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Feminists, Postcolonialists, and Other Music Therapists

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Introduction

In the present issue of *Voices* the North American music therapists Sandra Curtis and Chesley Sigmon Mercado write about music therapy as community engagement and citizen participation, with goals linked to friendship building and the development of social networks. One of their points of departure is:



Barriers to community engagement in general and friendship in particular exist at both external and personal levels for people with developmental disabilities. They may experience such external barriers as: lack of opportunity, transportation difficulties, lack of money, lack of social groups and organizations, and problems stemming from the human services agencies themselves. The hierarchy of and control by these human services agencies often make community engagement and friendship building difficult, providing their clients little free time, few if any unsupervised outings, and little support. Societal misconceptions and prejudice represent further external barriers. ...[...]... People with developmental disabilities may also face such personal barriers as: lack of experience and familiarity in forming friendships with those without disabilities; lack of confidence; lack of power and access; and fear of unfamiliar situations ...(Curtis & Mercado, this issue).

The authors therefore acknowledge that friendship building can be difficult under current circumstances, but - in line with the arguments of proponents of community engagement - maintain that it should be an expectation of people with developmental disabilities and that it also could be a concern and an area of work for music therapists.

The two Australian contributors to this issue, Rosemary Faire and Dianne Langan, argue that music therapists could be activists, in a broad sense of this word, "to mean not only those on the front line of protest, but also concerned citizens making changes in their lives, those working within existing institutions to effect change, and those pioneering new ways of doing things." The authors proceed by describing the process of leading a workshop at an Education and Social Change Conference held at University of Technology Sydney and in their conclusion they contend that they see great potential for music therapy and other expressive arts therapies in community empowerment. Rosemary Faire pursues this issue in a personal story, describing how she became involved in environmental community arts.

The European text in this issue is written by the Ukrainian music therapy pioneer Mariya Ivannikova, who - in a description of her personal journey of becoming a music therapist - asks: "Ukrainian Music Therapy - Does It Have a Chance to Exist?" In the description of her own process of discovery, she writes: "I thought that music therapy is just the same in the countries all over the world, that there are no or not so many differences in understanding its essence." A central argument in her text is that this is not the case; music therapy changes from context to context and from person to person.

The Asian input also describes a personal journey of learning and discovery. Yuji Igari, a Japanese music therapist trained in the US, portrays the reconstruction of his identity as a music therapist, a reconstruction allowing space for what he calls "missing pieces" of himself as a social being and a musician. To encounter theoretical perspectives and practical examples of music therapy concerned with culture, community, and aesthetics, helped him see that to reframe the question of what music therapy is and can be is linked to changes in perception of his own potential as a music therapist.

Taken together, these texts could be read as examples of the feminist claim that *the personal is political*. I am not saying that these texts are explicitly feminist. They are not, as far as I can see. But they illuminate (and could be illuminated by) ideas that have been prominent in feminist theory. Knowledge could be something more and different than an abstract body of statements; it could be embodied and situated, personal and social. Maybe it is not arbitrary that one of the contributors to the community discourse in this issue previously has made a case for the significance of feminist perspectives on music therapy (Curtis, 1996).^[1]

There is one more essay to mention here, namely the African contribution written by Bernard M. Kigunda from Kenya. Using the metaphor of "music therapy canning," he elegantly starts his essay in the following way:

In Kenya we export a variety of agricultural products such as tea and coffee. However, at the same time, some other tea and coffee is imported to Kenya. The difference is that the imported tea is *canned*. It is presented with names such as 'instant' tea/coffee, and is (in this case) preferred even by Kenyans. Unfortunately, it is not to be afforded by a Kenyan of average income (Kigunda, this issue).

The essay describes healing rituals of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Kenya, rituals that he argues are *canned*; they are imported but similar to some traditional Kenyan music healing rituals. The critical point here is that the charismatic rituals have been imported from the West by missionaries and other Christian representatives that have repressed and discouraged traditional Kenyan rituals. Seeing possible links to music therapy, Kigunda writes:

Considering that our own biases can unjustly discourage what may be useful, it may be useful for music therapists to be aware that they belong to a 'privileged' tradition, with the power to wrongly undermine/discourage an equally supportive health system because it sounds mysterious (Kigunda, this issue).

Kigunda then makes a case for more inclusive interests in a variety of approaches to music and health, with the goal of developing reciprocal relationships of learning:

It is not clear to me why there has been more interest in traditional rituals than *canned* church rituals . among music therapists. I believe that music therapy has much to do with both old traditional and *canned* church rituals (Kigunda, this issue).

Kigunda does not explicitly position his argument in a postcolonial context. My reading of it is, however, that this essay may be one of the first *postcolonial voices* in music therapy discourse. While the definition of the term postcolonial may be debated a great deal, it is often seen as the study of the interactions between European nations and the societies they colonized in the modern period of history. Strictly speaking, the US could then be considered a postcolonial country, but it is usually not perceived as such because of its history and present position of power in world politics. Kigunda's essay in fact illuminates how current interactions between US cultures and African cultures may be studied in the same perspective as interactions between European countries and their previous colonies.^[2]

I have shared with you some themes that grew out of my reading of the texts presented in this issue of *Voices*. An editorial column like this could in many ways be compared to a preface of a book: It is a text contextualizing other texts. Sometimes it abstracts themes from these texts. Since it is often read *before* the reading of these other texts it will guide the reading, and it is therefore never unproblematic. Or - if it is read at all, maybe it does not matter much whether it is read before or after, that is; whether it functions as preface or postface, as foreword or afterword? It will in any case influence the reading of the other texts and possibly show some aspects and conceal others. In her "Translator's Preface" to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, the Indian philosopher Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak discusses problems of the preface. She does this with reference to Hegel's reflections about the preface that he wrote after

he had written the *Phenomenology of the Mind*. Spivak asserts: "It is clear that, as it is commonly understood, the preface harbors a lie (Spivak, 1974/1997, p. x)."

The obvious and some would say trivial aspect of this is that prefaces are written retrospectively. The graver problem, Spivak argues, is:

The contrast between abstract generality and the self-moving *activity* of cognition appears to be structured like the contrast between preface and text. The method of philosophy is the structure of knowing, an activity of consciousness that moves of itself; this activity, the method of philosophical discourse, structures the philosophical text. The reader of the philosophical text will recognize this self-movement in his consciousness as he surrenders himself to and masters the text. Any prefatory gesture, abstracting so-called themes, robs philosophy of its self-moving structure (Spivak, 1974/1997, p. x).

These reflections on the contrast between preface and philosophical text may be relevant to the contrast between this editorial column and the essays, reports, and stories of the present issue of *Voices*. At least we need to acknowledge that the themes of the preface only represent one possible and partial perspective on the landscapes of the texts. Then again, we must remember that the preface is itself a text. One central influence on Spivak's thinking, the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, passed away recently, but his philosophy continues to challenge us, reminding us about how texts may resist straight textual analysis.

"Feminists, Postcolonialists, and Other Music Therapists" - You may read this line as a contention, claiming that there are links between feminist and postcolonial discourse and music therapy practice. You may also read it as an invitation. There must be other music therapists out there, looking at the field from different perspectives.

Notes

[1] See also Hadley and Edwards (2004) for discussion of the relevance of feminist theory to discourse(s) within music therapy.

[2] For further information about postcolonial theory, see for instance The Postcolonial Studies Website.

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