

# **Dhow Countries Music Academy**

*Mediating Cultural Trade in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*



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**Watu wa Zanzibar, marafiki zangu, ahsanteni sana kwa ukarimu!**

Tutaonana badaaye!



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# 1 Introduction

*tarab – (Arabic) the joy one feels  
when listening to music*

## 1.1 Preface

The first that catches the travelers eyes when arriving Zanzibar by boat is a line of limestone houses, and in the center of these buildings the Dhow Countries Music Academy (DCMA) with its green balconies. The house, called *The Old Customs House*, is beautifully situated on the waterfront in Stone Town. Zanzibar island is located in the Indian Ocean 40 kilometers off the Tanzanian coast in East Africa. The DCMA is a non-governmental organization with its main funding from the Ford Foundation and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), among others. The academy was founded particularly to be an institution where one could teach and learn traditional music styles of Zanzibar, and especially the style known as taarab. Due to the collaborations and economic support from embassies and organizations from around the globe the academy has a lot of visiting musicians and guest teachers from all over the world doing workshops and performing with the DCMA every year.

In a historical perspective Zanzibar has been a center for trade and shipping between East Africa, the Middle East and Asia, and therefore the island and its culture has met, and been influenced by, a number of different cultures resulting in new ideas and cultural fusion. The way of trade has changed immensely the last century and there are other attractions that make people visit the island.

Taarab is a music style, developed from Arabic music at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which has been transformed into a fully Swahili form of music and has been influenced by a number of factors the last 110 years. Taarab is today an identity marker for the Zanzibari citizen and in it one finds stories of love, social matters and politics. As Mahsin Basalama, one of the main informants for this paper, a splendid musician and a good friend of mine, states it:

[...] Zanzibari people loves taarab from the audience to the musicians them selves. So the Taarab for the locals is the life taarab [...] if you take any young, old or children they all know what is taarab, not necessarily the technique but the sound, songs and even texts. You can find a five years old little boy or girl singing taarab on the streets, this is the proof that this music is our life [...]

I did extensive fieldwork in Zanzibar and worked at the DCMA for 18 months and I noticed that many of the musicians were involved in a lot of projects, both national and international, and there were some concerns on whether or not there are too many collaborations and workshops for the taarab musicians connected to the DCMA. I have been looking into what has influenced taarab during its history, and what kind of impact the Dhow Countries Music Academy has on Taarab today.

## 1.2 Taxonomy

*Kiswahili* is the official language of Tanzania. It is also spoken in the Comoros, from the northern parts of Mozambique to Kenya and to the southern parts of Somalia, and it is spoken in The United Republic of Congo and Uganda<sup>2</sup>. It is a *Bantu*<sup>3</sup> language and it contains words from Arabic, Portuguese and English. In Zanzibar Kiswahili is the official and spoken language.

The culture of the people living in the area of the Kiswahili language is known as Swahili culture in English and *uswahili* in Kiswahili. The people belonging to this group are called waswahili (plural). People from Zanzibar will usually refer to themselves as waswahili or Zanzibaris.

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<sup>2</sup> From the Norwegian Encyclopedia [www.http://snl.no/swahili/spr%C3%A5k](http://snl.no/swahili/spr%C3%A5k), March 27, 2010

<sup>3</sup> Group of African languages, including more than 150 Bantu languages stretching over a vast geographical area. [www.http://snl.no/bantuspr%C3%A5k](http://snl.no/bantuspr%C3%A5k). April 3, 2010

The word *taarab* is taken from the Arabic word *tarab*, which means Joy, pleasure, delight, rapture, amusement, entertainment, music (Topp 1992:41). *Tarab*, in Arabic, is used as a term to describe the feeling humans experience when being delighted by music. In East Africa *taarab* is a genre of music divided into the *original taarab (taarab asilia)* and *modern taarab (mipasho)* and *taarab* has local variations on the Swahili coast. When I use the term *taarab* in this paper I mean the original *taarab*, or known as ideal *taarab* in Zanzibar, which mainly uses traditional, acoustic Oriental instruments.

### **1.3 Statement**

I have asked myself a number of questions concerning the state of the original *taarab, taarab asilia*, when learning more about the music and the Zanzibari people. To use the Dhow Countries Music Academy as my main focal point in this thesis was decided after a long line of different views on the situation of *taarab*, and which influences *taarab* has now and has had before. In the beginning of my fieldwork I sensed a radical change in the music scene in Zanzibar, and I felt a pessimistic wind blowing on the shores of *taarab* when looking at the traditional music and its musicians struggling in modern times.

At first glance it looked like a form of traditional music was being forgotten and neglected by a local community, who I thought in the beginning, rather wanted Arabic and/or western influenced popular music. On the surface it seemed like *taarab* was losing people's attention. But looking closer into the matter, and understanding the local community better, I gained a positive feeling that this music will not be gone and forgotten, but that it is heading into new and unexpected places. I got the feeling that the traditional *taarab* is now on the verge to develop into something vivid and new but yet keeping its origin and originality. I sense a change of both sound and context. A change I will try to grasp by looking into the history of the development of *taarab* combined with the feelings of the musicians and audience.

The title, suggesting that the DCMA is a mediator of cultural expression, and a place where musical elements fusion, indicates that the academy is taking, maybe unintended, the role as a cultural meeting ground, concentrating the meeting place for music on the island into one building in Zanzibar. In the DCMA's aims and objectives they state the importance of both preserving and developing the traditional music of Zanzibar and the music in the region. I also hope to reveal a pattern to see where taarab has been, as a part of culture, where it is moving to, and to understand how it is moving along with culture.

After reading about taarab and listening to the music since before ever being in Zanzibar, combined with the two years I have worked on this paper, I have found a lot questions I did not find answers to in other ethnographies about taarab in Zanzibar. I am hoping to reveal something new in the discourse of this field and that it can be used as an analysis for the local musicians and to hopefully put words on their thoughts about their music and its future.

During my fieldwork I gradually understood that in Zanzibar, taarab is far more diverse and complex than what were my first assumptions. The music finds its way into several layers of society and has various qualities in different contexts. Taarab is soothing and beautiful to listen to, it is complex and rhythmic, it is entertaining and fun and it is critical and serious. There have been written few, but good papers on taarab in Zanzibar discussing taarab's place in the community and social life. Especially the work of Janet Topp; *Women and the Africanisation of Taarab in Zanzibar* (Topp 1992), which recently was followed up by fellow student Hanna Trondalen; *Voices in a Zanzibari Culture; Performing Taarab in the Changing Society of Stone Town* (Trondalen 2009), were both have an emphasis on women in taarab. Among other researchers who has done research on taarab is Said A. M. Khamis (Khamis 2001, 2002, 2005), Annemette Kirkegaard (Kirkegaard 2005), Laura Fair (Fair 2001) and Kelly Askew (Askew 2002) and especially the very informative and well made documentary *Poetry in Motion: 100 Years of Zanzibar's Nadi Ikhwan Safaa*, produced by Askew with Werner Graebner and Ron Mulvihill (Askew, Graebner, Mulvihill 2008). All these researchers have during the last 30 years documented important sides of taarab, and they have also made a personal impact on people in Zanzibar when staying there and doing their research. When collecting data, doing interviews, being participant observers they have all influenced musicians by sharing ideas and thoughts on music and research.

There are within local musicians' terminology different ways of explaining what taarab is and how it is supposed to be performed. I observed that the groups vary a lot in size and instrumentation. Concerts are being held in different venues, but the first ones noticeable for visitors are the taarab concerts at the hotels. These observations led me to wonder if these arenas, especially when only playing for the visiting tourists, are the main arenas for Zanzibar taarab, and if so, what happens to the local appreciation for taarab music, if the local Zanzibaris are not exposed to it? And an important question is if these arenas give room for the music to develop? Has local appreciation disappeared? Is taarab just a faint memory of old times? Has the tourist industry, with its need for economic stabilization, taken the tradition from the people of Zanzibar, who in general cannot be a part of the performances at the high-end hotels and restaurants? And if so, will it be given back to the people? And how? Asking these questions led me to search for arenas where I, as an *outsider*, usually would not be invited, and to look for "living" taarab.

The second thing that came to mind was that the taarab I heard was moving in a certain direction. It is hard to pinpoint directly which direction it is taking, because the music and the culture around it seems to be in an indeterminate state right now. The musicians who play taarab talk about the music emphasizing on historical development, and at the same time exploring other genres, styles and techniques. I could not determine if taarab, among musicians, had come to a turn, or if it is on its way to something completely new. There are a few musicians working individually continuing to develop their musical skills and knowledge, while others are working in the field of conserving the culture. But are they able to take taarab to the next level, or will they jump into something completely different?

In the beginning of my fieldwork I had the feeling that taarab is only performed for tourists enjoying their sundowner drinks and eating dinner at one of the high-end hotels and restaurants. I was wondering, if taarab in Zanzibar is only exposed to foreigners, only exposed for the short time visiting tourists and not the local people, where will the next generation musicians come from? Is it possible that the next generation of taarab musicians will be ethnomusicologists and scholars from the Western academic world? And will taarab,

as a part of constant globalization, wonder off, literally blow off the island, and spread around the world to be expropriated, produced and distributed by non-Zanzibaris?

Omani ascendances who have been living in Zanzibar for generations while Zanzibar was the capitol of Oman, and had to flee during the revolution in 1964, are said to appreciate taarab strongly as a symbol for their identity and their history and heritage from living in Zanzibar. It is one of the import tokens to retain their identities as Zanzibaris. I talked to some visitors from Oman, children and grandchildren of those who had to flee the country, and they told me about their strong appreciation for Zanzibari food and music in Oman passed on by their parents and grandparents not being able to come back to the island they lived on for generations. They still identify themselves as Zanzibari, and taarab is an important identity marker. But how is it among the people living in Zanzibar today? Do they have the same sense of connection to taarab as a part of their identity?

### **1.3.1 The Main Statement**

The Dhow Countries Music Academy (DCMA) offers, as their slogan says; “music for education, music for employment and music for enjoyment”<sup>4</sup>. They have taken the roll as a preserver of Zanzibari culture and especially music. My main statement is therefore:

#### **How does the Dhow Countries Music Academy influence taarab?**

I could ask does the DCMA have an impact on the development on taarab, and I would have to answer definitively yes. The DCMA is a young organization but yet it has become a cultural landmark in Zanzibar. But looking into how the DCMA influences taarab is a polynomial question that has to be answered by looking at both the DCMA and taarab one after the other and then in connection to each other. The following questions would be: How is taarab changing? What has influenced taarab during history, and what is influencing taarab

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<sup>4</sup> The slogan of the DCMA. Used on t-shirts and posters.

now? Is there a real danger that taarab might disappear as a local appreciated form of music? Or has that already happened?

