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Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage: exploring the synergies in the transmission of Indigenous languages, dance and music practices in Southern Africa

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ABSTRACT

Like other forms of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), Indigenous music and dance cultures have been adversely affected by significant social, economic, technological, and ecological modifications. The resultant transformations in cultural contexts, function, modes of transmission, and performance have endangered the sustainability of several music and dance traditions and their transmission languages. Moreover, efforts to actively support the vitality of jeopardised cultural heritage are being developed and implemented in the emerging fields of applied ethnomusicology, ethnochoreology and linguistics. The area of Indigenous language safeguarding has theoretical, epistemological, and practical models comparable to safeguarding Indigenous music and dance traditions. This similarity is essential to developing interdisciplinary models, policies, and strategies to support the transmission of Indigenous choreomusical and linguistic heritage. Therefore, this article demonstrates how Indigenous music, dance, and language are integral to African cultural heritage and argues for an interdisciplinary community-based model to safeguard them as part of the same cultural ecosystem.

Introduction

Indigenous living cultural practices such as music and dance suffered substantial obstacles under colonisation because of forced cultural assimilation (including music prohibitions) that accompanied the broader oppressions of colonial occupation and imperial exploitation of Indigenous lands (Harrison 2020). Colonial administration and Christian missionaries systematically tried to eliminate Indigenous cultural heritage through censorship laws such as the Witchcraft Suppression Act of 1899, which regarded witchcraft as 'the throwing of bones, the use of charms and any other means or devices adopted in the practice of sorcery' (Statute Law of Zimbabwe, 1899, 295). The Act was used to ban the mhande dance of the Karanga people in Masvingo and Midlands provinces in Zimbabwe (Plastow (1996). Using the same ordinance, the Gule Wamkulu dance of the Chewa people in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe was also banned in the mid-1920s (Parry 1999). The colonial regimes also disconnected Indigenous children from their communities and families to Christian mission boarding schools that prohibited them from speaking their mother tongue, performing their dances and songs, playing local instruments such as mbira, and forcibly displacing them from their ancestral lands that are central to their cultural heritage. According to Harrison (2020), colonial strategies that forcibly changed Indigenous relationships to place, for example, by

relocating people to residential schools and away from lands designated for settler use, affected how they could engage place and environment, including via music and dance practices.

Moreover, external waves such as urbanisation, international tourism, mass media and the advance of worldwide information networks are also some of the factors that have affected the resilience of languages and cultural practices through promoting rapid economic, social, cultural, and environmental transformations of Indigenous communities (Grant 2010). When cultures meet each other, whether through the mass media, travel, shifting demographics or in other ways, practitioners of the minority culture may opt to shift to a more dominant one, attracted by new job opportunities or other promises of increased status in the community (Ladefoged 1992). Given the influence of modernisation, globalisation, urbanisation, and environmental degradation on cultural sustainability, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), through the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, adopted in 2003, speaks of the need to safeguard heritage from vanishing and to protect culture against change. However, the continual performance of the so-called 'traditional' practices, often called 'living heritage', naturally necessitates alterations in their outer form in response to the changing environment and socio-economic context (Bialostocka 2017, 16). Transformation is thus part of the life cycle of living heritage since it is dynamic and constantly evolving. Therefore, we argue that what needs to be safeguarded in the living heritage is its cultural value informed by the context and meaning which gives the heritage spiritual, social, aesthetic, historical, symbolic, and ecological values. Language, dance, and music can be regarded as repositories and organic inventory systems for the Indigenous living heritage, as the social-cultural values are primarily embodied in the linguistic and choreomusical interactions of the cultural practitioners and custodians. The safeguarding efforts aimed at preserving endangered Indigenous languages are the most extensive among all endeavours to protect living heritage. Scholarly interest in language preservation, like that in music, dates back decades, but 'language maintenance' as a distinct subject of sociolinguistic study only emerged in the early 1990s (Grant 2012). Since then, the discipline of sociolinguistics has been trying to set right the precarious predicament of around half of the world's 6000-odd languages (Grant 2012). Bialostocka (2017) advocates for greater protection and promotion of vernacular languages by assisting communities in developing them and sustaining their local cultural practices. To support the same idea of language revitalisation, we argue that Indigenous languages, music traditions, and dance practices are essential components of living cultural heritage which should be safeguarded as elements of the same cultural ecosystem.

Over the past few decades, conferences have been convened to discuss issues related to the status of African languages throughout Africa, not just in southern Africa (Kangira 2016). For example, the African Conference on the Integration of African Languages and Cultures into Education, held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in 2010; the Cape Town Language and Development conference, held in South Africa in 2015, and the African Languages Association of Southern Africa (ALASA) conference held at the Namibia University of Education. However, this article situates itself around the premise that Southern African countries such as Zimbabwe and South Africa have prioritised the transmission of Indigenous languages through education and research above dance and music traditions (Viriri 2003; Mthombeni and Ogunnubi 2021). Consequently, dance and music traditions as components of the living heritage have been overlooked due to the widespread assumption that Indigenous performing arts rely on the language of their practitioners to survive. Extensive theoretical bases now exist, and hundreds (if not thousands) of language-safeguarding projects from grassroots to transnational levels (Grant 2012). For example, the Allex Project and African Languages Research Institute (ALRI) at the University of Zimbabwe focus on collecting and documenting Indigenous linguistic knowledge of local communities in Zimbabwe. Its work created dictionaries and other tools for Indigenous languages used in the country.

