

“New Colonisers” Play in Postcolonial Music Education in Mauritius



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received 2020-08-24

Revised 2020-08-31

Accepted 2020-09-21

Keywords

Postcolonial

Multicultural

Music education

Mauritius

Cultural hegemony

ABSTRACT

Indo-Mauritian group cultural hegemony has become a trend in music education in Mauritius. This fact has led to social imbalances and inequality of art education. In this situation, Mauritius needs openness and a new policy of arts education, and this must be taken into account because Mauritius has a diverse population. The problem is how the condition of postcolonial music education affects the art education policy in Mauritius. This study aims to uncover this problem. The approach taken is based on an ethnographic approach using a grounded theory strategy. In a postcolonial context and highly multicultural society, hegemonic forces are at play that promotes the Hindu majority ethnic group (termed the “new colonizers”) over all the other ethnic groups. This argument is supported on one side by an analysis of the public music education system, and on the other, by the process of teacher training and certification. An analytic autoethnographic method grounded in a transformative philosophical perspective informs this qualitative research. Results demonstrate a substantial disparity of opportunities for students and prospective music teachers in favor of the Hindu ethnic group. An intercultural perspective on music education in Mauritius is provided that could portray Mauritian nationhood within the public music education system.

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1. Introduction

Cultural hegemony is a concept that was developed by the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci during the first half of the 20th century and referred to the domination of a group of society through cultural means. Authority is exercised tacitly through the spreading of ideologies. Gramsci also explained that cultural hegemony is mediated by consent through a complex mental state that mixes approbation, apathy, resistance, and resignation. He situates education as one of the main inculcators of beliefs and practices deeply held within the culture. This concept points out that it is not strictly an individual's efforts that result in social mobility and economic success [1].

Mauritius is part of the 90% of Africa colonized by European countries by 1917 [2]. Discourses in music education in most of these countries are about how indigenous music is struggling to find their way in formal curricula, which is heavily laden with western music, established by the culturally hegemonic former colonizers [3][4][5]. On the other hand, Mauritius, although an African country, presents a different situation where music education in public schools is mostly focused on Indian music, and I argue that this situation correlates with political, religious, and economic dynamics of control within the Mauritian society.

Mauritius covers about 2000 square kilometers and is situated about 900 km off the east coast of Madagascar. Moreover, it has the islands of Rodrigues, Agalega, and Saint-Brandon as its

dependencies. It has been a sovereign island nation since 1968, and a republic since 1992. It was successively colonized by the Dutch, the French, and the British. Mauritius has no indigenous people. Instead, it is home to a heterogeneous population of diverse origins.

A look at the demographics of the country today reveals that the Mauritian society comprises of people from different parts of India, different parts of Africa, France, and China. Today, the total population is approximately 1,3 million, out of which 68% comprises Indo-Mauritians, 27% Afro-Mauritians, 3% Sino-Mauritians, and 2% Franco-Mauritians. Within the Indo-Mauritian ethnic group, there is a clear cultural divide between the Hindu Mauritians and the Muslim Mauritians. Hinduism is the dominant religion of the island, and it is the only country in Africa where this is the case. 32% are Christian, 17% Muslims and less than 1% Buddhists. Because of its geography and demographics, it is densely populated [6]. Thus, multiculturalism in Mauritius happens in virtually all spheres of life. Social cohesion has generally been well-maintained on the island, where Governmental policies have ensured the peaceful co-habitation of the different groups of the social fabric.

Mauritius grew from a low-income and agriculturally-based economy after its independence to an upper-middle economy with growing industrial, financial, and tourism sectors. Much of this economic success has been tacitly attributed to the Hindu Indo-Mauritian group. They are mostly descendants of Indians who had immigrated as indentured laborers during the British colonial period. Political power has continuously been in the hands of the Hindus. In 51 years of independence, 4 Hindu prime ministers have been in power for 49 years. Besides, diplomatic relations between Mauritius and India have been very good for at least the past 50 years. These have been used to strengthen and legitimize the upward mobility of the Hindu Mauritians in the Mauritian social hierarchy. At the bottom of the social ladder is the Afro-Mauritian community, whose ancestors are mostly the slaves brought in by the French colonizers. The term “creole malaise” has been coined to define the persisting state of poverty, social problems, and political under-representation of this community [7].