To answer the main question and the following questions I have to find factors affecting the music. I have to add historical information on where taarab came from and to where it is going.

I see a change in the music's role in society, at the same time as I see a change in society. The role is definitely changing from being sermonic moving more towards a role as entertainment. It has, from originally being a gentlemen's club activity, become a way of making an income playing for the tourists visiting the island. Tourists visit the island's hotels the whole year around and the tourists are being exposed to taarab a lot of the time. Usually as dinner shows or played as background music in restaurants. This form of taarab is being specially fitted for its kind of receivers with a program often mixed with European or American classical and popular music.

As mentioned before, Zanzibar is a place where cultures meet. It is so today and it has been since human beings started to travel between continents. Today there is a large quantity of different people, artists, managements and researchers, traveling to Zanzibar to do projects on Swahili culture and music. These meetings are bound to add new, both subjective and objective, perspectives in both directions. Concerning taarab, a pessimistic view is to fear for a musical *greyout*, like some musicologists fear when western popular music influences and its strong capital force intervene with a local tradition (Taylor 1997) (Feld 2005:257-289). Taylor and Feld both talk about the impact the *world* music market has on "non-Western" musicians and how this raises critical questions on economical ethics and authenticity.

In presenting this ethnography of taarab within the Dhow Countries Music Academy, I have strived to represent the Zanzibari musician's, "insider", view and my, the fieldworker's and "outsider", view. To do this in the best manner possible I have tried to dialectically move between a rational, academic language and a poetic language, in order to serve the music and taarab poetry right.

## **1.4 Areas of Influence**

There are of course complicated processes that generate new musical genres and styles, and it is a slow development often being defined later in the course of history. It is often a specific musician or a group, who gets the honour for “creating” a new style or genre, when the truth is often far more complex and includes a number of musicians and other contributors. And as in the sake of taarab’s change in Zanzibar today, I cannot point out one specific musician or group, but more a music-culture changing in a weave of different influences from different directions.

I will introduce the factors that seem to have been of importance, and still are of importance in the development of taarab in Zanzibar. Later I will discuss them more thorough seeing them in correlation with the development of taarab today.

### **(1) Politics**

It seems like the music has changed abruptly when the political climate changes. It is highly visible in relation to Zanzibar’s revolution in 1964. Both structure of lyrics and the structure of groups changed after the revolution. There were supposedly restrictions on how the music should be, and taarab was urged to be used as a symbol for the new government.

### **(2) Tourism**

Tourism, which in a historic way can be seen as an extended version of the trade routes, with a slower and gliding impact on culture. The island has become easily accessible and is a highly popular destination for traveling Europeans and North Americans in Africa, which again makes it a popular place for researchers and scholars because of the islands complex origin and interesting history.



### **(3) The east: decades of Trade**

An important part of the islands early development is the settling of the Omani royal court and its Sultans. The Omani brought architecture and art from the Middle East to the island making it a basis for architecture and art in Zanzibar today.

### **(4) The west: from colonialism to wide spread media**

The so called “western” influences are also strongly seen as an influence of the modern form of taarab, like mixing taarab with other forms; fusions between taarab and R&B, Hip-Hop and reggae.

### **(5) Institutionalizing, distributing and preserving**

Another important factor is the Dhow Countries Music Academy (DCMA), founded for preserving knowledge about taarab music, and other traditional forms of music, dance and theater. The DCMA is also training local musicians in western and Arabic, both classical and popular music styles, to give students and musicians a broad musical foundation and understanding to be able to preserve Zanzibar’s musical heritage and to pass it on to future generations.

### **(6) Religion**

Zanzibar is defined as an Islamic society with 98% of the population being Muslims. I have investigated and tried to analyze where religion stands when it comes to music, in general and specifically in the Zanzibar community. The majority in Zanzibar is Sunni.

### **(7) Gender**

As taarab originally belonging to the Arab influenced gentlemen’s club in the early parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, keeping it as a men-only activity, the segregation led to women making their own groups, for their own activities but not performing outside the private sphere. The

women's groups are not visible today, and I am not sure if any still exists and gender is still an issue in taarab.

### **(8) Poverty**

The last important factor influencing taarab is poverty. There is no immediate hunger or need in Zanzibar, but the structure of social welfare, and low employment rates makes most people live on an uncertain edge of survival, not knowing what the next day will bring.

Even though the context of each factor is gradually changing with time, all these factors make the foundation explaining why taarab is where it is today. They are all important factors to investigate in order to understand how taarab became an important part of the people of Zanzibar. These factors are at the same time threatening the very existence of taarab. Taarab, as an art form, as a part of culture, and as a pastime activity, faces obstacles and threats that come from simple social structures of society. Today, the Dhow Countries Music Academy has given itself the role as a preserver of traditional culture in Zanzibar. Building, literally, an area where these obstacles are hindered. But, at the same time, in that role as a preserver, will taarab find an area to develop within the DCMA? Another issue that influenced me to write this paper is the fact that the DCMA is struggling for recognition in the local community. Why is it not getting recognition? Is its international profile not corresponding to the local culture?

I will look at these questions from different angles, but most importantly I will use my experience as a fieldworker to display my interpretations on the meeting between cultures. I will try to show how music moves in sub-layers of culture, to reveal something that is moving between a few people, but has an impact on the whole music-culture.

## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 Defining culture

The concept and the meaning of the term culture is widely used in media today. Among scholars there seems to be a more or less mutual understanding of the concept of culture, “around which the whole discipline of anthropology arose” (Geertz 1973:4). Being in the field, I was in need of having a clear definition of culture to see where and how taarab existed in its cultural context.

I like to sum up the definition of culture as Professor Mitchell Strumpf of the Dar Es Salaam University in Tanzania told it<sup>5</sup>. Strumpf defines culture as *sets of agreements between people*. These agreements binds people together, which makes the people sharing these agreements belong to the same culture. Culture is within all layers of the human life. In families, in work places, in towns, musical groups, in countries and villages and so on. In all kinds of social relations between humans there are people sharing agreements and these agreements binds them together and we call these agreements their culture. Inside a culture there is a variation of specific cultural agreements concerning the social life within the culture. People sharing these specific agreements are defined within a sub-culture. The different agreements are economical agreements, political agreements, social agreements, linguistically agreements and, especially for my field agreements on art, which can be divided in subcategories of visual art, moving (physical) art and sounded (musical) art. So even though my main topic is music, all the agreements within the culture has an effect on my findings and has to be taken in to consideration. The Norwegian philosopher and professor at the University of Oslo, Dag Østerberg, uses a similar kind of terminology of defining culture. He states that there are many patterns in our way of living and being, that when one puts these patterns together it is called *a cultural wholeness*<sup>6</sup> (Østerberg & Engelstad 1984:18). These patterns of a cultural wholeness can be language, economics, tools and weapons, music and theatre or religion and superstitions. And sometimes missing information within one of those patterns, one can make

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<sup>5</sup> Lecture at DCMA June 12, 2008

<sup>6</sup> Translated from Norwegian: “et kulturelt hele”. Can also be referred to “the complex whole” used in anthropology when defying cultures *complex* but still unified components.

theories based on the other parts of the culture to find the missing pieces, like often used in historical archaeology. If some of the pieces of a cultural whole is missing, one can assume, and make sure to say it is an assumption, how the missing pieces of this culture was with using the patterns and information acquired from the pieces that are known. Both Strumpf and Østerberg are building their theories from the culture definitions developed by, among others, Clifford Geertz. Geertz' work, *the Interpretation of cultures* (Geertz 1973), is a thorough work on the concept of culture, the cultural whole and cultural interpretation, which is the basis for the development of ideas within anthropology and ethnomusicology today.

As a fieldworker entering an unfamiliar and unknown field, one makes assumptions and interprets the field continuously. In the beginning assumptions and interpretations are based within the fieldworker's own culture, but further into the fieldwork one starts making assumptions based on the areas of the fields within a culture the fieldworker begins to understand. At this point, when I began to unveil the complexity of fieldwork and its inner life, the fieldwork became alive, and for me it felt extremely rewarding. Suddenly fieldwork becomes a performance where many sides of the human aspects have to be taken in to consideration. As a fieldworker the interactions with the people of the field creates a flow of ideas and concepts that continuously develops.

The concept of culture I espouse [...] is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. It is explication I am after, construing social expressions on their surface enigmatical.

(Geertz 1973:5)

## 2.2 Ethnomusicology

The term ethnomusicology originates from Jaap Kunst's book *Ethnomusicology* first published in 1959. Kunst is especially known for his research on music from Indonesia and is an important contributor to the discourse in modern ethnomusicology. Before this era the research on music from non-western cultures was called *comparative musicology*, a “cross-cultural” method of doing music research based on the Western conception of the physics of sound and sociology (Nettl 2005:60-73). The term ethnomusicology brought more than just a change of name; the whole discourse and its methods were reformed. The comparative research had been descriptive and systematic. The researchers analyzed their findings with methods from musicology in the same way they would analyze western music, analyzing note ratios and sound. With modernism came a research containing epistemological issues. Like Kunst says in his book “The original term ‘comparative musicology’ fell into disuse, because it promised more – for instance, the study of mutual influences in western art-music – than it intended to comprise, and, moreover, our sciences does not ‘compare’ any more than other sciences” (Kunst 1959:1). In any anthropological study of the “other” comparing with what is “mine” is inevitable, however the comparative method is not sufficient to be the main method (Nettl 2005:72-73). The scholars of the comparative method tried to reach understanding of non-music through practical analyses and refined methods from the western musicology. People like Erich M. von Hornbostel, George Herzog and later Allan Lomax, Mieczyslaw Kolinski and Marcia Herndon were the forerunners in formulating methods of analyzing non-western music (ibid:95-103).

It is a historical reason for the comparative methods dominating music research and it is a historical reason for it to be a secondary method. The comparative method did not manage to include and explain the complete human social and cultural meaning of the non-western music. The focus on scales, harmony and rhythm is not always the most important aspect of music for the people perceiving or performing it. Yet Nettl state that in ethnomusicology today, the comparative method has got a reason to come back, not as the main component of the discourse, but as a tool for the researcher and a way of describing what one has found during the research (ibid:70-73). One has to make a bridge to bind the “sounded” music material with the “unsounded” music material.

The comparative techniques that had been established by Hornbostel and his school – counting tones and intervals in scales, providing typologies of rhythmic units, and so forth – went only so far. It became clear that we must also study each music in terms of the theoretical system that its own culture provides for it, whether an explicitly articulated, written system or one that must be derived from interview and analysis; and that one must study musical behavior in terms of the underlying value structure of the culture from which it comes.

(ibid:63)

Nettl goes on stating that the comparative thinking has returned in the field of ethnomusicology “though without an explicit methodology, and usually without being named” (ibid).