Nevertheless, initiatives to preserve endangered languages and cultural heritage have stirred up much debate among academics, communities, and culture-bearers (Grant 2012). One of the reasons for the debate is the view that inventorying living heritage risks essentialising culture and 'fixing'

cultural practices in time (Bialostocka 2017, 17). Heritage practitioners and scholars have raised concerns that the institutionalisation of the living heritage risks 'freezing' it in time, and this kind of 'salvage ethnography' based on a 'preservationist ethos' might, in effect, hinder the development of cultural expressions (Alivizatou 2012, 14). We also argue that the implementation of the ICH Convention of 2003 and language revitalisation is rather inadequately integrated with work on dance and music as elements of the Indigenous cultural ecosystem. Although the ICH Convention of 2003 mentions language, it is only included as a vehicle of intangible cultural heritage. No specific safeguarding measures are designed specifically for language revitalisation as an element of living heritage that the Convention seeks to transmit from generation to generation.

Additionally, the cultural policy framework, for example, the National Arts, Culture and Heritage Policy of Zimbabwe (2020) and the Local Cultural Policy Framework of South Africa (2009) and other national policies for safeguarding culture and language in Southern Africa acknowledge the importance of language as a repository of living heritage, but they are implemented in a top-down approach, scantily executed, and inadequately understood, and do not integrate language and culture sustainability. To address some of the challenges associated with the implementation of the ICH Convention of 2003 and national cultural policies in Southern African countries, we propose that an indigenous humanistic approach, based on the traits of ubuntu/unhu (social relations, respect for humanity and moral ethics), could provide a framework for developing a community-based approach to cultural vitality grounded on the social context of performance, usage of language, inclusive participation, indigenous protocol, social values, moral ethics, respect for humanity and community social responsibility. Such an approach would create a platform for linking Indigenous language revitalisation to dance and music safeguarding as elements of the same cultural ecosystem in a culturally appropriate, sensitive, and specific way.

Music ecosystems: a conceptual framework

The concept of 'cultural ecology' has been used in anthropology since the 1950s. It refers to the study of human adaptations to physical and social environments. The term ecology in ethnomusicology is more recent and has brought new terms such as music sustainability and ecosystems. Music sustainability refers to the conditions which sustain musical knowledge, sounds, practices, styles, and expressions as well as cultures closely interlaced with them over time (Titon 2009; Schippers and Bendrups 2015). At the same time, music ecosystems are the conditions that enable music to thrive in communities. From an indigenous perspective, the music ecosystem involves the interaction of musical and non-musical elements (including language), living and non-living beings (living-dead or ancestral spirits in the performance of musical arts as cultural heritage for community sustainability (Gwerevende 2022). While the sustainability of Indigenous music ecosystems has been of interest to scholars since the early development of music anthropology and ethnomusicology over the past century, ethnomusicologist Jeff Todd Titon first proposed a detailed ecological perspective on music and sustainability (Titon 2009). He submitted the analogy that music traditions behaved as ecosystems and expanded the dominant paradigm from the twentieth-century ecology of the ecosystem. His work may not be the first linking of ecology with music research, but after his work, the idea that the music field can be thought about in ecological terms became more widespread.

According to Titon (2009), a musical ecosystem involves individuals and groups interacting around a particular genre or style of music. The music ecosystem's inputs, processes and outputs are primarily contained in the language of the people to whom it belongs. Therefore, to preserve the meaning of choreomusical practices and ensure the sustainability of the cultural ecosystem, the promotion and development of Indigenous languages that 'created' the values, experiences and principles need to be considered as crucial measures in safeguarding the living cultural heritage. Corresponding to cultural and linguistic diversity, the types of Indigenous music traditions are varied and extensive in style, ranging from traditional practices to mixtures of Indigenous musical

knowledge, practices, and ideas with almost numerous kinds of popular music and ever-expanding new styles of Indigenous music traditions. Many of these music cultures are expressed in local languages and performed together with other arts like drama, poetry, and dance in specific socio-cultural contexts. A music ecosystem of any kind includes 'both physical and cultural factors of the musical environment such as ideas about music, sound and sound-producing instruments, recording studios, media, venues, musical education and transmission, and the economics of music – indeed music as cultural production and a cultural domain – which relate to the health of musical individuals, populations, and communities' (Titon 2009, 120). This ecological approach to music focuses on the elements, patterns, and relationships within the overall system, showing how ecosystem elements interconnect. Considering the breadth and width of Indigenous music ecosystems, African music sustainability should focus on sustaining Indigenous performing arts (dance, music, drama) and their associated languages, which are faced with severe ecological and social challenges caused by imperialism, colonialism, globalisation, and climate change.

