some anthropological rigor as the cultural strength of a music–determined by

the strength of its relationship to a culture on four parameters: emotional involvement, communicational clarity, social identity and cohesion, and musical integrity (Schrag 1994).

*Champion of the Underdog.* A final point in characterizing SIL's ethnomusicological ethos is the belief that all music systems have inherent worth insofar as they are the heart music for even one person, and in that they somehow contain unique aspects of God's creative genius. This leads to a preference to engage musics that are moribund due to significant cultural disruption.

## **Dangers and Protective Measures**

For the remainder of this presentation, I will address my comments to 'missionary ethnomusicologists' and not just those in SIL. I believe we all share many goals and influences.

### **Danger One: Destroying Local Musical Culture**

During research for her dissertation in ethnomusicology among the BaAka of Central African Republic (New York University, 1991), Michelle Kisliuk encountered a recently introduced movement competing with local traditions. Certain BaAka had become convinced that some local dances were 'satanic', and refused to participate in them (Kisliuk 1998:154). They started singing songs originating with non-BaAka Central African evangelists and Western missionaries, with sometimes silly results. For example, a song containing the lyrics, "Alleluya Amen" became "Alleluya ame". 'Ame' means the English 'me' in Aka, so they were singing "alleluia me".

What was worse for Kisliuk on a personal level was that the BaAka assumed that she - a white person, like the instigators of this change - was in favor of the new music. Eventually, she clarified her position forcefully: "I said that there is no "sata" (satan), that 'sata' is in the heads of the nzapa [Sango for 'God'] followers. . . . Then I said outright that I thought the nzapa followers

were throwing away their own culture . . . and future, that they would become like the Bolemba pygmies who aspire to be like bilo [non-pygmy black people]. Like those pygmies, their own grandchildren would not remember Diaka or BaAka beboka. And, I added, the nzapa stuff is ugly" (155).

Missionaries had used short trips to evangelize the BaAka using the Sango language and Sango songs. "To naively step into that world [of BaAka pygmies], then, preaching a contrasting set of assumptions and values, is to invite misunderstanding that is likely to ripple through social and economic life. Boursier, a Catholic missionary himself, understands the complexity of his enterprise and seems to respect the Baka he works with, while the evangelists I encountered in Centrafrique seemed to comprehend very little about the implications of what they were doing" (154). Kisliuk believes that an unexpected social result of the evangelists' censure of BaAka spirits was increased boldness of non-BaAka Central Africans to exploit the BaAka. No longer fearing the powerful BaAka spirits, outsiders began to act on their baser motives for manipulation.

Song, dance, aesthetics, the spirit world, social relationships, and belief systems of the BaAka are all intertwined. According to Kisliuk, the missionaries' and evangelists' lack of reflection, understanding, and respect for local worldviews and practices has resulted in musical destruction, increased social manipulation of the BaAka, and superficial understandings of the gospel.

*Protective measures.* Because of the nature of this consultation, I doubt that anyone here would devalue the expressive and thought forms of people we work with, the way it seems some missionaries and evangelists to the BaAka have done. However, many of our missionary colleagues don't yet see the value and power of the musics God has created around the world.

We need to be vigilant in our efforts to inform and educate. In addition, I find that my own desire for quick results - to communicate to supporters, perhaps? - may lead me to short shrift the research necessary to understand people well. We need a renewed emphasis on respect for local creativity, research, and an increased integration of missionary colleagues into our work.

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### **Danger Two: Inappropriate Paternalism**

One of the most disturbing potential dangers of the SIL ethnomusicology model is its possible creation or continuation of paternalistic modes of interaction. This may occur unwittingly due to systemic objectification of symbols of power of which the missionary may be unaware. Bourdieu (1977; 1994) has argued that in France and other Western countries, academic degrees and other institutionalized certifications become keys that unlock access to cultural and financial capital. Regardless of the characteristics and abilities of the individuals who act within the system, their possession of these institutional symbols of cultural capital earns them a place in the structure, the permanent positions carved out in the society's social space. Power negotiations thus move from the space between individuals to space between permanent social categories, most of which are entered not by individual effort but by happenstance of birth. "Once a system of mechanisms has been constituted capable of objectively ensuring the reproduction of the established order by its own motion . . . , the dominant class have only to *let the system they dominate take its own course* in order to exercise their domination; but until such a system exists, they have to work directly, daily, personally, to produce and reproduce conditions of domination which are even then never entirely trustworthy" (1977:190).