I have tried to balance between the epistemology and the musicology as in present ethnomusicology, but I will also strive to present the ethnography in a poetic way, serving the music right. To not use my own academic and musical background to understand the field will be impossible, because it is the genuine tool I have. And the reason for fieldwork and for using diverse scientific methods is to be aware of my culturally attached presumptions and prejudice, and to not physically compare the music to the music from the western culture but to use my knowledge to understand the music in Zanzibar in an intellectual way, to see it in a global and local perspective, so I can understand it and share this with people who are not familiar with taarab, and/or other scholars and researchers who are interested in the development of taarab.

### **2.2.1 Performing Ethnomusicology**

Most of the information in this paper is gathered through interviews, recordings and observations done during fieldwork in Zanzibar on three occasions. The first time was in June 2004, where I did not intentionally do fieldwork, but got the opportunity to go to Zanzibar where I met musicians, recorded material and wrote down thoughts and experiences, which was very valuable for my later research. The next period with research was in June till

August 2007 and after that I had a longer stay doing research and also teaching at the Dhow Countries Music Academy from May 2008 till September 2009. Other information was gathered from various publications, books and articles on Zanzibar and taarab.

I have blended ideas and methods from the modern discourse of ethnomusicology, with Bruno Nettl, John Blacking, Jeff Todd Titon and Steven Feld as main inspirations, and I have applied philosophical theories from the discourse of hermeneutics, especially inspired by the book “Shadows in the field” (Barz and Cooley 1997), “Philosophical Hermeneutics” (Gadamer 1976) and “The interpretations of cultures” (Geertz 1973). In “Shadows in the field” music is put in a music-cultural research woven into the hermeneutic anthropology, as led by Clifford Geertz, to dissolve the problem of mediating between inside and outside perspective. This way of combining comparative analytical methods with a personal view made me more cautious towards my findings and to what I was looking for in the field. Combining philosophical hermeneutics with musicology and anthropology gave me a broad perspective of the field, and the combination strengthened the reflexivity of my fieldwork. In the postmodern ethnomusicology there is a desire to combine “a personal approach based on the culture’s perception, the analyst’s agenda, and the distinctive characteristics of the music” (Nettl 2005:107).

I want to show how the music scene for taarab musicians is changing using my personal view, which is based on what I understand as the culture’s perception, and I tried hard to go back to my informants to hear if they agreed on my interpretations. Parallel to that I needed to find musical examples and methods of analysis to fit my subject, described by the way the music is performed and perceived by its people.

Within the field of hermeneutics one is supposed to rapidly raise new questions out of every gained answer making the researcher constantly questioning the field. As I recorded lessons and performances and gathered information from interviews, I became aware of connections between cultural phenomena and different ways of understanding these cultural occurrences. A personal criticism on working this way concerns my lack of knowledge within all fields applied. There can be aspects I might overlook, merely because I do not know the complete existence of the discourses of anthropology, ethnomusicology and philosophy. But on the

other side, looking into various academic fields made me open up for, and presented to, new approaches than just the one of ethnomusicology, which seems by many to be in a state of uncertainty and change when it comes to methods (Nettl 2005, Barz and Cooley 1997, Feld 2005). Absorbing music is a personal thing and Charles Seeger points out that it is difficult to use one way of communication (language) to describe another form of communication (music) (Nettl 2005), which seems to be the task of the post postmodern ethnomusicology.

My historical information on taarab music is collected mainly from the works of Janet Topp, “Women and the africanisation of Zanzibar taarab” (Topp 1992), and Laura Fairs’ “Pastimes and Politics: culture, community, and identity in post-abolition urban Zanzibar, 1890-1945” (Fair 2001) along with information gathered through interviews.

The history of taarab is not one-sided and easy to interpret. It reveals many contradictions and conflicts due to political disagreements, but also social and economic differences between people. The people of Zanzibar has been under external rule for most of its modern history making it a society dividing its people in classes, with big differences between poor and rich. But either way, if you are a poor or rich Zanzibari, taarab is a part of your culture and your history. And this is a fascinating phenomenon showing the uniqueness and importance of taarab music as a symbol for the island’s culture.

## **2.3 Fieldwork**

In the field of ethnomusicology, and especially when studying the music of an unfamiliar culture, an important part of research is fieldwork. Basically to experience the music in question in its environment. Fieldwork includes gathering first hand information when looking for a specific entity within a musical culture. When doing fieldwork one is also making important documentation on what is happening in music around the world, not just the music recorded, but the way music is perceived and used everyday in the musicians’ and



the audiences' realities. And the reality is that music has a central part in people's life and culture. The fieldworkers are not just documenting music but also observing what part music has in other aspects of life, within the culture where music is being performed.

Ethnomusicologist Allan P. Merriam gave way to what he called *anthropology of music* (Merriam 1964) trying to combine studying the structure of sound as a system, e.g. music, and how to treat music as a functioning part of human culture (ibid 3).

First I would like to go through the history of fieldwork. It is important to understand how techniques and methods in fieldwork has developed in order to find the best suited methods and techniques to gain information in the field. The first documented musical research in a field is known to be by Jean De Lery in 1557 (Bohlman 2002:3). He traveled with a group of Christian Protestants to an island outside Rio de Janeiro. They were ordered there by the French government to strengthen France's areas in Brazil. De Lery got into disagreements with his fellow travelers and was sent to Rio De Janeiro where he had nothing to do but to wait for the first boat going back to France, which was in ten months time. So for ten months he stayed with a coastal tribe of Brazilian natives. In his diary from those ten months he described how he saw the people of the tribe's everyday life and he described how ceremonies were held and, most importantly in the view of ethnomusicology, he wrote about how the tribe's use of music strengthened the pagan beliefs of the indigenous people. He also described how the music went from feeling simple and meaningless to become a part of him.

At the beginning of this witches' Sabbath, when I was in the women's house, I had been somewhat afraid; now I received in recompense such joy, hearing the measured harmonies of such a multitude, and especially in the cadence and refrain of the song... Whenever I remember it, my heart trembles, and it seems their voices are still in my ears.

(Bohlman 2002:3 sited from Lery 1990:142-143)

Throughout recent history we have a lot of this kind of documentation taken from missionaries and explorers when traveling around the world (ibid:1-11). Their attempts to explain what the music they heard sounded like, and what they observed during musical

performances, could easily become incomprehensible for people back home. Later, when the phonograph was invented, researchers in Europe and North America used explorers and missionaries to execute field recordings.

In the romantic period of classical music in Europe in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when nationalistic thoughts and ideas conducted people's lives it was seen as a cultural necessity, and to be beneficial for society, to gather information about, and collect the "original" music from one's own people. Composers, scholars and intellectuals traveled in remote parts of their countries transcribing music and lyrics looking for "the poetry of the people", the original traditions of the people (Lundberg and Ternhag 2002:13). It was German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder who laid the philosophical base and ideas on patriotism as an important part of building the nation to gain stability in society. This was a term he called *Volkslied*<sup>7</sup>. His thoughts on volkslied include music and also language and history, and theories for reviving the 'original' life people use to have within a culture. Herder meant that the voice and singing, and music evolved simultaneously and that music is just as important for communication between people as language is (Bohlmann 2002:39-40). The interest for, and the philosophies behind, the term volkslied emerged into the field of studying and investigating music of unknown and 'exotic' cultures.

Ethnomusicology as a scientific discipline is said to have its beginning in the 1880's, at the same time as Thomas Edison and Charles Cros invented the phonograph in 1877. The phonograph made it possible to record the sounded material from a far and inaccessible field and return the sound to Europe where the researchers had the opportunity to listen to, and study, the music in their 'laboratory' for further investigations. When the fieldworkers got back from the field they had the possibility to show people what they had seen and what they had been listening to, not just trying to describe it in words, but to actually bring the sound back. And they had the opportunity to undisturbed analyze the music back home. As mentioned above it was customary for the researchers to send their phonographs with people traveling to the far corners of the world to record music of indigenous people. The researchers often used merchants, missionaries and explorers who traveled outside Europe

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<sup>7</sup> Translated: *folk song*, meaning music of the people

and North America to record the music they heard and then to bring the recordings back to the researcher who transcribed it and analyzed it (ibid). This way of research, processing the information gathered in ones laboratory without being in the field is humorously known among researchers as *armchair research*, and is no longer seen as sufficient in modern ethnomusicology, mainly because of the physical distance between researcher and field.

Today ethnomusicologists travel to remote parts of the world, or find subcultures in near areas where they do observations, sometimes by participating in musical activities or just as an observer, not intervening with the music.

### **2.3.1 Technology**

Ethnomusicology started with the invention of the phonogram, making it possible to record music and to bring the music back home (Lundberg & Ternhag 2002). In fieldwork today there is an endless line of technical devices to choose between when collecting information. And the digitalization of sound and pictures makes it possible today to acquire, store or even send an enormous amount of material, that be sounds, pictures or movies. For my research I used mainly a digital sound recorder and a digital camera, which also has video function, but I tried not to use it too much, often because of the consideration of the informants. I did also on some occasions do video recordings, but I felt the video camera got too much attention, and stressed the performer/informant, so I decided to use it more precautious and especially not in one-on-one situations.

I kept in mind that some people do not like to get a microphone in front of them when playing, so I was precautious to where and when to use it and how to present my reasons for recording. On occasions I got suspicious musicians wondering if I intended to use the recordings for commercial use. Other times I had to consider how much material I could manage to process and which use it had for me, as the fieldworker needs to have time to go through and analyze the material. After a while I thought I knew when I had to record and when it was best not to.

## 2.4 “Shadows in the field”

The field is constantly changing. The relationship between people in the field is constantly changing (Geertz 1973). Africa’s history the last centuries has been dark and brutish, including the history of colonization and conquest in the relation between North America and Europe and the rest of the world. The wish for understanding and appreciating art and music, and the culture of the colonized people was never shown by the colonialists (Cooley 1997:6). Anthropological research from those times was often influenced by presumptions on supremacy of the time, the worst examples containing race theories (Eriksen 2001).

I feel it has been of great importance to me to be aware of any historically derived obstacles that could appear between the field and me, that the hundreds of years with slavery and colonialism will make a barrier between the field and me. The heritage of the colonial times seems to be strengthened by the economical differences that do exist between many of the people of the field and me. Not just my personal economy but also my ‘national’ economy. I sensed sometimes that people felt, and rightfully should be allowed to feel, envy for the economical gap between us. These ideas could sometimes lead in to miscommunication. And as a researcher trying to integrate with the field it is an impediment worth mentioning. It is a luxury to travel miles and miles to study, and it is a luxury to do this kind of research.

