

UNESCO Chair on Transcultural Music Studies



Prof. Dr. Tiago de Oliveira Pinto, Chairholder of the UNESCO Chair on Transcultural Music

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Tiago de Oliveira Pinto is a professor in anthropology and musicology and Chairholder of the UNESCO Chair on Transcultural Music Studies at the University of Music Franz Liszt in Weimar, Germany. Prof. Dr. Pinto became Head of the Chair of Transcultural Music Studies, Department of Musicology, University of Music Franz Liszt, Weimar, Germany, in 2009.

Before joining the faculty of the Weimar Institute, Pinto was

head of the Brazilian Cultural Institute and full professor for Social Anthropology at the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil. Since the early 1990s he has conducted cultural research work and applied projects on ICH worldwide.

He is a member of the Expert Committee on Intangible Heritage of the German Commission for UNESCO and of the Academia Europaea / The Academy of Europe (London), among others.

The general domain of the Chair is Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), focusing mainly on performance studies and music research in specific social, historical and cultural settings. Musical practices are considered as social phenomena, and are studied in any geographical and or economic environment. The approach is a transcultural one, trusting in the plurality of cultures, rather than in authenticity of any absolute nature or single cultural existence. For example, Western musical theory is not a main or autonomous research topic but also part of global musical diversity. Thus, a primary concern of the Chair is on human beings as music makers that hold and transfer cultural knowledge.

The Chair's research concepts are guided by the notion that sustainable development is defined as an organizing principle for assembling human development goals, by supporting the natural resources as provided by ecosystem services. These resources are considered alongside cultural outputs, since only in the combined action of ecosystem and culture can the economy upon which a society relies be fully secured. Thus, research objectives are grounded on the recognition of the interdependencies of ecological, social, economic and cultural sustainability.

Research Areas

With the notion of ICH, communities are empowered to determine what their own cultural heritage is. Investigating music in the context of, and in collaborative interaction with, communities fosters a renewal of methodological approaches in music research. Some of the questions concerning music research in the domain of ICH are:

- How can the UNESCO Convention's definition of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) be fully comprehended within strongly applied academic research?
- How will this research be of benefit for those assigned with the recognition and safeguarding of their Intangible Cultural Heritage?
- What educational methods are best suited to understanding intergenerational transmission in music?
- How can intergenerational transmission in contemporary cultural life be recognized, studied and reinforced for the benefit of the community?
- What is the mechanism that commoditizes performances, giving them commercial value that can bring income to the community (tourism, etc.)?

Almost 70% of the entries of UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity is related to musical traditions or linked to music in one way or another. Until now, this significant fact has not been properly contemplated by academia. Musicological terminology and research strategies still offer few contemporary methodological skills and innovative theoretical approaches for use in defining music as ICH.

To encourage and develop investigations into music as Intangible Cultural Heritage is one of the basic academic goals of the Chair. This concern can finally lead to an approach that no longer detaches historical from anthropological music research. This is why the Chair's research effort goes in both directions, focusing on popular and contemporary urban cultures as well as on worldwide historical and artistic manifestations in music. Both are studied under the perspective of critical intangible heritage research.

International Cooperation

The Chair implements projects in different national and regional contexts in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Its aim is to support North-South-South and South-South dialogues in connection with ICH. These activities will link the Chair's programme with the Sustainable Development Goals. Institutional partnerships in Asia, Africa and Latin America are already in progression and will be intensified in order to delineate a South-South axis in Intangible

Cultural Heritage documentation, music research and transnational academic exchange, always within the framework of specific applied projects. With these activities, the Chair aims to bind "the power of culture for sustainable development and peace in a context of regional integration". Selected objectives are to:

- Connect local musical traditions to initiatives of sustainable development
- Foster exchange programmes with institutions of higher education to deepen international research cooperation
- Become a "think tank" and knowledge hub worldwide in the field of Transcultural Music Studies and applied cultural research
- Provide distance learning and e-learning courses promoting access to information and knowledge (e.g. by creating curricula for Afghanistan)
- Elaborate special curricula for academic institutions abroad (Afghanistan, Brazil, Ethiopia, etc.). This capacity building effort will be based on courses in lifelong learning. They in turn will be based on the implementation of concrete projects that involve face-to-face experiences in work and research.

Research Aims and Scientific Concepts

The transcultural research concept arose from the cultural and literary sciences in Latin America and was first represented by the Cuban sociologist and musicologist Fernando Ortiz (1881-1969). As opposed to "acculturation", "transculturation" implies something gained instead of something new replacing something older. One deals with events which do not merely reproduce regional traditional practices, but rather reveal a process of selection, elimination, recovering, discovery, the combination and synthesis of elements brought in from and mingled together by different cultures. Caused by voluntary or forced migration, developed within local history, by social encounters or as part of diasporic communities, these processes consequently encompass different defining qualities which are inherent in a great part of ICH.