In addition to the power of institutionally accepted symbols of accomplishment—like diplomas—each relative position of power also has associated lifestyle symbols. In Cameroon, the political and economic élite often drive Mercedes or new SUVs, and build large houses surrounded by tall brick walls. Other categories of symbols include clothing, language choice and register, leisure activities – any object or activity can take on meaning that associates someone with a specific social category. Though Bourdieu admits that categories like these are never impermeable, they reveal that institutionalized power relations are perpetuated systemically and marked symbolically. In addition, the individuals filling these spaces may be unaware of the kinds of capital they possess as well as the social power their associated symbols wield.

Bourdieu's characterization of institutionalized social space, privileged access to the certification needed to enter and maintain certain positions, and the power ascribed to their associated lifestyle symbols applies fairly clearly to the relatively homogeneous, socialist French context. Though still relevant, the situation becomes less clear when these concepts are brought to bear on cross-cultural interactions. Here, symbols from one culture are interpreted through the grid of another, with unpredictable results. An increasingly homogeneous global symbolic space provides a modicum of intercomprehensibility, but effective communication between individuals of different cultures requires laborious, detailed decoding and testing of symbols.

The danger of a paternalistic relationship between a missionary ethnomusicologist and members of the culture with which he or she is interacting could take two primary forms. First, if the missionary consciously capitalizes on the symbols and institutions of power that remain as residue from a colonial relationship, for example, he can attempt to force decisions on a

positionally and symbolically weaker society. Second, he may be unaware of the power that his lifestyle choices symbolize, and unwittingly exercise institutional power.

*Protective measures.* These dangers can be mitigated in at least four ways. First, missionary ethnomusicologists must visualize their encounters with music and music-makers from other traditions as opportunities for expansion of their own horizons. Following Gadamer (1975), humans' interpretations of experience are always already symbolically mediated; our preconceptions of the musical symbols that enter our horizons inform our understanding of them. "In fact, the horizon of the present is being continually formed, in that we have continually to test all our prejudices" (273). Thus, the missionary must adopt a position of humility, recognizing that his current understanding of the sounds, sights, and words with which he engages will be fused with those of the people he has chosen to serve. We must be first and foremost learners.

Second, following on this acknowledgment of his limited horizon and the intent to adopt a position of humility, the missionary must examine all aspects of his comportment and lifestyle to identify the symbols and objectified structures that keep him in a privileged position. We must identify symbols of capital and attempt to undermine them. Instead of letting the "system they dominate take its own course" and working "directly, daily, personally, to produce and reproduce conditions of domination" (Bourdieu 1977:190), we need to pour those same energies into counteracting the system of which they are a part. We must identify the cultural capital these symbols yield and attempt to divest ourselves of it.

This process is never straightforward, always requiring balance of personal identity and public persona. Thus, for example, when my family lived in the village of Bili in northwestern Democratic Republic of Congo, our skin color, language, work, and other signs immediately

marked us as missionaries in the Congolese social space. Part of that identity included the social objectification of Whites eating separately from the Congolese, a practice originally instituted by the Belgian colonizers. To counteract this, we ate in Congolese homes and invited Congolese—including employees—to eat with us as often as possible. Symbolically, this earned us the honor of being perceived as *simple* – unassuming, unaffected. However, in a bid to maintain internal family peace and propagation of aspects of our own culture to our children, we also sometimes refused invitations and kept our doors closed. The practical application of divesting oneself of cultural capital is always problematic.

The other side of the divestment coin is responsible use. If it is impossible to completely rid oneself of one's cultural capital, then it is necessary also to learn to use it judiciously and wisely. The third mitigating condition, then, is produced when the missionary finds ways to convert his capital into power for the local people. In a situation where a Christian church exists, then, the missionary ethnomusicologist raises questions for the local church: "How can you best draw on your traditions to live fully and creatively in the present and future? How do you reinterpret your past for your new self-understandings? If there is anything you want to discard, could it not rather be infused with new meaning?" In other words, the missionary motivates innovation by posing questions, and then providing practical help—perhaps in the form of tools found in *The Catalyst and Research Library*.