The other aspect of my ‘heritage’ from our colonial forefathers is the presumptions on Africa, on folk music and cultural traditions of the “other”. I sense there is a set of presumptions culturally built into me. I have to be careful so I discover them and can analyze them when they occur, and know where they come from. Edward Said’s studies of *orientalism* and “the other” and how the west is constructing the Orient shows how expressed prejudice is being used as a method of empowering people of “the other”.

Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient – and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist – either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism [...] Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the occident’. Thus a very large mass of

writers, among whom are poets, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, 'minds', destiny, and so on.

(Said 1978:2-3)

Said talks about different ways of forecasting the behavior of "the other". He shows how history has made different ways of defining "the other", definitions and presumptions that are still standing in the West, illustrated by the way the Orient is portrayed (ibid). In movies Arab men are often sneaky, greedy and dishonest – characters that serve to make them less appealing and likeable and women are portrayed as belly dancers, exhibiting an exotic sexuality. These ways of portraying "the other" strengthens prejudice and makes them even more "other". Said himself has been criticized in recent years for picking out literature and examples that fits his theories and for systematically misrepresenting Western civilization as a whole. I consider it important to put my attention on fellow researchers' and my historically assembled prejudices.

In social anthropology one speaks of three schools of anthropology and methods in the relation between field and researcher, originated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Eriksen 2001:9-24). It is the *American anthropology* led by Franz Boas, The American method aspires one to base the fieldwork on participant observation in order to understand the field as the members of the field do. It is about perceiving the field fully, getting it deep under the skin, and to understand it as if one were a part of it. It emphasizes the use of time to become a natural member of the field, or as natural as possible. Boas encompassed cultural and social anthropology with physical anthropology, archeology and linguistics. The *French anthropology* on the other hand, is to always keep a distance to the field. The anthropologists are supposed to interpret the field on the basis of their own culture to understand it and not to intervene. The field must not be contaminated by their presence. The French method uses analytic and comparative methods based singularly on observation and is philosophically more "adventurous" than the American and the *British anthropology*, which is the methodologically purist of the three. Bringing these ways of anthropological studies, incorporating newer ideas from anthropology and philosophy with Strauss, Geertz and

Ricaeur, is what Merriam, Hood and Blacking were emphasizing and what Mark Slobin and Jeff Todd Titan has developed their methods and techniques on studying music in culture.

Alan P. Merriam divides musical research into three levels: conceptualization about music, behavior in relation to music, and music, sound itself (Merriam 1964:32). It is about analyzing a music culture through the music, response and use of music, and ideas about music. I will attempt to show the alterations in music in Zanzibar by using the music as an example. I noticed that the way the size of the groups in Zanzibar is changing, they are getting smaller, which lead to alter the sound of taarab. And in this change of size one also finds issues of social and economical character, which are influencing the music itself as well as the performers. Suddenly there is a web of factors concerning one matter. There are threads crossing each other, all influencing each other. New threads occur while others disappear, constantly changing the shape of the web.

#### **2.4.1 The new paradigm**

Considered as an ecological system, the forces that make up a music-culture maintain a dynamic equilibrium. A change in any part of the acoustic ecology, such as the invention of the electric guitar or the latest computer-music technology, may have a far-reaching impact. Viewing music this way leads to the conclusion that music represents a great human force that transcending narrow political, social, and temporal boundaries. Music offers an arena where people can talk and sing and play and reach each other in ways not allowed by the barriers of wealth, status, location, and difference.

Titan 2009:31-32)

Jeff Todd Titan describes ethnomusicology's evolution in four stages (Titan 1997:87-100). The first one is the *Comparative Musicology*, where researchers analyze the recorded material with methods of western terms from musicology and parameters from modern science, and sometimes without having been in the field, focusing only on the sounded material. The second stage is the musical folklore based on the volkslied theories e.g. building nations and patriotism, preserving cultural ideas from the origins of human beings

and early culture, and the study of local culture in a social context. The third stage comes after the second world war with Jaap Kunst book Ethnomusicology that sets the pace for the modern ethnomusicology, wishing to dissolve nationalism and wanting to follow music's natural development rather than conserving it. Postmodern ethnomusicology is focusing on ending the comparative generalizations existing in research and is trying to produce detailed studies of the individual music and culture. The fourth stage, which is where ethnomusicology is today according to Titan, can be called the study of "people *making* music". "I have called this new paradigm the study of people making music, but I might also be called the study of people experiencing music" (ibid:91).

In lack of a better idiom and definition this is the term for ethnomusicology of today. He gives the word making two definitions: "...(1) producing the sounds we can call music and (2) constructing the cultural domain the we demarcate as music" (ibid:91-92). To make music is therefore described as *generating sounds we define as music*, which is a definition that can vary between cultures and between people within the same culture. Titan is suggesting an opening for a new paradigm from the ideas of the 1968-generation, on global peace, women's rights and issues on race and ethnicity. These thoughts have influenced the scholars and their research giving it an emphasis on understanding rather than explanation. Titan emphasize the importance to use the understanding one gets from the lived experience from both other people and oneself, and to relate it to the musicians and audience within the field. The field, together with the research and its outcome, will then become more than a student's research of musicians producing sounds, and an audience receiving and interpreting these sounds, but it will hopefully give mutual meaning and understanding between everyone related in the field.

Together with Mark Slobin, Titon developed Merriam's model on how to study musical cultures. They state that music as culture has four components (Titon 2009:19).

1. Ideas about music
  - A. Music and the belief system
  - B. Aesthetics of music
  - C. Contexts for music
  - D. History of music
2. Activities involving music
3. Repertoires of music
  - A. Style
  - B. Genres
  - C. Texts
  - D. Composition
  - E. Transmission
  - F. Movement
4. Material culture of music

1. *The conceptualizations about music* are divided into four separate aspects. The first is (A) music and the belief system. Is music human, divine, or both? Is music useful for human kind or is it potentially harmful? The second concerns the (B) aesthetics of music asking what is beauty, what is noise, and aspires us to investigate at how a performance should be in the eyes of the performers and audience. The third aspect focuses on the (C) contexts for music. At which occasions are music played and how is the live performance received? The (D) history of music analyses what happens to music in the course of time and space. What did the music sound like in the past? Should it be preserved?

2. *Activities involving music* is when the musicians are taking ideas about music into practice. This is where one looks at how people are making music, recording and distributing. It is also interesting to see how people become musicians, since being a musician is not highly respected by the majority in Zanzibari. Another point is when analyzing taarab in the "World music" market; who earns from it? Who invests? And then one can look at other activities



involving taarab. Is there dance? Are musicians moving while playing? And who are a part of the activities involving music?

3. *Repertoires of music* are “a stock of music that is ready to be performed” (Titon 2009:26). This stock consists of six basic parts: style, genres, texts, composition, transmission, and movement. With (A) style I can look at how the music is different between the groups of Zanzibar. Do they sound different? And does the Zanzibari feel there is a difference between the Malindi group and Culture Musical Club? The units of repertory divided in (B) genres are used to look at the different songs and to categorize them suitable. Like the instrumental pieces, called *bashraf* in opposite to the pieces with lyrics. (C) Texts, or lyrics, is in Zanzibar a field on its own, since lyrics are poems usually written before the melody is composed. When looking at the (D) compositions one has to investigate the way of composing, if it is planned or spontaneous, and who is composing. The next field is transmission of music. How does music pass on from one musician to the next? Being at the Dhow Countries Music Academy I was close to the formal way of teaching taarab, but is it the same in the outskirts of the island? And last in the repertoires of music is (E) movement. Which physical movements accompany the music?

4. *Material culture of music* is researching the tools and the material culture within the music-culture to understand it. The most obvious tools in music are the instruments. How are they made? What is their origin? And it is of current interest to look at the impact that the electronic media has on the culture.

In combining these I hope to gain an understanding of taarab and its role within the Swahili culture. And most importantly to discuss the question of what impact the DCMA has on taarab and if there is a source of influence on taarab music, and for taarab musicians.

## 2.5 In the field

During my fieldwork in Zanzibar I have been going in and out of different roles in the field. I have been a student, I have been a teacher, I have been a friend doing non-musical social activities, and I have been a colleague and a fellow musician performing concerts for my field and playing and performing together with musicians of my field. I have been playing both the music of my field and music I consider to be “my music” for the field. This gave me a great opportunity to get to know the field, to be a participant observer, in order to come as close as possible to an understanding of the field. I like the way Mantle Hood says it in his remarks on participant observation research; “the only right way to understanding music is to participate in the music, to get it under your skin. Our ears are the gates to any understanding of music. In the field one has to be able to see oneself as a teacher and as a student at the same time. You know some things and you need to learn other things” (Hood 1971:32-33).

In modern anthropology one says that the fieldworker constructs the field (Eriksen 2001). It only exists at present of the fieldwork, at the time it is conducted. After that, the field is history and therefore constantly changing. The field is only restricted in the way it has been performed and the field will always be in relation to other fields. One has to always consider the field’s influence from other fields. How is it in relation to social structures, economic and political structures, are there any linguistic relations important to ones line of work in the field, or is there any political tension important for the produced sounds in the field? These questions will always be a part of my fieldwork, unaffected of I choose to write it, or to take it in consideration or not (Lundberg & Ternhag 2002). And then again ethnomusicologists and an anthropologists cannot neglect their expectations, and have to try to understand where their prejudgments come from. And at the same time they have to understand that the field has its own expectations and prejudgments that the fieldworker might not even comprehend at all. There is a constant mutual influence between the field and the fieldworker, which again colors the fieldworker’s work.

The new paradigm, as Titan calls it, consist of a broader focus on discourses on ethnicity, gender issues, religion and social studies and it emphasizes human relations stronger than anything else. The sounded material, the music itself is not being neglected but interpreted in

relation to its meaning in the field, the culture of the researchers, and their polar paradigms (Titan 2009). The use of philosophy is increasing in order to understand the human side of the presentation of the comparative analyzes. For me it became a tool for interpretation, both human and musical factors, and it was vastly significant for my collection of data, and the interpretation of collected data.

As mentioned before in the beginning of this paper I have had contact with musicians in Zanzibar for nearly six years, and during those years my role in the field has altered many times. I have been in Zanzibar on three occasions, and musicians from Zanzibar has been visiting me and playing with me in Norway. My first time in Zanzibar was not as a researcher but as a teacher and musician. I was invited to Zanzibar to teach and work together with musicians, not to execute academic research. I was there to learn about taarab, to broaden my musical horizon and to teach music. I had absolutely no expectations. When I then two years later decided to study taarab as the topic of my master's thesis, my ideas was heartily welcomed by my friends and colleagues in Zanzibar, and overwhelmingly all of them offered me assistance when needed.