The linguistic foundation of dance and music: a cross-cultural perspective

There are several Indigenous music and dance styles and ways of conceptualising them in local languages. In many Indigenous African communities, there are no generic terms for dance and music but specific local terms for different social events involving dance and music performance. According to Gwerevende (2020) and Rutsate (2011), the local terms used, such as mutambo in Shona and mitshino in Tshivenḓa, refer to the broader view of dance and music that incorporates the context, singing, invocative drumming, bodily movements, ritual cues, ululations, handclapping, and handheld objects that enhance the cultural performance. This way of contextualising Indigenous cultural practices gives them a broader scope than the English terms music and dance, which explains why no Indigenous word is equivalent to the English concept of music or dance. The non-existence of Indigenous terms comparable to the Eurocentric conceptualisation of dance and music has also been noted by Dave Dargie, who argues that 'There are simply no words in use in the Lumko district (outside of church and school) of the Xhosa to express abstract concepts such as music, melody, note and rhythm' (Dargie 1988, 62). The terms noted by Dargie among the Xhosa people were all related to something a person does when performing music, such as *ukuhlabela*, which means to lead a song. The Indigenous African dance and music genres are defined by the social functions they serve and the social context in which they are performed, such as those provided in the Table 1 below.

As shown in Table 1, it should be noted that the cultural value and meaning of Indigenous traditions in Southern Africa are carried by their local names, such as muchongoyo of the Ndau people traditionally performed for war preparation and celebration, and Maskandi of the Zulu people performed for wedding celebrations and courtships. Moreover, the cultural value of heritage (knowledge, skills, meaning) that should be safeguarded is stored in the language in which a particular expression has been created and still functions. As Wa Thiong'o (1986) argues,

Table 1. Indigenous choreomusical genres and their social functions.

Ethnicity	Country	Dance/music genre	Language	Purpose
Karanga	Zimbabwe	Mhande	Shona	Rainmaking ceremony
Xhosa	South Africa	Ukwaluka	Xhosa	Boys' initiation ceremony
Ndau	Mozambique & Zimbabwe	Muchongoyo	Ndau	War preparation and celebration
Bakalanga	Botswana & Zimbabwe	Hosana/Wosana	Kalanga	Rainmaking ceremony
Zulu	South Africa	Maskandi	isiZulu	Wedding celebrations and courtship
Venda	South Africa & Zimbabwe	Tshigombela	Tshivenda	Girls' initiation ceremony
Xhosa	South Africa	Ukwaluka	Xhosa	Boy's initiation ceremony
Bakalanga	Botswana & Zimbabwe	Hosana/Wosana	Kalanga	Rainmaking ceremony
Vatsonga	South Africa	Nkelekele	Xitsonga	Rainmaking ceremony
Chewa	Malawi, Zambia & Zimbabwe	Gule Wamkulu	Chichewa	Initiation ceremony

language is a very important vehicle for understanding culture and worldview such that Africanist scholars conversant with African languages and who grew up in African cultures must lead the decolonisation of the mind crusade.

The Indigenous conceptions of the events in which choreomusical heritage is performed are not likely without a specific Indigenous vocabulary. The names of the social events are determined by the practitioners' language, purpose of the event, participation, and cultural context. For instance, among the Vatsonga people in South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe, dance and music are components of *nkelekele* (rainmaking ceremony). According to Babane and Chauke (2015), *nkelekele* has always been practised among Vatsonga to ask for rain and manage drought. Music and dance are Eurocentric abstract concepts, whereas *nkelekele* is a social event performed by Vatsonga. Another problem with the terms 'music' and 'dance' is that they refer to products rather than a processes (Rice 2014). Such terms do not capture the holistic nature of the social events in which performing arts are performed, the interactions between performers (dancers, drummers, singers and the active audiences) and the significance they attach to these events. Postcolonial Africa is saddled with tribalised linguistic and cultural information, perpetuating certain exaggerated and false assumptions about Africans embedded in the colonial archive (Wa Thiong'o 1986; Mudimbe 1994). Writing about the *uhadi* music tradition from the Ngqoko district of South Africa, Dave Dargie explains: 'Music is an abstraction: (whereas) a song is something performed by people' (Dargie 1986, 10). Indigenous African choreomusical languages are culturally embedded and socially constructed through their social functions enacted through context-based performance. Mary Douglas, one of the leading Africanist anthropologists of the twentieth century, argued that there are many instances where the English and French languages do not have the vocabulary that appropriately describes some African cultural practices (Douglas 1967). This observation may help explain why most languages in several African societies have no specific local terms equivalent to music or dance.

Indigenous African dance and music lexical tone languages rely on the tonal contour of words to indicate meaning, purpose, and context. To most Indigenous communities in Southern Africa, the concepts of music and dance, which Westerners may describe as organised sound (music) and movement (dance), are redundant abstractions, as they are extensions of language history. The idea of music without language is not known, such that instruments are described as singing parts, such as the *hlabela* (leader) or *lendela* (follower), rather than playing notes (Chapman 2007, 53). Even drum ensembles from West Africa, such as those described by Stone (2005, 96), base their patterns around vocalisations: 'Words underlie rhythmic patterns'. Dargie (1988, 62) describes the insepar-able integration of words, movement and instrumental performance as a gestalt, a singularly perceived whole. It is important to note that the choreomusical vocabulary in Indigenous African cultures does not indicate a lack of aesthetic values, abstraction, or ability to abstract; instead, it shows the degree of emphasis on social participation, meaning and context of the performance of indigenous African musical traditions. Therefore, the metalanguage of dance and music in most Indigenous communities, such as the Shona, Ndau, Chewa, Venda, Xhosa, Karanga and Zulu, is connected to the social function and cultural contexts. Hence, a socially and culturally embedded metalanguage may be beneficial in describing Indigenous choreomusical processes and activities related to participation and social interaction in performance.