Fourth and finally, the danger of the outsider relating hegemonically to a local population is mitigated by the fact that human beings are seldom passive recipients of enforced change. We are all actors in interpreting the symbols that enter our horizons, no matter the level of power exercised by their initial communicators. Pointing to the multi-faceted consequences of globalization, George Lipsitz suggests that both homogeneity *and* diversity result (1999).

Quoting Peter Manuel, he wonders whether in addition to the musical “grey-out” described by Lomax (1962), a “glitter-out” also occurs, attested to by the myriad urban musics emerging around the globe. There is some comfort in realizing that whatever mistakes a power-wielder makes, the people she affects will decide for themselves how to integrate her symbols into their lives.

The ideal relationship between the missionary ethnomusicologist and local culture then, is one in which we

- acknowledge systemic power differentials and work to maintain a position of humility;
- consciously divest ourselves of dominant-structure related symbols, life-styles when beneficial, and use them wisely otherwise;
- aim to empower local culture-bearers to make informed decisions about their interpretations and re-creations of musical tradition; and
- still sleep well, trusting them to make good decisions.

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### **Danger Three: Unhelpful, Uninformed Reification**

A common understanding of tradition originated in the late 19th century culture concept of Franz Boas (Langness 1987:53ff.). Reacting to the highly speculative search for a grand evolutionary progression of human societies, Boas and his followers began to insist that the particularities of each culture must be understood in terms of the local context in which they appear. This cultural relativism spawned several approaches—including the superorganicism of A.L. Kroeber in the early 1900s—that led to the reification of the descriptions of cultures. Reification refers to “making a material thing out of something that is in reality only a mental thing” (125), fixing it in time and space forever. Reification may be evident in a researcher’s indiscriminate use of the ethnographic present: “The Mono draw on thirteen genres for composition” or “An apprentice learns to play *tabla* only through long devotion to his *guru*,” are hypothetical examples of fixing the truth of a particular historical moment and place in a timeless tense.

Bourdieu purports that this approach to culture provides the basis for what is often referred to as common sense, as well as racism (1994:18). It “attempts to treat the activities or preferences unique to certain individuals or certain groups of a certain society at a certain moment as substantial properties, inscribed once for all in a biological *essence* or—what is no better—cultural *essence*. . .” (ibid.; my translation).

In contrast to this “reified, static givenness of the culture concept” (Rice 1994:33), Ricoeur characterizes tradition as “. . . not the inert transmission of some already dead deposit of material but the living transmission of an innovation always capable of being reactivated by a return to the most creative moments of poetic activity. . . . [A] tradition is constituted by the interplay of innovation and sedimentation” (1984:68). In other words, to Ricoeur, bearers of a tradition are constantly mediating themselves to themselves. Each generation receives the paradigms and concepts that have sifted down to become cultural sediment, and uses those in the process of innovating a novel conception of the present and future. J.H. Kwabena Nketia accesses a similar tension in discussing African musical change by stating that “any music that embodies a large measure of significant aspects of style passed on from generation to generation at different points in time can be described as traditional” (1978:3); innovation draws on cultural sediment to continually re-create tradition.

If members of a culture are continually mediating their past to their present and future, what happens when someone outside the culture interferes, attempts to appropriate part of its symbolic universe for its own means? The blues revival of the 1960s in the US provides a telling example of this type of activity, at first glance analogous to the aims of missionary ethnomusicologists. Fueled in part by the folk revival of the same time period, outsiders to the black communities that gave birth to the blues set out to “think about, document, analyze, and in

some cases, perform” blues music (Titon 1993:223). Among other things, their activities resulted in the rise in popularity of blues music as a nonconformist path among middle class white people, and the creation of discographies that came to define the blues canon. Revivalists thought they had “discovered an object called blues. . . . Instead,” confesses Titon—a self-identified revivalist—“by our interpretive acts, we constructed the very thing we thought we had found. . . . [T]he various activities of the blues revivalists constituted a commodity called ‘blues’ that came to be consumed as a popular music and a symbol of stylized revolt against conservative politics and middle-class propriety” (ibid.).