When reading ethnographies one often find stories about the difficulties the researchers meets when presenting themselves as researchers who wants to do scientific investigations on a people's culture and music. One often reads that it can be hard to get into the society and to gain personal trust. Like in 'Why Suyá Sing' by Anthony Seeger where he is forced to discuss and explain his research, and he is being met with a lot of skepticism, mainly because of other anthropologists who have been there and made the Suyá people feel exploited (Seeger 2004). I have sometimes encountered skepticism to some extend, but only when I have gone outside the group I know. But thanks to having a helpful and supporting group of musicians to work with I have received a lot of assistance when these situations have occurred. My main informants know my affection for and interest in their music and culture and also my interest for history and politics. Unlike social anthropology one can as an ethnomusicologist meet people with music as a mutual ground. Musicians share experiences and knowledge and can therefore break the first barriers of communication with a second 'mutual language'.

As an example I can describe the first time I went to see one of the DCMA's branches in a village called Mahonda. This was while I was conducting fieldwork and doing research in Zanzibar in 2007. I went there with one of the teachers from the DCMA who was giving lessons there. The DCMA teacher introduced me for the students as a researcher, and I had a presentation of my thesis, and myself and I also taught the subject of writing notes on their demand. Then I asked if they could play some taarab for me, and the musicians of Mahonda expressed an eager to do that. They got their instruments ready and I set up my mini-disc recorder and its microphone and put it in front of the musicians. Suddenly I saw skeptic faces in front of me. They started talking amongst each other. And then they asked the teacher from the DCMA for what reason I was recording. I explained that it was purely for my own use and that I would not use it in any other way, never without talking to them on forehand, and not without their permission. The situation was uncomfortable. I didn't speak sufficient Swahili at that time and the discussion went through the teacher from the DCMA. I realized later that I should not have recorded these people on the first visit, but rather save it for later, but this was early in my fieldwork. I had met a new group of musicians and I really wanted to keep this music in my memory, and basically I was too eager.

I came to Zanzibar as a jazz/contemporary musician wanting to develop my personal musical expression and to gain knowledge about the music and culture. I have always had an interest in *traditional* and folk music from all over the world and I enjoy the way musicians play in Zanzibar, and especially taarab music. I felt the presence of something unfamiliar but beautiful that I hope to maybe understand to express myself. To engage one self with different music-cultures is a highly known way for any improvising musician to try to find new ways to make music. And to get into other musicians' ways of playing and performing and their way of being musicians I think one must interact on a social level over a period of time. My main concern doing fieldwork in Zanzibar was that as a friend, as a jazz guitar player, I would always be seen as an outsider when it comes to taarab music. I can play the oud in an orchestra and play taarab songs but I can never be like the Zanzibari, who is born here. My presence as a Norwegian, a European and a jazz guitar player is just too strong. I would have needed much more time to become a taarab musician without being viewed upon as an outsider. But the fact that I am an improvising musician has made it easier for me to gain contact with the people of the field and to interact with them musically and socially, and

from there I have gained a lot of knowledge and information on taarab music, Zanzibari history, culture and customs.

I see a development in some areas of performing taarab, and among the musicians, that I find somehow unbalanced, and this is the main reason why I write in English. I did not write this paper alone, it would not have been anything without my informants, the people of Zanzibar. I write in English so they can take a part in my research, even though my English is insufficient at times. Through my eyes I try to narrate what the Zanzibari musicians see through their eyes. Social anthropology often state that it is difficult to do anthropological research on ones own society, since lack of prejudgment makes it difficult or even impossible to have a constructive discourse. One needs the outside view to see those symbols and signs an insider takes for granted, and therefore will not reflect upon. Anthropology and ethnomusicology is supposed to “explain the many and complex sides of humanity, and sometimes you might even save disappearing cultures from eternal extinction” (Eriksen 1998:37).

### **2.5.1 Polluting Someone’s Backyard**

Another debate in ethnomusicology is on “polluting” the culture already existing in the field with the culture that the researcher originates from. It has been, especially in the beginning of ethnomusicology, a goal to find the pure and unpolluted styles of the folk or tribal communities (Nettl:372-373). Today one can find influences, sometimes seen as pollution, in even the farthest corners of the world, if there still exists far corners of the world. It seems like Western popular American/European music is a part of everyday life and culture in Norway as in Tanzania or anywhere else. And more and more frequently one hears *Euroamerican* popular music mixed with, or contains elements from, different styles from Africa, using non-Western musical ideas. One can say that in general, the popular music in East-Africa has strong influences from American R&B and hip-hop, reggae, and the “afro-beat” pop, with its roots in Congo. If it is pollution or if it is development is hard to determine and this might only be judged by each sub-culture within the definitions of themselves?

I am also asking in my statement if there is “a real danger that taarab will disappear as a local appreciated form of music”. A question like this might sound like an expression for *global romanticism* (Kvifte 2001). Global romanticism is an extended term used of the local romanticism of *folk music* in Scandinavia in the 1970’s. In the 70’s the socialist movement was expressed through music. In this movement “[...]’real’ authentic music should belong somewhere, in a local community, where it is created according to the needs of the people, formed by the nature, and polished through the loving care through generations of use” (ibid). Today the objects in question have shifted from the struggling working classes in the 70’s to the struggling ‘ethnic’ musician of today. ‘Ethnic music’ is being romanticized today, especially in the world music market (Taylor 1997). Romanticizing a culture is a way of undermining it and one can easily fall into the terms of cultural imperialism (Said 1978). Does taarab belong to a certain group of people? Is it the property of the people of Zanzibar, and therefore it should be produced, performed and controlled by Zanzibari? Does reggae belong to Jamaica?

As this is a pit-fall for me, it is also one for the Dhow Countries Music Academy. Since the DCMA has main parts of its economic funding from the West, the contributors themselves and their organizations could claim the right to be the ones who set the artistic agenda. Who are then the owners of taarab? And are the contributors not influenced by their visions and expectations of taarab? Edward Said’s term *orientalism* is both describing the academic field of studying the Orient, and the Eurocentric prejudgments of the orient, without these two being discrepant to each other (Said 1978:73-92). On the other hand Taylor concludes that “[...] if cultural imperialism happens, sort of, in many places, modern ideas about preservation and authenticity ensure in many places that more traditional forms of musicking are being retained” (Taylor 1997:197). Giving an example were Joseph Shabalala of *Ladysmith Black Mambazo* in 1994 founded a conservatory of music in South Africa to educate young South Africans in indigenous music, dance and ritual. In the same way the DCMA is educating young Zanzibaris, who propitiously will be the next generation “handling” taarab, they have be aware of the “problems of the maintenance and dissemination of traditional musics” (ibid:198).

In my case, as a fieldworker and musician, when interacting in the taarab society, I have to ask myself if I can inflict my ideas on taarab musicians, in the same way as I gain ideas from taarab musicians, and maybe in that way pollute aspects of taarab? Jean De Lery writes about how he sang his songs from France for the natives in Brazil (Bohlmann 2002:3) and Stephen Feld was playing Charlie Parker for the Kaluli people (Shelemay 1997:191). One has to thread carefully on how one presents music and one self, and to be aware of ones prejudices.

## **2.6 Interviews**

Besides being a participant observer in the field I have also done both formal and informal interviews with musicians, audience and people in general. Some of my informants I have gotten information from frequently for many years, other informants I have met briefly and had discussions and talks about my topic. I could not have written anything if it had not been for these people all connected to the field and with an opinion on music and Zanzibar taarab in one way or the other. My only concern is that my affection for and interest in the field will color my result. But I cannot hide my affection for the field, the Zanzibar taarab and its people.

In this paper I have particularly followed three musicians who are influential in the taarab scene in Zanzibar and who are working at the Dhow Countries Music Academy as teachers and in planning curriculum and working with projects concerning the DCMA. I chose to do qualitative research, using few sources of information, to find an understanding of taarab and the DCMA from the musicians who are most active in that area. I have also had many conversations and interviews with audiences and other musicians to crosscheck how the opinions are among people. Bruno Nettl says that if one wants to study the Western classical music one would absolutely get a different picture if one studied through the performances of Isaac Stern and Mstislav Rostropovich than if one learned from the performances of a high school orchestra (Nettl 2005:374). So I choose to use three of the best musicians in Zanzibar

whom all work on a professional level teaching and performing music as their main source of income. They have all been traveling and touring around the world experiencing different styles of music and collaborating with musicians with different musical backgrounds.

Needless to say that without them this paper would not have been the same.

Names and pictures are used with courtesy of each informant. There are some statements in this paper that are not linked to a specific individual. This can be because the statement is of a general character or that the informant expressed a wish to not be quoted in specific. These statements might as well belong to other informants than the three main informants.

### **2.6.1 “Matona” Mohammed Issa Haji**

Mohammed Issa Haji, known as *Matona*, is 40 years old and born and raised in the village of Paje on the east coast of Zanzibar. His first meeting with music came through his father who played in kidumbak groups and taarab groups. Matona is one of the main figures in the active music life in Zanzibar, and an extraordinary talented musician. He is recording and making CDs, playing in restaurants and hotels, involved in many cross-cultural projects, traveling around the world playing both taarab and other musics with musicians of other styles. His main instruments are oud and violin, but he plays many instruments, that be string, wind, reeds and percussion, and he plays a vast type of genres of traditional East African music, Oriental and Arabic classical and modern music, and Western classical music and Euroamerican pop and jazz. He has an immense knowledge of, and interest for music and music’s history in Zanzibar. As his father also was a taarab musician Matona knows a lot of history and got his musical knowledge passed on from his father. He is the head teacher and a board member at the DCMA, and he is a vital part of building the schools curriculum and expanding its visions. He has helped me tremendously when it comes to the history of taarab, finding interesting people and topics, and details within the music.





Illustration 3: Matona and Said Nassor<sup>8</sup>

### 2.6.2 Rajab Suleiman

Rajab Suleiman is known to be one of the best qanun players in Zanzibar. He also is functioning as vice director of the taarab orchestra called Culture Musical Club. Like Matona he is an active musician playing around the island with various groups. Rajab is 32 years old and started playing music when joining the army in his twenties. He started first as a keyboard player playing modern taarab but is now professionally only playing qanun and traditional music. He is experimenting a lot musically and he is exploring music from all over the world using different techniques and broadening his musical repertoire. He has a great knowledge of the taarab repertoire of Zanzibar. Rajab is concerned on how to recruit young musicians into the traditional music genres and has a lot of thoughts on the development of taarab. Discussing the future of traditional music in Zanzibar with Rajab has been extremely valuable for the outcome of this paper. Rajab is teaching taarab and Oriental music at the DCMA.

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<sup>8</sup> Said Nassor formed the Ghazi Musical Club in 1958 and is a taarab legend.