Language plays a significant role in the performance and transmission of Indigenous musical heritage because the songs, ululations and other vocal expressions are performed in the language of the practitioners. Dance as an aspect of musical heritage is also performed choreographically and linguistically through concepts and terms in the Indigenous vocabulary. In most Indigenous communities in Southern Africa, for example, the Venda people in South Africa and Zimbabwe, the description of the community as Venda refers to the language and culture of the Venda people. Tshivenḓa refers to the totality of the Venda culture made up of interconnected music, dance, language, symbols, rituals, beliefs, and myths, which constitute enacted systems for making mean-ing and sense of the way of life of the Venda people (Gwerevende 2020). Thanasoulas (2001)

suggests that language does not exist apart from culture, from the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determine our lives. Music and dance are components of Indigenous people's living heritage, and language is critical to the cultural past, present and future and a guide to social reality. Stern (2009) views culture through a more interactive design, stating that it is a response to need, and believes that what constitutes culture is its response to three sets of needs: the basic needs of the individual, the instrumental needs of the society, and the symbolic and integrative needs of both the individual and the community. Music and dance, as elements of Indigenous cultural ecosystems, are communicated or transmitted orally in the language of the culture bearers. According to Patterson (2015, 4), oral culture refers to what is spoken and sung, and aural culture refers to what is heard. Indigenous dance and music traditions use performative, aural and oral transmission methods. These methods are essential for effectively transmitting choreo-musical heritage and are almost always simultaneously present in Indigenous communities. Therefore, the sustainability of Indigenous musical ecosystems in Southern Africa is impossible without considering the role of local languages as a form of expression of cultural heritage and the means of its performance.

Cultural heritage: language as a vehicle and repository

The continuing losses of cultural diversity around the world remain problematic for the safe-guarding of living cultural heritage. In the international cultural policy framework, for example, ICH Convention of 2003, ethnomusicology and ethnochoreology, Indigenous dance and music traditions have been pursued separately from the languages of their practitioners, a situation which seems perplexing when we consider the significance of indigenous knowledge management systems in the maintenance of biocultural diversity in many areas now 'protected' for nature (Rotherham and Bridgewater 2019). To address these broad issues, fundamental to future cultural sustainability, this article considered cultural diversity as a framework which stresses the importance of language as the repository of Indigenous choreomusical knowledge, practice, and heritage. According to the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity of 2001 Cultural diversity is stated 'as necessary for humanity as biodiversity is for nature' (Article 1). Article 3 posits that this principle ought to be comprehended within the context of economic expansion, serving as a vehicle for attaining a more gratifying intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual livelihood. It also implies a commitment to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, particularly those of Indigenous Peoples (Article 4). This diversity is embodied in the plurality and uniqueness of the cultural identities of the communities making up humanity. Moreover, it infers a commitment to funda-mental freedoms and human rights, particularly the rights of minority communities and Indigenous peoples.

Cultural diversity is expressed by language, dance, and music traditions as cultural heritage components. While Indigenous communities adapt to socio-economic changes, their local lan-guages help them to encode, convey and maintain the knowledge of their cultural ecosystems, which involves diverse performing arts. These arts are shaped by and adapted to the socio-ecological environment and serve as a transmitter of a specific reality (Maffi 2005, 605). Consequently, when speaking about cultural diversity, we need to recognise that it is not only the religious, political, environmental, and social factors that shape it, but it is also influenced and inhabited by the linguistic ecology. It can be further argued that since Indigenous knowledge of cultural ecosystems is implicit in the languages of their inhabitants, the natural environment can also be affected indirectly by the loss of a language (Maffi 2005, 601–603). Maffi further argues that language transmits concepts that cannot be expressed in a different 'code system' and thus represents a repository of the cultural memory of people (Maffi 2005). Dance or music as living culture exists through memory. Therefore, the preservation of linguistic diversity is directly con-nected to the sustainability of communities and Indigenous choreomusical practices (Maffi 2007; Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 2010).

Language is the instrument of conceptualisation and categorisation of living cultural heritage and, in general, the method of intellectual comprehension of reality, reflecting the nature of cultural performances, contexts and meaning of indigenous performing arts in African communities. It is a natural substrate of cultural heritage, a means of fixing ethnic perception of the world and optimising intercultural interaction and a form of ICH alongside music and dance traditions. However, article 2 (1) of the 2003 UNESCO Convention, which defines ICH for safeguarding, does not explicitly mention 'language' as a cultural heritage. Nevertheless, it states that cultural heritage is transmitted from generation to generation and constantly re-created. Languages are also transmitted from generation to generation, re-created continuously, presuppose knowledge and skills, and speech acts can be described in terms of linguistic practices and expressions (Smeets 2004). The ICH Convention mention language as a vehicle for oral traditions and cultural expressions (UNESCO 2003, 2). Although the ICH Convention does not explicitly refer to the language as a form of living cultural heritage, we argue that Indigenous languages represent people's living cultural heritage as they display all the traits to be regarded as ICH. For example, they are transmitted from one generation to another; constantly recreated; speech can be treated as linguistic practice and expressions; language bestows identity upon people in the same way social practices, rituals, or indigenous knowledge do (Smeets 2004).