In Mauritius, education has been free for pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels since independence. A new educational reform, which started in 2017, triggered significant developments for music and dance education. In the former educational system, music was absent from primary education. In contrast, in secondary schools, it was an extra-curricular, non-examinable subject, and only available for only the first two years of lower secondary. In primary schools, music is combined with visual arts and theatre and is now taught by specially trained ‘holistic education program’ teachers. In secondary schools, music and dance are scheduled to be part of the national assessment for lower secondary as of 2020. In a context where music education has never yet before been part of the formal curriculum, these can be considered as significant steps forward. However, something from the old system remains: a student in secondary school must, from the first year, choose between the music and dance genres offered at school. These are the different options available within the ministry of education. In any given school, an average of three of these options is generally available, Indian Vocal Hindustani music, Indian Vocal Carnatic music, Indian Bharata-Natyam dance, Indian Kathak dance, Indian Kuchupudi dance, Instrumental music: the sitar, Instrumental music: the tabla, Western music. This choice of music genre seems to be a tacit agreement that has, up to now, not been contested in Mauritius. The question is, why are only Indian music genres and western music taught at school? Why is there such an enormous disparity in the representation of Indian and western music? Why does this compartmentalization of music genres exist in a country where multiculturalism is so strongly experienced?

2. Method

The research proposes a transformative philosophical perspective. This perspective emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. This perspective addresses issues of power, social justice, and discrimination. This research covers ethnic minorities and post-colonial societies. In certain situations, this perspective is associated with political action. This transformative philosophical perspective also raises contemporary social issues related to empowerment, inequality, and social oppression [8]. It is on this latter kind of transformative philosophical perspective that the present research is based. This research reveals problems in various social fields, so the method used in this study is qualitative. In particular, the issue of cultural power forces within the music education system is considered within the broader multicultural and postcolonial context of Mauritius. Such cultural disparities are put about existing power differences in socio-economic and cultural dynamics in the country.

Meanwhile, the theoretical approach to the research method proposed is the grounded theory methodology. This means that the data collected is then analyzed, and the results are used as the basis for theory development [9]. The data collected here is based primarily based on personal experience, the researcher fully being a member of the group under study, as a western music educator of the Afro-Mauritian ethnic group. Such a basis on personal experience and its connection to the culture and the social is in line with an autoethnographic research design [10]. In particular, analytical autoethnographic research involves data analysis and comparison. Within this design, the researcher identifies as a “complete member researcher.” The researcher must have the ability to become a full member of the group under study; if this is successful, the researcher has carried out an excellent strategy. Researchers must also have the ability to unite with the group being studied and become an integral part of the group. Even the researcher must endeavor to be recognized as a permanent member of the community studied [11].

Analytic reflexivity is also an essential feature of analytic autoethnography and implies that the research is aware of how he/she relates to the phenomenon under study. Because of this focus on self, the researcher gains an in-depth insider perspective and may further understand the experiences of others that form part of the same group to which he/she belongs [12]. Confidentiality is an active attempt to remove any element that may reveal the subjects’ identities [13]. The identities of the two educators whose music training and professional journeys are narrated in this paper have been kept confidential, as per the ethical stance of the researcher. Anonymity, however, is virtually impossible, because the two subjects are well known to the researcher. Data collection was fundamentally based on the personal experience of the researcher, who gathered and put together published materials. This included details about the structure of the music department in the Mauritian ministry of education. Moreover, focusing on the staffing of this department led to the detailing of the personal journeys of two educators, one teaching Indian music and the other western music, which was narrated and compared. These empirical data analyzed to support the fundamental argument of this paper, which is to point to a pattern of cultural hegemony within national music education in Mauritius, which finds echoes in the multicultural setup of postcolonial Mauritius.