### 2.6.3 Mahsin Basalama

Mahsin Basalama is 25 years old and already an experienced, talented qanun player and percussionist. His father, Ally Basalama was a legendary musician in taarab and other traditional genres. Mahsin's mother is a taarab singer. Mahsin is playing in many musical constellations, both western and eastern styles of music and he is playing with musicians from all over the world. He has a superior knowledge of Oriental music, Western music and African music. Mahsin has a good knowledge on, not just taarab, but also *kidumbak*, *beni* and the traditional *ngoma*<sup>9</sup> styles from Zanzibar. We have been discussing music and taarab in a greater context, and Mahsin has explained all the cultural aspects of Zanzibar I did not understand, and his help and support has been beyond all my gratitude.

## 2.7 Philosophical Hermeneutics

“...we insist on being guided by our concepts of the “complex whole”, but our field techniques and our conceptions of cultural and personal identity have widened. The concept of insider and outsider and their relationships have become even more complex.”

(Nettl 2005:187)

The definition of a field is according to Dan Lundberg and Gunnar Ternhag in “Musiketnologi”, the relation between *the objects* in the field (Lundberg & Ternhag 2002:39). That is between music, musicians, listener, social circumstances and the fieldworker. My task is to see music in both text and context. I have to go from the *emic* view, that is how I personally understand this music, and from the *etic* view, how I can study this music in an objective approach<sup>10</sup> (Nettl 2005:228-229). In the field I constantly attempt to be an “insider”. I socialize with people and learn their music. But at the end of the day I

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<sup>9</sup> Ngoma means drum in Kiswahili and includes all the traditional drum music.

<sup>10</sup> “Etic” (*Phonetic*) and “emic” (*Phonemic*) from linguist and anthropologist Kenneth Pike’s theory on *tagmemics* (Norwegian Encyclopedia [www.snl.no/Kenneth\\_Lee\\_Pike](http://www.snl.no/Kenneth_Lee_Pike) downloaded March 12 2010).

have to see what I have encountered with the eyes of an “outsider”. But as a fact, the further the research went, the harder it became to keep my original outside view. And I began to feel like I was a part of the field.

“Today I was interviewed by a person who, like me, is doing fieldwork on the music of Zanzibar. I was asked questions on taarab and Zanzibari culture, and I answered them as good as possible. I easily talked about the Zanzibar music and culture and how I interpreted this. I didn’t really give it much thought until after I had written in my field diary. It made me start thinking about my position in the field. What is my role in the field? At what layer of the field am I performing? And, am I now able to comprehend where my position is?”

(Field notes November 20<sup>th</sup> 2008)

The reason for this quest for a total understanding is the need to comprehend the relations between people in the field; a field the fieldworker is a part of. I can never observe in the field without influencing it with my presence. I am a part of the field, I influence the field and I interpret the field. In this way the field will be what I construct it to be. I define my field from my perceptions and prejudgments. I am the subject writing about it and this is my subjective view on it. But I am trying to reach objectivity by adding other anthropologists’ and ethnomusicologists’ ideas, techniques and methods as well as gaining an understanding of the field’s perception of it selves. This way I have to acknowledge that I interpret what is happening in the field from my viewpoint, but using the experience of other ethnomusicologists and anthropologists. My cultural inherited, and studied comprehension is reflected when I describe my view of the field. There will be other people in the same field interpreting differently than I do and therefore getting different conclusions on matters in the field. So what I am writing must be interpreted by the reader as my interpretation and it is up to the reader to interpret what I have been experiencing in the field. But the field, the way it really is, existed only at the time I was in the field. When I go back into the field next time I will have gathered new objective knowledge and gained new prejudgments to my cultural view and therefore interpret the field differently (Lundberg & Ternhag 2002:39-42).

In the field and in performing or composing music, whether it is in my office or intervening with people, I find the discourse on hermeneutics beneficial. It contains openness to its philosophies, binding ideas and praxis together. The action of the subject's constant questioning of the object has advantages, and of course disadvantages. Music science has, during its short history, tried to make universal laws and objective theories on music and its nature (Nettl 2005:1-15). But some of our latest ethnomusicologists claim that ethnomusicology is without any defining theory, because of the great variations of the fields. Timothy Rice writes that if ethnomusicology requires an objective unanimous paradigm it cannot be viewed upon as one single discipline (Rice 1997:103-104). The ethnomusicologist has to see all of ethnomusicology's contrapunctual theoretical lines as one distinguished method. "Ethnomusicology is woven by a polyphonic theoretical material" (ibid). Rice argues that it is important that the researcher has several theories to stand on, and that it is only in the researcher's favor to use theories from several sciences to get a broader insight to what one has been studying.

So, although many of us believe in something like multiple subjectivities and have abandoned the search for objective knowledge, we still tend to demand and trust in objective methods to demonstrate to colleagues our understandings of the other's intentions, feelings, perceptions, distinctions, and rules. It is at this contradiction that we really have to seek a new philosophical foundation for our ethnomusicology and our social sciences and to try to mediate the dichotomies we have inherited from the Western Enlightenment and pre-modern scientific traditions.

(Rice 1997:114)

One wishes to use objective methods and theories so one can communicate with colleagues within the field, in order to have the same basic perception and understanding for the colleagues' intentions, feelings, perceptions, differences and rules. But this becomes a utopia because one uses "multiple subjectivities" to get the required results and has therefore abandoned the search for an objective way, one true principle to go along. This shows that ethnomusicology and anthropology, sciences going out in the fields, need to constantly alter the discourse to fit the moving field.

Both Rice and Titon mention the phenomenologist Paul Ricoeur to be important for future ethnomusicology. Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) is an important part of the development of philosophical hermeneutics, first formulated by the theologian Rudolf Bultmann and further developed by Heidegger and Gadamer. The fundamental questions in hermeneutics are: *How is understanding possible* and *what happens when we understand* (Læg Reid & Skorgen 2002:10). *Verstehen* (understanding) was the major principle for interpretation of text in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is based implicitly or explicitly on an imagined dialog between the subject and the object. Explained in fieldwork it means a dialogue between fieldworker and field to seek understanding for the fieldworker's motives and goals. With the right questions the fieldworker's understanding and interpretation of the field gets far more comprehensive and helps him see past his prejudgments (Dalhaus 1983:72).

Philosophical hermeneutics takes as its task the opening up of the hermeneutical dimension in its full scope, showing its fundamental significance for our entire understanding of the world and thus for all the various forms in which this understanding manifests itself: from interhuman communication to manipulation in society; from personal experience by the individual in society to the way in which he encounters society; and from the tradition as it is built of religion and law, art and philosophy, to the revolutionary consciousness that unhinges the tradition through emancipatory consciousness.

(Gadamer 1976:18)

The interpretation will, according to Gadamer be a discussion between the object to be interpreted and the subject - the interpreter. The subject, the interpreter, gives the object questions and then acquire answers which brings new questions, which again makes a foundation for new questions and answers in a never-ending hermeneutic circle. The interpretation may never be concluded and the research will willingly not have a conclusion.

For me working in a field, this method might reveal nuances and bring forth new questions. But before one sets these questions one must know ones cultural prejudgments. Læg Reid says that it is important to know that it is hardest to see ones own prejudgments and that this is

really a difficult subject when it comes to writing down our impressions of phenomena and social situations without adding something from ourselves (Lægheid 2002:288). Paul Ricoeur states that the subject's understanding is culturally and historically constructed forms descended from the cultural forms like architecture, literature, language, music, art and so on (ibid). Timothy Rice calls it an *unbridgeable gulf* (Rice 1997:114) with the subject and the object on each side of a gulf. The gulf's size varies depending on the subject's understanding and experience of the object in what Ricoeur calls a *hermeneutic bow* (Lægheid 2002:287-304). The subject, the researcher, closes in on the object, the field, by moving dialectically back and fourth between rational and poetic language (Rice 1997:114). And in that way the interpreter, when encountering and analyzing something alien or "other", will enhance the understanding of ones' self. Ricoeur imagine that any reflection is linked to a connection of references, and the meaning of these reflections acts according to a transcendent world outside language (Lægheid 2002:291).

Another hermeneutic philosopher who continued Ricoeur's line of thoughts was anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Since the anthropologist does not have any super human ability to understand and to be empathic, he or she must find suitable methods to understand the field (Lægheid & Skorgen). Geertz tries to understand people's actions and choices based on the entire complex cultural symbols the people's actions are based on. At the same time all the cultural symbols will not be understandable before seeing the actions and choices of the individuals sustaining these cultural symbols. This system of cultural symbols is something Geertz state to be found in all levels of society. He uses the example of how individuals in a group define each other and how to find and understand hidden meanings in these definitions. The fieldworker's presumptuous expectations and cultural prejudgments will be confronted with the reactions, the self-interpretations and the actions of the field he or she wants to interpret and describe. And at this point to achieve interpretation Geertz recommends using terms close to ones own experiences instead of hiding findings in "abstract scientific language". This is to get closer to the symbolic understanding of the field at the same time as one has to use the discourse's terminology to create an objective distance for interpretation. One should go between language close to ones' experiences and the scientific terminologies, and strive to go in and out of the field with a dialectic sensibility (Skorgen 2002:323-337).

I see the gathered information, sound and social observations, as the text for interpreting, and my main reason to incorporate hermeneutic methods and philosophy is to never stop questioning, and to try as hard as I can to see all sides of the field. The worst that can happen is, according to anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen, “that you risk finding out what you thought was right, actually was wrong” (Eriksen 2001).

## 3 ZANZIBAR

### 3.1 On the map

Zanzibar is the name of an archipelago containing two big and a few smaller islands located in the Indian Ocean 40 kilometers outside the coast of Tanzania in the eastern part of Africa (Norwegian Encyclopedia [www.snl.no/zanzibar](http://www.snl.no/zanzibar) downloaded). The name Zanzibar, derives from Arabic traders calling it “Zinj el Barr” meaning *the land of the black*. Of the two main islands the largest island is called *Zanzibar Island* or *Unguja* in Kiswahili and the second largest is *Pemba Island*. The name Zanzibar is most common to use when talking about Unguja. All my fieldwork has been carried out in Zanzibar Island only, and the main parts of it in *Zanzibar town*. Zanzibar Town is the main city and capitol of Zanzibar and my fieldwork was executed in the central part known as *Stone Town*.

#### 3.1.1 Population, economy and politics

Zanzibar Island had in 2002 a population of 621000 people. Together with Pemba and the surrounding small islands Zanzibar is 1,1 million people. Zanzibar Town had a population of 206000 people in 2002 ([www.snl.no/zanzibar](http://www.snl.no/zanzibar)).