Because of Chenoweth’s initial research experiences in the highlands of Papua New Guinea—where mountainous terrain and other forces have resulted in over 800 separate languages being spoken among its less than 5,000,000 inhabitants (Grimes 1996)—missionary ethnomusicologists she has influenced may be prone to the same confusion. In her experience, the lines were drawn clearly: small, relatively discrete cultures with little or no previous contact with peoples outside of Papua New Guinea were at the cusp of a powerful, Western-dominated capitalist invasion. In Chenoweth’s view, the Usarufas needed to be protected and fortified to withstand this historically unprecedented assault. Practically, that meant recording and archiving as much Usarufa music as possible for posterity, refraining from uttering a single word of English or singing a single note of non-Usarufa music in their presence. It also necessitated performing a thorough analysis of Usarufa music so that a portion of its genius could be accessed by future generations who might be severed from their tradition.

The danger here, seen most clearly in its extension to less isolated contexts, is in privileging one type of music, thereby constructing something that had not previously existed.

Like the blues revivalists, we may impose a preconceived category of “indigenous music” on a culture that they then define and constrain according to their own paradigms.

*Protective measures.* I see three important ways to protect us from this risk. First, we need to understand tradition as fluid, in constant flux. This means we should question the categories we use and make sure we don't get stuck on them. How long has this tradition existed? What was there before? Who is creating new traditions? Second, this implies significant research. We mustn't be content with superficial understandings of the socio-musical milieu. And third, we should encourage local initiative as much as possible.

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#### **Danger Four: Disrespect to and Neglect of the Scholarly Community**

We need to be careful of using the term 'ethnomusicology' and 'ethnomusicologist' in our work. Since the term was coined in the mid-1950s, many people have devoted their lives to thorough, rigorous research and clear reporting and nuance analysis in the field of ethnomusicology. If we associate ourselves with this discipline, we need to uphold its scholarly standards as well. If you call yourself an ethnomusicologist, make sure you're familiar with the literature, people, and methodologies in the field. Otherwise, we are not showing respect for the scholars whose insights inform our work.

Most of our critics don't know us. The vast majority of the ethnomusicologists I've met have never made friends with a missionary, and so they have little first-hand understanding. We need to "be ready always with an answer for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15), graciously and prudently sharing ourselves, our work, our goals, our motives. Our critics have a responsibility to engage in dialogue with us, to try to get to know us. And we need to examine

criticism honestly and humbly. We have nothing to be ashamed about in our calling, but we are fallible humans and should listen to truth from wherever it originates.

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### **Danger Five: Irrelevance**

If we don't know the people we're working with well, have not earned their trust, and don't understand the social processes surrounding musical creation and practice, they'll either fight what we hope to accomplish or ignore us. We may get people to compose songs, but if they evaporate into the oral landscape, what's the point?

*Protective measures.* We must invest our time, energy, and resources into knowing and being known. Dan Fitzgerald, an SIL ethnomusicologist working in Cameroon, has authored a document characterizing the nature and goals of SIL's activities in ethnomusicology in Cameroon. He states,

we will foster the use of translated Scriptures in song by enabling and training individuals, institutions, and churches to model relevant, sustainable song composition processes that set vernacular Scripture to song forms of lasting value and to enable them to train and mentor others (2003).

Dan condenses most of what I've discussed so far into this succinct plan of action. It requires a long view, with a life full of research, but is a good guide of our activities, and guard against irrelevance.

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**Danger Six: Let our desire for accumulation of monetary, cultural, or spiritual capital skew our actions and communications.**

In order to communicate to our constituents in a way that will get their attention, do we present essentialized versions of the people we work with? Do we emphasize elements they see as primitive in order to capture their attention and - indirectly, but significantly - send more money our way? This can result in the acquiring of both cultural and spiritual capital. I admit to this.

Because of SIL's financial structure, I am dependant on God working through my supporters to continue in this work. And so I try to keep them engaged, enthralled in the work. And what often engages the people on my team is stories of people who are very different from them, people wearing strange clothes, eating wild animals, frightened of forest spirits, etc. But this is just part of the picture; there are also many commonalities.