3. Results and Discussion

In Mauritius, education has been free for pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels since independence. A new educational reform started in 2017, triggered significant developments for music and dance education [13]. In the former educational system, there was no music taught in primary schools. In contrast, in secondary schools, it was an extra-curricular, non-examinable subject for only the first two years of lower secondary. In primary schools, music is combined with visual arts and theatre and is now taught by specially trained ‘holistic education program’ teachers. In secondary schools, music and dance are scheduled to be part of the national assessment for lower secondary as of 2020. In a context where music education has never yet before been part of the formal curriculum, these can be considered as significant steps forward. However, something from the old system remains: a student in secondary school must, from the first year, choose between the music and dance genres offered at school. These are the different options available within the ministry of education. In any given school, an average of three of these options is generally available, Indian Vocal Hindustani music, Indian Vocal Carnatic music, Indian Bharata-Natyam dance, Indian Kathak dance, Indian Kuchupudi dance, Instrumental music: the sitar, Instrumental music: the *tabla*, Western music.

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The skewness of the staffing of the two sub-departments can be explained by understanding how training operates within the MGI and the CNMFM, and in particular, how training within these

institutions form educators or not for the needs of the national music education system. To date, the MGI provides academic programs in Indian performing arts that include dance, instrumental and vocal genres up to the doctoral level [14]. The MGI has well-established programs jointly with the University of Mauritius, which has allowed for a nationally valid certification, recognized by the public service commission of Mauritius, which regulates the employment of civil servants. For its part, the Conservatoire de Musique Francois Mitterrand (CNMFM) has set up its certification, which has, for a long time, not been validated nationally, and which tops at a level equivalent to Grade 8 ABRSM. It does not extend into tertiary education. Although professional qualifications like the ABRSM and LCM diplomas are offered, no academic training programs exist. The teachers at the Conservatoire are, for very exceptions, either performing musicians without formal qualifications or have Grade 8 or less [14][15]. Less than 10% of the tutors are on full-time employment. In the absence of any established teacher training program, even professional diplomas offered by the British examination boards are more of a personal venture. Thus, although publicly funded, the conservatoire does not professionally train musicians so that they can, in turn, serve the country in general, through free music education.

The first-ever bachelor degree program in western music has been set up in Mauritius in 2017 and is an individual initiative of the University of Mauritius and its foreign partners. Only one cohort has been enrolled so far. Tutors are scholars and performers from abroad and qualified local musicians. The future of this program is still unclear, though, the main reason being the cost of hiring foreign tutors. To make the differences in music teacher training very clear at an individual level, here is a comparison of the training journey of two educators: Educator A is an Indian music educator, and Educator B is a western music educator. She was working outside the music field at the time she started her music training with the MGI. She followed seven years of part-time course that allowed her to make a career change as a Grade B music educator. A further two-year part-time degree course upgraded her to a Grade A status. She studied two years more, still part-time, to complete her teacher training with a PGCE course. She enjoyed low public university costs throughout her training.

Educator B is a Western music educator. She studied at the conservatoire but also took private lessons to be able to complete her ABRSM Grade 8 practical and theory. This took about ten years. With no clear further opportunities in training, she spent three years in a full-time degree program outside the music field. After a year on the job market in this field, she decides to change to music. She works part-time as a music teacher at the Conservatoire. Because she wants a full-time job, she studies for an ABRSM teaching diploma, mostly by herself, and succeeds after the second attempt, which takes her two years. Employed as a Grade B music educator in the ministry, she embarks on a distance-learning bachelor's degree with the University of South Africa (UNISA). The only option available to her is a joint degree that involves musicology. There are no tutors, and the course is delivered through self-study and completing assignments. Because she has no background knowledge in musicology, it takes her seven years to finish the degree and upgrade to Grade A educator.