Furthermore, UNESCO inscribed various languages on its lists of intangible cultural heritage. The examples include the Language, dance, and music of the Garifuna, inscribed in 2008 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity after being nominated by Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua (UNESCO 2008). In 2009 UNESCO also recognised as a best safeguarding practice a multinational initiative submitted by Bolivia, Chile, and Peru, titled 'Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage of Aymara communities in Bolivia, Chile and Peru'. (UNESCO 2009). The initiative targets all domains of ICH, including language and presents as one of its main areas: 'strengthening language as a vehicle for transmission of the intangible cultural heritage through formal and non-formal education' (UNESCO 2009). What is interesting about this project is that it is interdisciplinary as it involves safeguarding measures to ensure the viability of oral expressions, language, dance, music, and traditional knowledge. Another example is China's nomination of the Hezhen Yimakan storytelling tradition aimed at revitalising the Hezhen language. The nomination was approved by UNESCO when it inscribed this storytelling tradition in 2011. At present, only the elders can speak their native language, while most adults and teenagers have lost their mother tongue and have increasingly become strangers to the legacy of their ancestors (UNESCO 2011). In this case, the Hezhen language was safeguarded as an essential repository for living cultural heritage and a vehicle for expressing and transmitting the Yimakan tradition, which was on the verge of disappearance. Although UNESCO has recognised numerous language repositories as cultural heritage, language itself is not explicitly listed as an Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) domain in Article 2.2 of the Convention. Nonetheless, we contend that language should be considered a form of living cultural heritage.

Indigenous communities require support from both local and national authorities, and potentially international intervention, to safeguard languages as a means of preserving their cultural heritage. The specialised lexicon in use among practitioners, especially in Indigenous knowledge, handicrafts and performing arts, may need to be collected to preserve the knowledge concerned and promote its transmission. Music dictionaries used in schools, colleges and universities in most African countries are skewed towards Western music or only contain terms related to Western music. For endangered Indigenous languages, dictionaries are essential resources that cover understandings outside the meaning of words and provide insights into language structure and indigenous cultural knowledge. Hawaiian linguist Candace Galla argues, 'Dictionary-making is one of many initiatives that can create capacity in Indigenous communities to document and (re)access language again to reclaim and revitalise knowledge and identity' (Galla 2020). Previously, some work has been done in Southern Africa to collect and explain the vocabulary of regional musical

forms, instruments, and practices (Smit 1992). For instance, in 2000, Reino Ottermann published a dictionary of music titled '*Suid-Afrikaanse Musiekwoordeboek/South African Music Dictionary*'.

In the introduction, the dictionary says, it 'concentrates on terms from Western music culture. A small number of terms used in the Indigenous African musics in South Africa, which pupils and students will commonly encounter, have nevertheless been added' (Ottermann 2000, 6). This statement reveals a patronising (if not downright offensive) attitude (King and Steyn 2003). The dictionary assumes that twenty-first-century South African music researchers, teachers and students are supposed only to know about 'Western music culture' plus a token smattering of Indigenous African musical terms thrown in for good measure – this in a hard-won pluralistic and democratic society (King and Steyn 2003). Besides this dictionary being inclined towards Western music, there is no comprehensive book covering Indigenous music terms in local languages such as Zulu, Xhosa, Venda, Swati, and Tswana. Since oral tradition predominates in most African communities, preserving it in written and digital form for future generations is expedient and essential to prevent cultural extinction (Kamtchueng 2019). Lexicologies have been employed in Cameroon to protect cultural heritage. Kamtchueng further argues that literary works of Anglophone Cameroonian authors have made it possible to highlight the various facets of this cultural heritage that are perceived by including lexis that falls under the categories of traditional events and songs; traditional products and titles; foods, local dishes, and drinks; socialisation, relations, and acquaintances.

Mother language is an essential carrier of indigenous knowledge, norms and values, often used in performing rituals or ceremonies, practising and transmitting living cultural heritage, especially in oral cultures. Using their mother language, Indigenous practitioners of specific traditions often use highly specialised sets of lexicons, concepts, terms and expressions, which reveal an intrinsic relationship between language and the ICH. Therefore, Indigenous performing arts are expressed in specific language registers, which must be safeguarded together with the traditions. For example, epics often abound with aspects and expressions that need study and special attention in transmission processes. Documentation may also be required for the transmission of the expressions in question. In exceptional cases, such as the Mhande dance and music of the Zezuru people in Zimbabwe, proclaimed a masterpiece by UNESCO in 2008, the language used in the representations is fundamentally different from the everyday language of the bearers of the tradition, which is Shona. The determination of language planning actions to preserve an endangered indigenous language should not only depend on the intangible cultural heritage to be protected. Those affected by the language extinction should also decide whether the conservation efforts should target a small group or include wider groups.

