

Interview with Prof. Sylvia Antonia Nannyonga-Tamusuza
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Brief about Sylvia:

Prof. Sylvia Antonia Nannyonga-Tamusuza is Associate Professor of Music and Head of Performing Arts and Film Department. She is the Coordinator of Ethnomusicology in Uganda Projects and the founder and Curator of the Makerere University Klaus Wachsmann Audio-visual Archive.

The interview was held immediately after she has presented her lecture “Music, an agent of negotiation”. Due to the interesting discussion which was held after Sylvia’s lecture we had different ideas and inspirations for topics to discuss in the interview in spite of the fact that we prepared our questions before listening to her. In the beginning of the interview that we more of had an informal discussion with two students who were interested to know more and were passionate to learn.

1. The interviewer: When did you first have interest in music?

Sylvia: I started having interest when I was about eight years old, but I never had the opportunity to join the choir because I didn't have shoes so I was not allowed to join it at the time. When I joined the secondary which contain 6 years. School music activities was a compulsory activity so the whole school had to do it. not studying music but to join the choir and performing, so I was part of the choir just because it is compulsory and by the time I also had shoes because it was also compulsory to have shoes in my middle school as well. so then the teacher discovered that I had a skill more just than performing traditional dancing and participating in the activities and sing so when he discovered that I had this very strong skill

2. The interviewer: Do you mean a skill in singing or dancing?

Sylvia: “I had a skill in both singing and dancing so my teacher actually dragged me into the music class so I can study music as a subject and that was when I was about fifteen years old so I could study music and music theory as well as many music and dances from different cultures, we have 56 different ethnic groups so by the time I learnt about 50 different dances and songs and I finished school and joined the college but in the process when I was about ten years I dropped out of school. Because we had to pay to go to school and my father said to me that he didn't have money to waste on me because I am a girl because the girl supposed to stay in the kitchen and to make good food you have to go to school so there was a nun in a missionary came to our village and she knew I had to drop out of school so she took me back to school and she paid for my education, until I was 12 years old, so after that I went to a government school and I got a scholarship for my PhD.”

3. The interviewer: what was your major in university?

Sylvia:” I studied music education and economics that was my first degree and my second degree I studied and a branch called ethnomusicology my third degree also music and ethnomusicology, ethnomusicology is about understanding people to understand music and understand music to understand people for example to be able

to critique the see relationship between community by the music like what i had presented in my lecture.”

4. The interviewer: you are a composer as well right?

Sylvia: “No my husband is a composer.”

5. The interviewer: where did you study in college?

Sylvia:” My bachelor and also my master degree was in Uganda and my third degree and a PhD in the US”.

6. The interviewer: Did you have a scholarship?

Sylvia:” yes.”

7. The interviewer: If you had the opportunity to choose where to study the PhD wherever you want, would you still choose the US or another country?

Sylvia: “actually I had given a scholarship in Germany to do the same PhD but I choose USA because they speak English and in Germany I had to learn the language that would be difficult in that level”.

8. The interviewer: Did your education in the US have influenced your perspectives and how you perceive things you had experienced and happened with you?

Sylvia:” I think my entire life the whole package is playing a role I wouldn't say because of the us I am thinking differently when my father abandoned me and told me that he can't pay for my education I developed a kind of resilience and struggle and tried to aim higher because I wanted to show him that I'm actually good and I can perform so it's from that age of ten I started to develop that kind of a heart that really really say you can't stop me I have potential and I can do it ‘ it's only now that I can interpret it but then I just did it and I can also do my master degree and by the time I got a scholarship to do my third degree I have just married but again this has been an inspiration of course this part of me still me although of course when you move along You get other perspectives to understand more about yourself so I wouldn't say that me going out is influencing what I'm saying or what I am doing rather than I think it enabling me to understand who I am and my full potential”.

9. The interviewer: I am relating to what my friend has asked you about the influences of the abroad education abroad it's an interesting topic because when you study in a different culture and seek your education from it, all the ideas, the articles, the way of thinking about things and communities how life's supposed to be lived it also affects your understanding of the world and even you start seeing the world through the eyes of this culture, in you case we are talking about the western neoliberal culture but the

real question is do you think that the fact that you have studied in the US has something to do if you see life in your country right now ?