Zanzibar became a part of the Portuguese trading routes in the 15<sup>th</sup> century when Portuguese explorers made an attempt to discover a trade route to India. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Omani sultanate settled on the island and made it the capitol of Oman. The sultanate made Zanzibar the major port for slavery in East Africa. Zanzibar was widely known throughout the ancient and medieval worlds due to their involvement of inhabitants in international trade, linking the people and products of the African interior with markets and goods from the Red Sea, Persian Gulf and the wider Indian Ocean world. Swahili, and Zanzibari, people maintained ties with the maritime traders of the Oman and the Gulf area and therefore Zanzibar was a natural place for Omani headquarters to settle. Zanzibar became a British protectorate from 1890, but there was no difference from that and a colonized country. The English had the protectorate



till 1963 when Zanzibar gained independence and the sultanate and the government was overthrown in a revolution in 1964 (Fair 2001:10). Together with recently independent *Tanganyika* on the mainland, they formed the United Republic Of Tanzania the same year. The name Tanzania is from “Tan” of Tanganyika and “Zan” from Zanzibar. Politically it is a sovereign state within the Republic and it is governed by the Revolutionary Council and House of Representatives, whose members are elected and appointed by the people, in short Zanzibar is a semi-autonomous part of Tanzania. The president of Zanzibar is in 2010 Amani Abeid Karume from the *Chama Cha Mapundizi* (The Revolutionary Party) and he has had the presidency since October 2000. The next election will find place in the autumn 2010.

People’s personal income is mainly from fishing and farming. The island is very fertile and green and is often called *Spice Island* because of the numerous spices grown here. One of Zanzibar’s main exports used to be cloves, but this plunged seriously because of a drastic fall in clove prices during the 90’s. Also notable incomes for the islands are the expanding tourism industry and seaweed farming<sup>11</sup>.



Illustration 4: Map of Tanzania

<sup>11</sup> Seaweed is used as food thickener.

### 3.2 Zanzibar Town

The main area of settlement is Zanzibar Town situated in the center of the west coast. The town is divided into two sections by Creek Road. The creek is no longer there but it used to divide the town and one had to cross by boat, before a small bridge was build and eventually the creek was dried up and paved. When the Omani Sultanate had its headquarters in Zanzibar the creek divided Zanzibar Town into Stone Town, the “center” west side of town, mainly consisting of Omani, their workers and employees and traders and the Zanzibari living on the other side of the creek, the east side, called *Ng’ambo*, literally meaning *the other side* (Fair 2003). The name Stone Town comes from its architecture with tall buildings made of limestone divided by narrow streets. When the Omani and British were ruling Zanzibar, Stone Town was the area for the rulers and Ng’ambo for the Zanzibari people, but there was mixed ethnicity, and one found wealth and poverty on both sides (ibid:20). After the revolution in 1964 Omani and Yemeni settlers, and South Asians, were forced to leave the city and most had to leave the country (Mapuri 1996). The people of Zanzibar got the opportunity to take back and live in Stone Town. Still there is a great amount of people with South Asian, mainly Indian and Omani and Yemeni background living in Zanzibar.

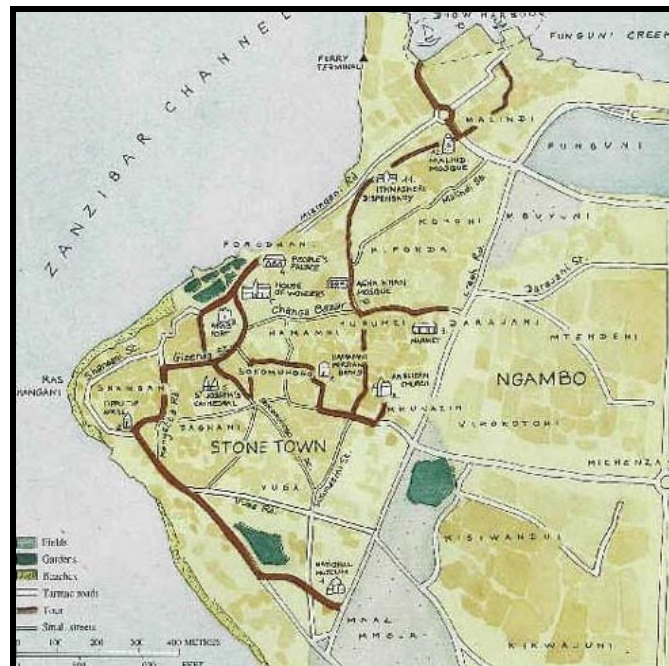


Illustration 5: Map of Zanzibar Town

## 4 Taarab

### 4.1 In the Audience

At the Haille Selassie School on Creek Road there is a concert held by the oldest taarab group in Zanzibar, *Nadi Ikhwan Safaa*. The concert is held in the evening, in the weekend or at holidays, and it starts after sunset and lasts until midnight. There is a big stage, with a roof set up in the end of the open courtyard of the school and a banner with the groups name is hung up on the back wall of the stage. There is a big PA-system and some stage lights. The courtyard is packed with white plastic chairs slowly, one by one being seated by extravagant clothed women and sharp looking men in all ages. The next thing that catches my eye is the presence of TVZ (TV Zanzibar) with cameramen and bright flashlights lighting up what they are filming. TV Zanzibar is recording a lot of the musical activities on the island, and it is usually broadcasted a few days later.

The concert is introduced in Kiswahili by a master of ceremonies. He is an old man in a suit and shirt and it seem, in the way musicians greet him on his way to the tip of the stage, that he is a highly respected man. I cannot fully understand everything he says, but apart from the usual presentation and welcoming there are jokes, which is very common for Zanzibari when they meet. People are listening, and laughing or commenting. I am just wishing I could have learned more Kiswahili, because I tend to loose important words or miss double meanings in his jokes.

The group starts playing a *taqsim*. This taqsim is an improvised part by the qanun, while the double bass and violins are keeping a drone, a continuous unison note, in the background. I notice the audience is merely keeping half an eye on the stage, and people are talking and still arriving, greeting each other and finding their seats. Women are dressed up in long silk dresses with ornaments and sequins. Accompanying the dress is a strong make up on eyes and lips and elegant hairstyles, or stylish wigs on the women who are not using a veil. And most of the women have painted hands and sometimes feet with the traditional henna

painting, ornamented lines going around the arm, running up the fingers before ending at the fingernails.

The group starts playing a song. A man, maybe 55 years old, is singing. He has a strong voice. And unison, as the singer starts on the melody, people next to me starts singing along, not loud, but by them selves in, what I figure, recollection of the song and appreciation for the music. The dressed up women starts dancing their way up to the stage, in a slow (or described as introvert, yet social) dance, holding up a 500 or 1000 Tanzanian Shilling bill in their hand, swinging the bill in circles. Many women gathers in front of the stage as the man continues to sing, and as the women reach the stage, they give the bill to the man, throw it at him or put it in a box next to the him. I have also seen, when the stage has been on the same level as the audience, that women stick the bill to the musicians' forehead. This action, called *Kutunza*, meaning to tip, is to show appreciation for the music, and the money is often the only pay the groups get. It is quite a sight when 20-30 women are dancing like this.

The concert goes on. The orchestra is huge. Besides the qanun, there are one oud, four violins, a double bass, two accordions, a keyboard, and bongo drums, riqq and tablah in the percussion. And placed behind the instrumentalists, I can see the backing singers, sitting on a line, with a microphone in their hand, gazing out in the air, looking a bit uninterested. But when coming in front and singing they start to flirt with the audience and make gestures accompanying the lyrics.

There are songs of love, songs of social differences and songs telling stories about cheating husbands, or moral lectures informing what is right or wrong, and often hidden behind symbolic depiction. Taarab is as much poetry as music, and Zanzibari has many ways to say one thing. I try as hard as I can to understand why the singer is singing about a cat drinking milk, and when I ask my friends the meaning of the story, I get a smile and a new story explaining the story of the song.

As more and more people go home for the evening, and the master of ceremonies talks less between the pieces, the orchestra plays its last tune and ends it in a long note fading out till silence. I am only hearing people talking to each other as they are getting up from the chairs

and going home. Uncustomary to a westerner like me, there is, like after every song, little or no applause. The appreciation is shown by comments and whistling during the songs and not after.

This is a general description of a taarab performance. Sitting in the audience, watching and listening, I understand how important taarab is for the Zanzibari culture, for the Zanzibari's life expressed through musical poetry. When taarab is at its best there is no musical form being close to its beauty, and in its unique organic, living way portraying the life of every Zanzibari.



Illustration 6: Performance with Nadi Ikhwan Safaa

Used with courtesy of Werner Graebner

## 4.2 Taarab Asilia

Taarab is today a term used for different kinds of music in Zanzibar, divided in *Asilia*, the *original* and also referred to as *ideal* taarab (Topp 1992) or *elitist* taarab (Khamis 2001) and *Mipasho*<sup>12</sup>, the modern taarab. There is also a related music form called *Kidumbak*.

The traditional taarab, in Kiswahili *taarab asilia*, is often referred to original, ideal or elitist taarab (Khamis 2001:149). In Zanzibar, and among Kiswahili speaking Zanzibaris one says taarab when referring to this type of music. Asilia is considered to have kept its sound ideal close to the music from the origins of the Middle East, still using instruments from Egyptian music. Even though it has a strong influence from Egyptian music, it has become unique in Zanzibar, continuously developing as it has done for more than a century. Today there are two big orchestras playing original taarab, Culture Musical Club and the 105-year-old Nadi Ikhwan Safaa, also known as the Malindi group. There are also several smaller groups, constructed to entertain the tourist industry, playing around the island.

The lyrics are, as mentioned above, metaphoric and poetic, and they can be about any important subject for the Zanzibari, and as in most music of the world, mainly love. It is the ideal taarab and musicians playing ideal taarab that are the focus of this paper. My informants emphasize that ideal taarab is for soothing the soul and it has a relaxing kind of mood, which is not found in the other kinds of music on the island.

The taarab referred to as *modern taarab*, named *mipasho* in Kiswahili, is a musical style based on the ideal taarab but with the use of electric instruments, especially keyboard and drum machine but also electric bass and guitar. The lyrics tend to be more forward, less metaphoric and to some extent they can often be vulgar. Mipasho also involves explicit stage performances and dancing containing sexual allusions in both lyrics and movements (Khamis 2002). Mohammed Ilyas says in the movie “Poetry in motion” (Askew/Graebner/Mulvihill 2008) that “modern taarab is taarab just with modern instruments”. But other musicians disagree, like Mahsin Basalama who said that “I don’t believe there is such a thing called

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<sup>12</sup> Means to confront someone who has been talking behind your back.

modern taarab”, meaning that it has nothing to do with the tradition of taarab asilia. Even though my informants know of, and some have on occasions played modern taarab, it is not taught at the Dhow Countries Music Academy, and I have not included it in my paper.