The extinction of specialised lexicons means a loss of important local knowledge systems. Chichewa or Chinyanja language carries sacred and secret knowledge connected to the Gule Wamkulu tradition (also known as Vilombo or Zilombo, meaning the world of beasts), which is a ritual performed by members of the Nyau secret society in several countries in Southern Africa. Chichewa is a language of the Bantu family that is widely spoken in parts of Central, East, and Southern Africa, particularly in Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. To promote the language, the Government of Malawi designated Chichewa the national language in 1968 and established a Chichewa Board, which oversaw its safeguarding and coordinated research into grammar, usage, linguistic structures, spelling, songs, folklore, idioms, and other aspects. Gule Wamkulu, literally 'the big dance' or 'the dance of the elder', is a performance of the Nyau secret society that is central to the education of male youth and in ritual ceremonies (Kambalu 2016). The performance of Gule Wamkulu is associated with certain rules. For instance, the performers are not allowed to disclose the proceedings of the initiation ceremony to the public. The dancers – initiated Nyau men – wear masks and costumes made of banana leaves. This attire is meant to hide the dancer's identity.

UNESCO declared the Gule Wamkulu an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2005 and 'is now part of our world heritage since 2005, one of UNESCO's 90 Masterpieces of the Oral and

Intangible Heritage of Humanity' (Boucher 2012, 257). The nomination forms for the tradition were written in English rather than in Chichewa. Although the documentation was done in Chewa, the interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated into English. The translation resulted in the loss of specialised lexicons that carries Nyau secrets and sacred knowledge. The loss of knowledge derives from the attempts to translate Gule Wamkulu terms, concepts, techniques, and specialised lexicons from Chewa to English directly without appreciating the deeper meaning of the symbolism involved in the performance of the secret ceremony. Language is the most important conveyor of meaning and culture, elements which are often lost in translation, especially when such translation is across languages from distant cultural zones (Chirikure 2017). Therefore, translating the Chewa language into English or French as the official language of UNESCO, when writing about Gule Wamkulu for documentation and safeguarding distorted the meaning of local words and traditions. The transmission of Indigenous knowledge among the Chewa is done orally and communally through participation and observation of the performances in cultural contexts.

Policy framework for safeguarding cultural heritage in Southern Africa

Numerous national and international cultural and indigenous language conventions form the cultural policy framework for safeguarding linguistic and choreomusical heritage in Southern Africa. The cultural policies were designed in line with the regional and international agreements that originated from the need to protect choreomusical practices and linguistic expressions as forms of ICH, thereby promoting cultural and linguistic diversity across national signatories to the conventions (UNESCO 2003). The most prominent documents related to ICH include the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples UNDRIP (2007). The UNDRIP asserts that the right of Indigenous peoples to their languages is inherent, an intangible possession of the peoples who speak it (UNDRIP 2013). The advancements in international human rights rules are vital in preventing further linguistic and cultural heritage loss. What needs to be understood is that the UNDRIP embraces numerous international human rights instruments, making it more than just aspirational (UNDRIP 2013). However, the UNDRIP expands on the already-existing human rights of Indigenous peoples rather than establishing new ones.

The UNESCO Convention of 2003 articulates the urgent need for measures to ensure the viability of ICH worldwide, including languages as oral expressions and performing arts, including dance and music. The Convention's actions for safeguarding ICH include identifying cultural expressions that need support and activities relating to documentation, research, protection, promotion, transmission, and revitalisation. It is the first binding multidimensional Convention for safeguarding ICH that reinforces existing international instruments, resolutions and recommendations concerning cultural heritage. The ICH Convention serves as a framework for developing national policies that reflect current global models and strategies for safeguarding ICH. It has been created to promote the safeguarding of ICH, ensure better visibility of ICH, raise awareness of its importance, and encourage a dialogue respecting cultural diversity. Between 2009 and 2017, the Government of Flanders supported several Sub-Saharan African countries with a grant to support the implementation of the 2003 Convention. The grant resulted in a series of pilot projects to safeguard ICH at the grassroots level in several African countries, such as Botswana, Malawi, South Africa, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. One of the projects is titled 'Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in basic education in Namibia and Zimbabwe' (2022–2024). The project focused on capacity building to promote the transmission of living cultural heritage in schools through teaching minority indigenous languages, performing arts and indigenous knowledge systems, which were not part of the education curriculum in most Southern African countries.

The UNDRIP adopted by the General Assembly in 2007, unlike the ICH Convention, explicitly mentions languages in article 13. It says, 'Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalise, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies,

writing systems and kinds of literature, and to designate and retain their names for communities, places, and persons' (UN 2007). In addition to the specific references to Indigenous languages, the UNDRIP considers a plethora of other rights relevant to this issue, including the right of Indigenous peoples to practise, safeguard and revitalise their cultural traditions (art. 11); to teach their cultural heritage and religious practices (art. 12), and to preserve their cultural expressions (art. 31). The UNDRIP also captures several ICH elements connected to indigenous languages, such as dance, musical arts, and religious rituals. In addition, southern African countries such as Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe ratified the UNDRIP to show their commitment towards promoting indigenous rights and interests, rights to cultural, religious, spiritual, and linguistic identity, and self-determination.