Sylvia: “Definitely! There is definitely an influence the way we think, I am a Christian I am living in the hills of Elijah it's in the bible where prophet Elijah lived so for me coming to the mountain and has slept where prophet Elijah has lived in a cave I've been reading in the book it's gonna be so different for me what I'm trying to say its wherever we go we pick different things and the question is which has the greater influence is you or the outsider it's what shaped our entire personality, because when I lived in Uganda I didn't even understand those things I start question the gender and my position until I moved to the us not because I was happy with the situation but I never knew how to express it I didn't know how to look at it. when had to write a report in music theory and culture class where we tried to understand how music and culture interact then I start thinking when I was in Uganda I'm only allowed to dance not to play drum and start to ask why I am not allowed to play drums and I realized that the reason why my father abandoned me was because as a woman culturally expect me to be in the kitchen and not elsewhere and completely bring a different attitude from me between me and the music I play so when I look at the music even today or dancing it's not just an art it's quite a lot more than what I'm seeing it's complicated but again that does not say these issues did not exist in me but because I have a different way of understanding and expressing it and arising consciousness and awareness so suddenly when I came back you don't exactly know when you have picked ideas and what have changed.”

10. The interviewer: the interesting topic is the fact that you have lived in a culture that determines specific roles for women according to its codes and then you have learned about those codes from people who didn't have the same experience as yours. Have you learned something new out of this intersection?

Sylvia: The fact that I was not able to express what I was going through didn't mean that I didn't experience what I have experienced, not because of the western point of view but I actually got answers because my father has never fully explained to me why I have to drop out of school

11. The interviewer: can you tell us more about the cultural codes of gender in Uganda?

Sylvia: “Socially culturally men are in charge but women must work and women have to decide how to distribute the money, the man should be the head of family he must be in charge of A B C D and also in our culture the women who are the ones who build houses and men are the decision makers. and even though just the fact the a man works and brings money don't say that the woman that takes care of the house is not important it's even have more strength to take care of the house than in being at work.”

12. The interviewer: it's the same subject that relates to what kind mechanism between men and women we a society has to come up with in order to be balanced?

Sylvia:”I think that in my marriage we have to give each other opportunity for what each other are the best at like for me and my husband I am better at being the head of the department so he lets be that and my husband is the best in being the head of the family so I let him be as well and he even allow me to have my PhD when I have children because he saw my potential also we got married we didn't have a home and it's the man's responsibility to get us home but I also helped financially so now we have a good home that I didn't have when I was a child because I was allowed to do what I am good at. We have not to be in this place of forgetting that we have to be humble some men for instance avoid marrying an educated woman because the fact that she also brings money makes them competitors and start giving him orders as well , I never tell my husband that I am right , if he tells me that I am not allowed to certain thing so it's ok but when I decided to change my religious direction from catholic to not he was not happy because I don't go to church now but he understands that this is the relationship between me and god and he can't negotiate it. It's for me about the balance and not the individual's achievements.”

13. The interviewer: it's interesting that you discuss the topic as a religious person because the non-religious contemporary discourse does not see the notion of a family as important to give up the individual's opportunity or to see it as an achievement either it's about the individuals prosperity how further he/she can go and where he/she can reach

Sylvia:” yeah I think that's what separates me from the typical feminism I'd rather be called a genderist because I look at the middle point because feminism is so much about ”me“ and ”myself“ and ”who I am“, ” this is what I want“ and ” this is what I like“ which is very different so for me is to look at the middle point and allow the other person to be what he/she can be as long as this contributes to the family and contributes to the community rather than setting restrictions from the beginning.”

14. The interviewer: we still have two more questions the one first one is about the world of music, there is a relationship between the visuals and the sound, when you tell us the story and show us the visual and we listen to music it constructs a certain image do think that sometimes we can find contradictions between the visuals and the music?

Sylvia: “ Yes I think its different levels when you have a visual you get access to the message but it would be your own message because of that I talked about multivocality because the meaning isn't there the meaning is very constructed but when we know it became very powerful it's like the first layer and then the second layer to make a better understanding it's important to understand the language but also the understanding of the context offers new messages to negotiate the socio economic space it offers more understanding when you just listen you might think it's nice music but I explain the words you get another perspective and when know about the context it makes more and more powerful so what I am trying to say that all of this work in collaboration.”

15. The interviewer: Why is it important to you to you to this conference specifically?

Sylvia :” I actually wanted to come to her because of the holy land as an important religious site for me as a Christian in addition of conveying a message through my lecture in this conference, the holy is very important to me as a Christian, I mean the land itself and not the state or the current regime, it's important for me to visit Jerusalem and Nazareth and other holy worship sites.”

The interviewer: We enjoyed having this deep conversation with you thank you very much!

Sylvia:” Thank you for having me, good luck with your report.”