PGCE options are not available in Mauritius and involve another distance-learning course with the UNISA to entail more time and additional financial resources. The cost of her music training has mostly been based on the international rates of the ABRSM and UNISA, and have thus been much more than Educator A. Educator A is representative of how many other people have trained in Indian music. At the same time, Educator B is a rare example of someone who has persisted in completing her music training. The post of music educator has been a means of upward social mobility for the Indo-Mauritian community. Training has been accessible and cheap. Being a music educator in the ministry ensures a permanent and pensionable job, where the possibility of job loss is minute. It also entails a myriad of fringe benefits that ensures the systematic growth of the economic comfort of the employee.

On the other hand, similar opportunities lack Western music musicians, and indeed any musician outside of the realm of Indian music and dance. Musicians who want to pursue music as a career, whether in western music, pop music, or jazz, are primarily from the more economically deprived Afro-Mauritian ethnic group. Through a lack of training opportunities, they are being kept in the margins of socio-economic advancement. Like everywhere else, musical talent abounds in Mauritius, across ethnic groups and social statuses. From an islander perspective, the prospects of solely leading a performing career are slim due to the small size of the market and the insularity of the country. There is a long list of musicians from the Afro-Mauritian community that are successful performers, and yet

perpetually stay in a relatively low economic position because stable teaching jobs remain inaccessible to them.

This goes in line with the blooming of Indian music education, supported by Indian socio-cultural lobbies, and deep connection to India. On the other hand, western music education, as a vehicle of colonial power, has not been further promoted. Strangely, there has not been any attempt to incorporate other aspects of Mauritius' rich multicultural music heritage in education: Chinese music, Arab music, and folk Mauritius music genres are still kept out of the music education system. The multicultural diversity of Mauritius is not represented in the music education system of the country. Incidentally, the exclusive education in Indian music and Western music finds echoes within the postcolonial setup of the island. The teaching of western music is a direct cultural good brought by colonialism. Indian music education, which bloomed ceaselessly since the creation of the MGI, has followed the political, economic, and cultural shift of power from the British to the Hindu in postcolonial Mauritius. This shift has been apparent in state institutions.

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Moreover, the promotion of Indian music genres above all others reflects the hegemonic nature of such a phenomenon. In such a setup, Hindu students, on the one hand, have greater access to music education, and on the other, are encouraged to become cultural vehicles of the promotion of a memory of their traditions. In the process, within the field of music education, systemic inequality is being created. The compartmentalization of music education follows the idea of "harmonious separatism" to characterize the Mauritian society [17]. I argue that such separatism is, at its core, not "harmonious" when related to music education because it is far too focused on promoting one culture. A contrasting scenario would involve cultural diversity in music education, incorporating cultural diversity in their music education programs. A student becomes exposed to music beyond a specific culture, in societies that have become intricately interconnected and culturally complex. An intercultural education involves an "acceptance of the real dignity and worth of all groups and individuals" in society. Its objectives are to learn about other cultures, develop sensitivity to another culture's feelings, values, and attitudes, train in problem-solving within-group relations, and develop and implement social skills to function in intergroup situations [18]. Previous research revealed that people within music education have cultural barriers, explicitly and implicitly referring to racism between ethnic groups in Mauritius [19].

4. Conclusion

The cultural hegemony of the Indo-Mauritian group is being perpetuated in silent and steady ways through the music education system, and this can be seen as an old pattern about colonial times. Openings are needed, and new policies remain to be thought of that would embrace the Mauritian population in its diversity on equal terms. Global trends in arts education have been pointing towards cultural diversity in arts education for the 21st century. The separatism that persists in Mauritius does not serve a holistic social and cultural development of the country and does not serve the needs of the Mauritian student of the 21st century, called to be a global citizen in a shrinking world of expanded possibilities. Social cohesion and a stronger sense of "Mauritianism" could be built by having a more integrative system of music education.

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