Scientific reaction to a process which always includes losses and gains does not expect in the first instance the statically in music, but attempts to discover its living and therefore dynamic structures. The fixed element existing in this is the (silent/tacit) immanent knowledge that mainly derives from living musical forms of expression. Only the creative musical process that stems from tacit knowledge can be preserved a posteriori by notation or audio and video documentation.

The symbolic content of cultural manifestations also draws tangible and intangible cultural heritages closer together. Sound phenomena in themselves are particularly obvious examples of intangible cultural heritage. As an example, take an orchestra such as the **Sächsische Staatskapelle** of Dresden. Over many generations of musicians this orchestra has developed a carefully cultivated sound which becomes an eloquent form of intangible culture. In Germany there are a large number of orchestras which have existed for centuries and regularly perform their musical repertoires. These orchestras are highly valued by their audiences and form part of community life, thus being in fully concordance with principles of ICH. In the same way, German organ-building and the German “organ landscape” has been inscribed into Germany’s ICH list. Here also a tradition of knowledge has been passed down from generation to generation. Multifaceted knowledge and skills from different spheres come together in organ-building: these include the understanding of the principles of acoustics, complex tuning systems, the ability to work with wood, metal and other materials in a highly artistic manner. This highlights the fact that there is always a direct and causal connection in the dynamic of cultural inter-relationships, both tangible and intangible.

With regard to ICH, the Chair’s research projects focus on three stages that deal with dynamic transformation processes that link cultural facts and knowledge to a broader concept of ICH. These are: 1) the abstract, spiritual-cultural fact, the knowledge, including the so-called “implicit or tacit knowledge”; 2) the act, the transformation, the carrying out

of a cultural manifestation; and 3) the created artifact, the result of any cultural action. The cultural fact, meaning the knowledge and the various forms in which the cultural comprehension appears in the passed-down tradition, becomes transposed, and the result of this action appears in art handwork, festivals, competitions, carnival processions, preparation of culinary specialties and so on. This is true also of music in that a particular type of music, a piece of music, a performance, a song form and so on may also be considered an artifact of ICH.

The UNESCO Convention of 2003 defines five general domains of ICH: 1) Oral traditions and expressions, 2) Performing Arts, 3) Social practices, rituals and festive events, 4) Knowledge and practices focusing on nature and the universe, and 5) Specialist knowledge in the field of traditional craftsmanship. Even without naming music, almost 70% of the enlisted manifestations of ICH worldwide relate to music, either directly to music itself or to matters connected with music in the wider sense. ICH may be understood as living practice and also as an actively generated tradition/form of creativity which at the same time is part of human spiritual activity (speech, performance, handwork, music, dance, ritual, marriage customs, festivals, etc). Seen in this light, music is most definitely always part of ICH, independently of the way we understand it or of any local or historical definition of music. Finally, regardless of how we might define ICH, music is always part of it, as a cultural phenomenon that (1) exists universally, but (2) has always to be understood in its own – locally defined – right.

Collaborative Projects: Present and Future

The UNESCO Chair on Transcultural Music Studies has carried out and is presently conducting collaborative research projects in partnership with institutions in different countries. The projects are related to inventories and field work on different musical genres, to the support of local initiatives regarding music as ICH, to the establishment of curricula and research programmes on ICH, to documentary films and educational materials, to the exchange of scholars, students and artists, to artistic performances and audio/video productions, to the implementation of cultural archives and to the support of local personal infrastructures by means of capacity building and distance learning offers. Due to the complexity of all of these endeavors, collaborative activity with institutions and scholars in South Africa will each have a single focus:

Umngqokolo – Thembu Xhosa Overtone Singing: An endangered music technique of South Africa’s ICH

The attribute of ICH, that it exists only in living representation and therefore neither assumes absolute final shape nor are the small details of performance invariable, makes ICH exceptionally fragile. Therefore, whereas (material) objects have stability, intangible cultural heritage must be safeguarded through the definite (immaterial) knowledge of the human being who brings it to realization.

In 1980, the South African musicologist Dave Dargie from the University of Fort Hare discovered the overtone singing among the Eastern Thembu people in the Lady Frere district of the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. He was the first to document and record such singing in African traditional music.