*Protective measures.* Though having spiritual, cultural, or financial capital is not in itself wrong, if acquiring them plays any significant role in the motivations for our work, we're in grave danger. The love of money - or people's acclaim, or even God's acclaim - is the root of all sorts of evil. So, we need to be extremely careful about how we present the people we work with to others, ensuring that it is done respectfully, accurately, and not accentuating their other-ness. As much as possible, we should show people in the communities we work with what we're communicate about them.

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**Danger Seven: By focusing on tradition, we may sap a culture's strength to negotiate changing realities.**

Studies searching for the homologous relationship between musical and social structure are common (e.g., Lomax 1962; Feld 1984; Shepherd 1982). However, the enterprise of catalysis draws on another paradigm of the relationship between music and society, namely, its capacity

“to *outlive*, through its own artistic and human values, the socio-historical conditionings and circumstances that influence its creation” (Supicic 1987:13). In other words, in addition to music’s nature as a reflection of the society from which it emanates, music also somehow remains autonomous from that society. Theodor Adorno explores feature of music, arguing that music can and should have a dialectical relationship with society, creating critical moments in which society itself is transformed (1989). Though he argues that “functionless” music in capitalist societies has been co-opted by market ideology and rendered impotent, instances of critical resistance exist. Soul music, for example, played a pivotal role in informing people’s consciousness and effecting social change in the 1960s and 1970s (Maultsby 1983). Soul artists drew on the hortatory, proclamatory traditions of gospel music to attest to new possibilities, a new way of being treated: no longer simply integrated into majority society, but included as equals.

Missionary ethnomusicologists' approaches to music contain potential for similar resistance, based on Christian values. Catalysis draws on music’s autonomous nature in order to infuse creative energy into a new domain, namely, indigenous hymnody. At first glance, we may appear to be restraining the autonomous power of music by focusing on tradition, especially when minority cultures are attempting to engage the majority cultures around them. Are we helping the majority to “keep them in their place?”

Ultimately, the opposite is true. Throughout history, dominating societies have attempted to control their subjects by robbing them of their history: the U.S. forbade enslaved Africans to speak their heart languages or perform their heart music; the French attempted to replace the histories of central Africans with those of Europe by integrating them into French schools. Returning to Ricoeur’s depiction of tradition, without one's own past to draw on, there is no raw

material available to reinterpret into a vision of a just future. "From whence does resistance rise? What do you draw on to form resistance? Where do you go to discover the cultural good" (Savage 2000)? Resistance stems from creative renewal of a cultural heritage, and this process occupies the core of the goal of catalysis: empowering cultures to creatively renew their musical heritage, providing a space for critique through contextualized Christian values.

Lamin Sanneh, D. Willis James Professor of Missions and World Christianity and Professor of History, Yale Divinity School makes a similar point in his *Translating the Message* (1998). Sanneh contends that Christianity contains at its core the possibility and necessity - perhaps even the *urge* - of being translated into local cultures. At its inception, it "identified itself with the need to translate out of Aramaic and Hebrew, and from that position came to exert a dual force in its historical development." (1). First, it resolved its roots in Judaism, and second, destigmatized Gentile culture. Throughout the history of the church - though seen most clearly in the growth in Bible translations since the 1600s - [CONFIRM!] missionaries have translated the Bible into local languages. This has resulted in research in and increased valorization of local languages, local worldviews and cultures, deeper comprehension and assimilation of Christian truths, and wildly different forms of Christian worship and theology around the globe. "Missionaries paid huge 'vernacular' compliments to Africans, enabling many peoples to acquire pride and dignity about themselves in the modern world, and thus opening up the whole social system to equal access" (172).

Christianity's intrinsic translatability causes people to search for their own roots in order to grapple fundamentally with Christ's claims. So, encounters between Christian faith and local worldviews and practices have resulted in both the birth of the churches and

revitalization and renewal of local cultures. They produce increased creativity, directed to the ultimate Creator.

*Protective measures.* To avoid draining a culture's creative strength, we need to encourage encounters between Christ and culture at a fundamental level. Just as translators of Scripture must come to grips with multiple meanings and associations of words in both source and receptor cultures, so should we struggle to know and understand the complex musical universes encapsulating musical sounds and practices. I believe we can be unapologetic advocates of older music, while being involved and informed in current trends.