The national constitutions have substantially influenced the creation and implementation of cultural heritage policies for safeguarding cultural heritage in South Africa and Zimbabwe. One on hand, the Zimbabwean Constitution under Article 16 says, 'it is the obligation of the State and all its institutions and agencies and indeed all Zimbabwean citizens to preserve and protect Zimbabwe's Cultural Heritage while at the same time respecting the dignity of traditional institutions' (Government of Zimbabwe 2013). The National Arts, Culture and Heritage Policy (2020), designed in line with the national constitution, aims to create a progressive, cohesive, and culturally vibrant society where cultural heritage and various artistic expressions, performing arts and indigenous languages celebrate the nation's diverse heritage. On the other hand, the South African Constitution, under the language clause supported by the Bill of Rights, recognises language as a fundamental human right: 'Everyone has the right to use the language and participate in the cultural life of their choice, but no one exercising these rights may do so in a manner inconsistent with any provision of the Bill of Rights' (section 30). Apart from the constitution, the national policy on living cultural heritage emphasises the importance of recognising indigenous languages as they are central in the effort of heritage management in South Africa (Department of Arts & Culture 2009, 36). The cultural policy deals with cultural traditions, customs, religion, identity, language, crafts, and art forms, including music, dance, creative writing, theatre, photography, and film as the sum of the results of human endeavour. The same goal is shared in South Africa's Language policy which is seen as a serious indictment of the government's commitment in its Policy Statement to meet its goals to 'ensure redress for the previously marginalised official indigenous languages' (Department of Arts & Culture 2003). The South African and Zimbabwean cultural policies also advocate transmitting living heritage from generation to generation. They also encompass several ways to document and revitalise the harmonious combination of arts, language, and cultural heritage as catalysts for sustainable development.

Although several national and international policies are relevant for protecting Indigenous linguistic and choreomusical heritage in Southern African countries, mainly South Africa and Zimbabwe, implementing these policy instruments is associated with loopholes that cause adverse implications, such as heightened disagreement among cultural practitioners about the sustainable future trajectory of living cultural heritage. The top-down approach to implementing these policies promotes the visibility of cultural heritage and indigenous languages from specific ethnic groups. For example, the African Union (AU) agreed that 'language is at the heart of a people's culture' (OAU 1986) and that social and economic development can be accelerated using indigenous African languages. African Union declared that each African state should promote the use and development of every language within its borders. However, it overlooks the reality that some indigenous African languages suppress and dominate other indigenous languages of Africa (Nhongo 2013). A case in point is that of Shona and Ndebele in Zimbabwe, which dominate other languages and are now being labelled as minority. From a critical stance, language policy can be construed as political, ethnic, and cultural domination (Wright 2004). In essence, language is power, and control over people's language practices is a significant expression of political and cultural hegemony. Such musical and linguistic heritage preservation approaches risk being undermined by a complex set of issues, for example, a lack of grassroots understanding, resources,

control, and ownership that typically characterises approaches developed and implemented at the community level (Grant 2013). For this reason, the strategies for cultural heritage preservation, in some cases, are associated with systematic challenges to the very choreomusical traditions and indigenous languages they intend to promote and protect.

Ubuntu/unhu-based transmission living cultural heritage

The centrality of communities, groups and individuals is highly emphasised in the ICH Convention of 2003 and other policies discussed previously. According to the Convention, communities, in particular, Indigenous communities, play an essential role in the production, safeguarding, maintenance and re-creation of ICH (Preamble); only communities can recognise particular practices, representations, expressions, knowledge or skills as their ICH (Article 2.1) and any cultural sustainability initiative should 'involve the communities concerned in safeguarding activities and management of their ICH' (Article 15). To bring communities to the centre of cultural sustainability, we proposed a humanistic approach based on the philosophy of ubuntu/unhu that could help design and implement approaches grounded on cultural context, inclusive participation, social values, moral ethics, respect of community members and their cultural values and social responsibility. *Ubuntu/unhu* can be described as the capacity in African culture to express dignity, compassion, humanity, reciprocity, inclusivity, respect, and mutuality in the interests of maintaining communities with justice and mutual caring (Nussbaum 2003; Gwerevende 2020). It is an epistemological and ethical concept shared by many ethnic communities in Southern Africa. Ubuntu/unhu is centred on social relations, group solidarity, interconnectedness, and moral values central to the survival of Indigenous African communities and the sustainability of their cultural heritage as living traditions.

Ubuntu/unhu can play an essential role in safeguarding cultural heritage, as it influences the internal social activities that involve the performance of dance, music, and the usage of Indigenous languages. The knowledge about ubuntu/unhu and its inclusion in cultural sustainability could be a recipe for a holistic and sustainable transmission of dance, music, and indigenous languages as features of the same cultural ecosystem. We considered an ubuntu/unhu grounded approach for safeguarding choreomusical and linguistic heritage in and outside communities as a decolonising strategy that supports contextual and holistic revitalisation and documentation of cultural heritage. In addition, ubuntu/unhu can also help reassert or reaffirm "Indigenous sovereignty whereby 'Indigenous people reclaim their past, present, and future (George et al. 2020, 3). By re-establishing Indigenous sovereignty, the humanistic model based on ubuntu/unhu is seeking to establish indigenous terms and conditions for the safeguarding of language, dance, and music as elements of living cultural heritage based on respect, trust, and genuine reciprocity.