In overtone singing, also called harmonic singing or split-tone singing, a singer produces

two (or more) notes simultaneously by amplifying overtones of a fundamental tone. Overtone singing is well known in Asia and Europe. However, the Xhosa overtone singing is quite different from other known examples and there are several kinds. The two main kinds are called **umngqokolo** (or **umngqokolo nje**) – **umngqokolo** being a word used for various kinds of rough singing including non-overtone singing – and **umngqokolo ngomqangi**, which means **umngqokolo** in the style of **umqangi**, a mouth bow also called **umrhubhe**. **Umngqokolo nje** means simply **umngqokolo** or “ordinary” **umngqokolo**, to distinguish it from the **umqangi** variety. Neither of these forms of overtone singing can be called “ordinary”. Both are quite extraordinary, and the **umqangi** variety is particularly striking.¹ The types of **umngqokolo** and also **ukutshotsha** may be seen on video recordings.² The people performing on most of the video recordings are or were from the village of Ngqoko, which is about 12 km from Lady Frere on the road to Qamata, opposite Lumko mission. Dave Dargie first encountered and recorded “ordinary” **umngqokolo** in the village of Sikhwankqeni about 8 kilometres south of Ngqoko. In 1983 he met and recorded Mrs Nowayilethi Mbizweni of Ngqoko, the performer of **umngqokolo ngomqangi**. In 1980 there were still many women and girls of Sikhwankqeni and Ngoqko who could perform “ordinary” **umngqokolo**, but only Nowayilethi Mbizweni knew **umngqokolo ngomqangi**. She learned the technique in the village of Maqasha before moving to Ngqoko. Becoming known through Dargie’s research work, the musicians of Ngqoko formed a music group, the Ngqoko Cultural Group. In time the Group became not only known through many performances in South Africa, they also had a number of performance tours in Europe, the US and Canada, among other places. In the 1990s, becoming concerned about the future of **umngqokolo ngomqangi**, Dargie suggested to Nowayilethi that she teach the technique to others. By 1998 she had taught some seven other women in the group.

Unfortunately, after that time, no new performers learned **umngqokolo ngomqangi**. Nowayilethi died in 2005, by which time fewer and fewer people of Ngqoko were playing the old traditional instruments or singing **umngqokolo**.³ In time, her first pupil, Nosomething Ntese, also passed on and others followed. Today, only two of the **ngomqangi** singers are well, though a third can still perform. They are all now elderly.

Music as the Subject of Research in the Arts and Cultural Sciences

The Art of Sound	Performance Practice	Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)
Musicology/Music Theory	Collaborative Research	Self-defined Cultural Image
Fact	Act	Artifact
Musicology	Historical/Philological	Transcultural Music Studies
	Methods, Transcultural	
	Evaluation and Intangible	
	Cultural Heritage	
“The Science of Art”		“The Science of Culture”



It is clear that the time has now come for something to be done before a marvelous and unique musical technique which is part of South Africa's ICH is lost. The scholars of the University of Fort Hare, Dave Dargie and Bernhard Bleibinger have made the following suggestions for activities to be implemented in collaborative actions with the UNESCO Chair:

1. Workshops should be arranged at which the remaining singers of *umngqokolo ngomqangi* should be given the opportunity to teach both "ordinary" *umngqokolo* and *umngqokolo ngomqangi*, and receive suitable payment for it.

2. Such workshops should be held in South Africa and in Europe. The first course should be held at the University of Music in Weimar, to which the Xhosa singers could be brought. (To assist them in travelling to Germany, and to assist with translations and explanations, Mr Tsolwana Mpayipheli, the organiser of the Ngqoko Group who has led them successfully on many overseas tours, should accompany the Xhosa singers.)

3. It is extremely important that significant remuneration be paid to the singers from Ngqoko, so that they will feel it worth their while to make concerted efforts to teach what they know – knowledge and skills they have not taught to any others since Ms Mbizweni's death.

4. As part of the process of trying to keep *umngqokolo* singing alive, Xhosa overtone singing must be recognized as ICH in South Africa. In collaborative efforts, the scholars of Fort Hare and of the UNESCO Chair have started to work on a dossier on South African overtone singing in order to inscribe it as an endangered ICH. This is the first step in safeguarding an old and exceptional sample of music as ICH.

This brief description of the South African overtone project provides an illustrative example of some of the objectives of the UNESCO Chair on Transcultural Music Studies. As an academic institution, the aim of the Chair is to:

- Conduct and collect scholarly research on music practices and musical heritage as an expression of cultural diversity and of historical and current transcultural exchanges in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America
- Conduct and collect scholarly research on the role of music as ICH in different regions
- Publish the findings of this research in ways that promote both the scholarly understanding of transcultural music studies and international relations, and shape dialogue and cultural development
- Maintain an active and current data-base on the role of music as ICH in different settings and situations.

Footnotes

1 Another less developed form of overtone singing used by men and boys is called *ukutshotsha*

2 Placed on the Internet by Asian overtone singing expert Dr Trần Quang Hai. They are accessible www.youtube.com/watch?v=MYj-55T6Uzs.

3 The most important traditional Xhosa instruments are musical bows which use overtones to perform melodies and harmony. They include the *uhadi* calabash bow, the mouth-bows (*umrhubhe/umqangi, inkinge*), the former herd-boys' bow *ikatari*: these instruments may be seen on the video viewable on the internet, mentioned above.