## **Advice for Interacting With Critics**

**Speak the truth boldly, from a position of respect, judiciously, humbly**

### **Boldly**

From Frank Fortunato (2003):

John Piper published a book called *A Godward Life* (2001). It's a book of weekly meditations to his congregation. One meditation is on Ephesians 5:11 "take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them." (RSV). He titled his column that week: "Your outrageous opinions are not based on truth."

He wrote that our job as Christians is to "speak God's truth at every level and to speak with boldness and clarity what God would say." He went on to say: "Don't be muzzled by the comment that you can't force your religion or morality on others. You are not forcing it; you are commending it for serious consideration. Declaring and persuading are not forcing.

Commending is not coercion...Since Christianity is true, there is an echo of it (however faint) in every heart. You never know when the open statement of your conviction will strike a deep

chord of rightness...

### **From a Position of Respect**

From Tom Headland (1999):

" 'Nothing raises secular elite hackles, suspicions, and whispers quite like a well-educated, well-positioned person expressing deep religious faith without temporizing or apologizing for it.'"

Statement by John Dilulio, professor of political science at Princeton University; as quoted in *Christianity Today*, June 14, 1999, p. 37. He could be speaking of himself here. One of the more influential scholar/thinkers in America today, he is well-known as a Christian. CT says he calls himself a "born-again Catholic."

### **Judiciously**

From Tom Headland (2003):

Here is a piece of advice that Kenneth Pike gave to us long ago. On January 19, 1984, Pike wrote a letter to [an] SIL anthropologist . . . who was trying without success to give honest answers to SIL's anthropologist critics. No matter how politely [he] had tried to respond, his words were only used against him as SIL was attacked even more. Here's how Pike advised [him] :

"Try to answer for yourself the following question: Under what circumstances is it basically irrelevant whether or not you are able to answer carefully and truthfully and fully somebody's question? One situation: When that person has no intention whatever of trying to come to terms with us--no desire whatever to be helpful, no intention of seeking the truth or facts. If all such a person wants is to block us, stop us, or have us thrown out, then no matter how relevant in other contexts, there is no point in trying to respond to this person's question. If one answers such a question, the asker then just looks for another question."

### **Humbly**

1 Peter 3:13-16 (NIV):

[3:13](#) Now who is he who will harm you, if you become imitators of that which is good?  
[3:14](#) But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "Don't fear what they fear, neither be troubled."[3:15](#) But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and

always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, with humility and fear: 3:16 having a good conscience; that, while you are spoken against as evildoers, they may be disappointed who curse your good manner of life in Christ.

## **Conclusion**

In a 1993 interview, Bess Lomax Hawes of the Folk Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts, made the following comments:

The human species has evolved a great number of musical systems, and each of them have their own individual quality and particular excellence. As with anything else over time, [some are lost]. You lose a lot when you lose a whole human invention like that. And I think that one of the obvious duties of ethnomusicologists is to do what they can to keep these musical systems alive and functioning. And growing. And changing.

Ethnomusicologists should continue being very activist in temperament. They should be supporting the music alive; rather than just teaching it as though it were gone....

Recent events in the field of ethnomusicology in the US attest to the growth of these ideas. In 2001, the Society for Ethnomusicology raised the status of its Applied Ethnomusicology group; an active listserv dedicated to discussion of applied ethnomusicology exists; and a conference entitled, "Invested in Community: Ethnomusicology and Community Advocacy" was organized at Brown University in March of this year.

The work of missionary ethnomusicologists is a consistent extension of Hawes' convictions and those of these other ethnomusicologists. Our goal is not the rightly vilified attempt to produce culture zoos, but rather to encourage cultural insiders to mediate their past into a new future, the ultimate good of us all. Many will disagree vehemently that worship of the Christian God through the variegated lenses of the world's cultures is an ultimate good, a worthy utopia. But if persuasion is done through relationships of mutual respect, in dialogue, where

power differentials are mitigated and change is reciprocal to some degree, it is part and parcel of the increasingly broad and frequent conversations between different peoples of the world. The work of missionary ethnomusicologists does not constitute an unconscionable deceit, but an imperfect act of love.

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