Given the importance of language as a carrier of culture, it is essential to advocate for its documentation and revitalisation (i.e. encouraging the continued use of the language) in the contexts where it is used, such as community rituals, music and dance performances. To achieve fluency in Indigenous languages and proficiency in musical arts performance, researchers, learners, and teachers need to rely on methods that are based on ubuntu/unhu, such as close relationships with community elders, speakers, dancers, and musicians and participating in cultural events in which the music and dance are performed, and the language is spoken. These community-based modes of transmission promote a thorough understanding of how indigenous music practices, dances and languages are intertwined. Through the ubuntu/unhu-based cultural events, dance, music, and language are transmitted in contextualised cultural contexts and critical social and intergenerational interactions. Leuthold (1998, 93) claims that 'for obvious reasons, Indigenous dance songs can only survive in the fullest sense when native languages survive'. These songs, in most cases, are inseparable from dance, and they depend on the language for the composition of new lyrics and meanings connected to the performance context and beyond word-for-word translations facilitated by dictionaries. In addition, context-based music education incorporates

musical content into the classroom and includes non-musical elements such as dance, visual arts, language, socio-cultural values, and the environment. In addition, music is an essential method for revitalising Indigenous languages and dance. It should occupy centre stage in safeguarding endangered languages and dance traditions to survive in the fullest sense.

Safeguarding ensures the long-term viability of intangible heritage within communities and groups. It is defined in the Convention as 'measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the living cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalisation of the various aspects of such heritage' (UNESCO 2003). Language, dance, and music interact constantly, and music competence is not enough for learners to be competent in that music without proficiency in the language of the music and the dance that is associated with the music. A community performer, for example, in the Venda culture, is a multi-skilled performer who can dance, play ngoma (drums) and sing in the Tshivenda language in a single performance, such as tshigombela. The development and implementation of national cultural policies should reflect the interdependence of dance, music, and indigenous languages. The methods of language transmission also involve musical expressions such as songs, ululations, yodelling, poetry, and vocables that promote incorporating cultural knowledge into the education system and other strategies for language safeguarding. Vocables, are sounds that are sung, spoken or written, but have no semantic meaning (Chambers 1980). Vocables or syllables are vocal expressions without semantic content, which appear as an element of almost every style of Indigenous singing in several Southern African communities. In addition, many educators and language policymakers need to understand that knowledge of a specific language, such as grammatical competence, must be complemented by culture-specific expressions, such as dance, music, and poetry, to enhance cultural competence through language education and safeguarding strategies.

The collaboration in transmitting dances, music practices and languages promote the coordination of efforts to safeguard cultural heritage from applied ethnomusicology, ethnochoreology and linguistics. Music or dance education is not a matter of educators explaining to the learners how it is; it is essential to let learners learn the language of the music tradition and make informed participant observations, such as ethnographers would do during fieldwork. By recognising first-hand experience and the cultural heritage language, learners or researchers can see and understand a specific cultural performance beyond choreomusical terms and concepts. They can also understand and realise the underlying cultural processes and linguistic techniques that cultural practitioners of a particular music and dance tradition utilise to produce, perform, and interpret choreomusical experiences, including unspecified assumptions, collective cultural knowledge realised through ubuntu/unhu, and meanings transmitted orally. Finally, an ubuntu/unhu-based approach to transmitting cultural heritage emphasises the integrated implementation of music, dance, and language sustainability from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Conclusion

This article argues that the relationship between indigenous dance, music and languages may create collaborative platforms, policies, and initiatives for safeguarding linguistic and choreomusical heritage as forms of living cultures. While the ICH Convention of 2005 is essential for safeguarding indigenous living cultural heritage, promoting cultural rights and linguistic diversity in Southern African countries, there are several limitations owing to, among other factors, a failure to link performing arts and language as elements of the same cultural ecosystem and a lack of understanding of the embedded cultural context and philosophical underpinnings. Furthermore, the ICH Convention mentions language in a restrictive way in the first of the domains listed: 'oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage' (Article 2.2). This wording presents a compromise between the views of countries that do not want to acknowledge language as a domain of living cultural heritage and countries that want languages to be

included as a form of ICH listed in article 2.2. These problems, among others, present a pushback from the strong relationship between indigenous language, performing arts and cultural identity characterising African traditions, as expressed in the Cultural Diversity Declaration.

This article has advocated for the reconstruction of the cultural ecosystem by proposing a community-based model that links Indigenous language revitalisation work and safeguarding music and dance practices in Southern Africa. We argued that using local terms and languages when writing about Indigenous performing arts for documentation and transmission is one way of achieving holistic transmission of Indigenous living heritage. More importantly, for community-based safeguarding approaches to be practical, local communities must play a role in designing the revitalisation strategies and compiling ICH nomination forms for UNESCO inscription. Without this, the views of cultural policymakers, experts and Indigenous communities may remain worlds apart as far as the safeguarding of dance, music, and languages as components of the same cultural ecosystem is concerned. Applied ethnomusicologists, ethnochoreologists and linguists should collaborate with cultural practitioners to develop sustainable and culturally sensitive models for Indigenous communities to safeguard their culture and improve their livelihoods and the viability of their cultural heritage. Such models may prove a thoughtful and decolonial step towards indigenising cultural sustainability and helping local communities preserve their choreomusical and linguistic heritage for sustainable development.

Disclosure statement

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