Kidumbak is somehow a musical tradition that derived from taarab. It is told to be a kind of taarab made by musicians who could not afford the Egyptian instruments, or did not have the opportunity to join one of the social clubs playing taarab. A lot of taarab musicians start their musical career as kidumbak players, before they move on to taarab. A kidumbak group is usually one violin, one *sanduku* and two drums, called kidumbak. The music is faster than taarab and has more rhythmic elements, but not the complexity of composition as taarab. There are also different ways of composing lyrics, and unlike taarab, kidumbak often involves dancing. The bass, called sanduku, meaning *box* in Kiswahili, is an instrument made by a box put on the floor with a stick attached with one thick piece of plastic string attached on top of the stick whilst the other end is placed on the box. The name of the music is named after the small hourglass shaped drums made out of clay.

These three forms of music, taarab, modern taarab and kidumbak are presented in separate venues and have a different place within society. Taarab asilia can be seen as a cultural *high* art form, being sophisticated and expresses no more meaning than the meaning one finds in music. The concerts are performed in a sophisticated manner for a polite audience who are listening to the music. It is used by the government in official matters, and as entertaining in weddings. In opposite of asilia, mipasho is vulgar. Verbally it builds sexual expectations outside the musical spear, being performed in bars and discos. It is purely entertainment, and it crosses cultural borders of the customary, and can be classified as a *low* form of art (Bourdieu 1984).

### 4.3 The History of Taarab in Zanzibar

It is of big importance for the understanding of the music of Zanzibar to know its origin, and which place it has at present, and which place it used to have in society in Zanzibar. Even though I am not basing my research on Zanzibar's music history, it has its place in a paper about taarab. Music historians are divided by a set of conceptual and methodological issues (Dalhaus 1983), and there is less emphasis on historical research in ethnomusicology than in musicology (Nettl 2005:272-277). Taarab has supposedly, and I think this is one of the most important aspects when looking at its origin, bloomed out from the Arabic trade and the Omani sultanate that had its main seat in Zanzibar. As mentioned before, for centuries Oman had a great deal of power, and controlled the trade from the Persian Gulf to the east coast of Africa, stretching as far as Zimbabwe and Mozambique in the south (Aschehoug og Gyldendals store leksikon 1992:495).

Under the attentive care of Seyyid, Zanzibar grew from an insignificant little town, rarely visited by shipping except to take on water and provisions, to the principle port on the western shores of the Indian Ocean, the chief entrepot of the African-Asian trade, and the home of the greatest slave market in the East. (Gordon 1989:186-187)

The island has a dark history being one of the main ports for the East African slave trade. Slaves were captured from all over East Africa where they were sent to Bagamoyo just north of Dar Es Salaam on the mainland Tanzania. From Bagamoyo the slaves were sent to a small island just outside Stone Town, for health checks and to prepare them for sale, and then they were sold in Stone Town. After being sold, a slave could be sent to any place that was connected to Zanzibar in the Indian Ocean. There are still buildings and places in Stone Town reminding us of the inhumanity and cruelties conducted by human beings on other human beings. The British abolished slavery in 1897, proclaiming a legal freedom of slaves, meaning that it was not fully a social or economic freeing of slaves. But by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the slave trade ended (Fair 2001).

It is told that the third Omani sultan in Zanzibar, sultan Bargesh Bin Said, who ruled from 1870 to 1880, had a big interest in Arabic music. He did therefore send one of his servants,



named Mohammed Bin Ibrahim, to Cairo to learn the music of Egypt. The story, as described by Janet Topp, is that Mohammed Bin Ibrahim came back from Egypt after a period of time with knowledge of Egyptian music, compositions from the Arabic world and, most importantly, instruments (Topp 1992). He then taught others how to play the instruments and songs he had learned from Egypt. This story was confirmed by my sources in Zanzibar. I would like to add some criticism to this history, because I found some older written material telling about Arabic instruments in Zanzibar. In the book *Zanzibar, City, Island and Coast* by Richard F. Burton published in 1872, Burton writes of local musicians playing on “the Tambire, or Arab barbut, a kind of lute” which is an oud or one of its close relatives from Arabic music, and one of the main instruments in Zanzibar taarab (Burton 1872). This shows that there already were Arabic instruments and music before Bargesh bin Said started to rule. Matona also told me that the stories tells of *dhow*s, ships, were the crew came to entertain the Sultans of Zanzibar with Arabic music, and I want to conclude that the sultan encouraged his staff to play Oriental music. The paths taarab has taken to become a part of Zanzibari culture is probably extremely complex in terms of cultural flow between people from different continents, and people on different sides of borders, and between people from different tribes; a cultural flow that has sprung out during a long aspect of time, and it cannot be as simple as springing out from one single source. Like Said A.M. Khamis says:

To say that taarab contain features of a typical ‘Indian Ocean music’, combining influences from Egypt, the Arabian peninsula, India and the West with local musical practices is apparently true but does not adequately capture the ambiguities and complexities of it’s protean nature. (Khamis 2001:145)

Khamis is saying that like many cultural phenomena in this world, taarab cannot be fitted into a “neat bag or squeezed into terse all-embracing definitions”. The background history of how the different occurrences are connected to each other is indeed complex, and it is better to keep searching for plausible stories on how taarab came to be what it is today in Zanzibar.

It is told that in the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century music was played at every occasion at the sultanate and that the local people, not admitted to these occasions, sat outside the sultans house, listening to the music of the Arabic rulers (Topp 1992:78). A great deal of culture

must have been exchanged between the Arabs and traders from India, Europe and East African and countries in the Middle East and with the local community.

Returning to the main source of trade, slaves, we can look at what happened after slavery was abolished. A great number of slaves were stationed on the island and after being freed, when slavery was abolished in 1897, continued to live in Zanzibar (Gordon 1989: 207)<sup>13</sup>. The cultural exchange between freed slaves staying in Zanzibar must have been executed to a great extension. Some historians conclude that almost 55 percent of the slaves arriving Zanzibar stayed there and worked on the clove farms on the island (ibid: 188). This means that a big number of people from all over East Africa met in Zanzibar and stayed there after the abolishment of slavery in 1897. It is fair to assume that many of the freed slaves engaged cultural exchanges, and developed their own cultural entities.

Richard F. Burton describes the music in Zanzibar in 1870 as monotonous and “all in the minor key, and the song being a mere recitative without change of words” (Burton 1872:430-431). Not really simple to understand if it is a version of Arabic music he was listening to or something of a ngoma style or a musical fusion. He gives a good description of the instruments and the surrounding circumstances.

“The Wasawahili have all the African passion for the dance and song: they may be said to exist upon manioc and betel, palm-wine and spirits, music and dancing. The Ngoma Khu, or huge drum~ a hollowed cocoa-stem bound with leather braces, and thumped with fists, palms, or large sticks, plays an important and complex part in the business of life: it sounds when a man falls sick, when he revives, or when he dies; at births and at marriages; at funerals and at festivals; when a stranger arrives or departs; when a fight begins or ends, and generally whenever there is nothing else to do. It is accompanied by the 'Siva,' a huge pipe of black wood or ebony, and by the 'Zumari,' a more handy variety of the same instrument. On occasions which justify full orchestras, an 'Dpatu,' or brass pan, is placed upon the ground in a wooden tray, and is tapped with two bits of palm-frond. Some wealthy men possess gongs, from which the cudgel draws lugubrious sounds. The other

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<sup>13</sup> The slave trade continued for at least ten more years, and it was finally totally abolished in East Africa in 1907 (Gordon 1989:207)

implements are 'Tabl,' or tomtoms of gourd, provided with goatskin; the Tambire, or Arab Barbut, a kind of lute; the Malagash 'Zeze,' a Calabash-banjo, whose single string is scraped with a bow; and finally horns of the cow, of the Addax, and the Oryx antelopes.“

(Burton 1872:430)

This is a unique description of the instrumentation and music in Zanzibar at the end of the 1860s. This ethnography describes the use of instruments from the Arabic parts of the world, but also traditional Tanzanian instruments such as Zeze<sup>14</sup> and cow horns together with local wooden drums and performed by the “wasawahili”, the Swahili people.

#### 4.4 Oriental Music Theory

Taarab, being performed on Oriental instruments, uses mostly theoretical explanations from Oriental music theory. The tonal system is based on a system of scales, or more precise, modes called *maqam*, or plural *maqamat*. The structures within these *maqamat* are divided into quartertones. Simply explained one can say that the octave is divided into 24 notes, and not 12 as common in modern European music. There is, however, not an exact size of the quarter note. A *half flat* note does not have a fixed pitch for all the *maqamat*.

In fact, the breadth of deviation of this musical step is a crucial ingredient in the peculiar flavor of Arabian music. To temper the scale by dividing the octave into twenty-four quarter –tones of equal size would be to surrender one of the most characteristic elements of this musical culture.

Touma 1996:23-24)

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<sup>14</sup> Zeze is an instrument resembling a violin. It has one up till five strings. The strings are connected to the neck, a stick pointing vertically, and placed on a resonant gourd and played with a wooden bow.

Oriental music is written with European accidental marks and quarter notes are written in a modified form. The modified forms are  $\flat$  for *half flat*, which lowers a tone by a quartertone and  $\sharp$  for *half sharp*, which raises a tone by a quarter note.

A maqam is built up by *jins*, or *ajnas* in plural, which are trichords, tetrachords or pentachords. The name of the maqam is often the name of the lower jins in the maqam, like the maqam *kurd*, which is the jins (tetrachord) kurd, D, E $\flat$ , F, G and the jins (tetrachord) *Nahawand*, G, A, B $\flat$ , C. And the full maqam kurd is D, E $\flat$ , F, G, A, B $\flat$ , C and D.

As for Arabic music the quartertone is a natural ingredient in taarab. But it there is not quarter notes in all maqamat, and therefore not quartertones in all music. A vast amount of Culture Musical Club’s music is composed in the maqam *kurd*, which has the same notes as the *phrygian mode* of western music. An example is Culture’s “Jipeleleze” (illustration 7) composed by Rashid Mussa. Older popular songs like “Nipepe” (illustration 8) and “Yalaiti” (illustration 9) are in maqam Ajam, which is similar to the major scale of western music. Other songs, like “Arebaba Pakistani” (illustration 10) and “Watu Wananiuliza” (illustration 21 page 70) are in the maqam *Nahawand-hijaz*, sounding like the western scale of harmonic minor, and/or *Nahawand-Kurd*, which is similar to a natural minor.

### Jipeleleze



Illustration 7: excerpt from “Jipeleleze” composed by Rashid Mussa.

### Nipepe



Illustration 8: excerpt from “Nipepe” composed by Seif Salum.

## Yalaiti



Illustration 9: excerpt from “Yalaiti”, traditional, performed by Siti Binti Saad.

## Arebaba Pakistani



Illustration 10: excerpt from “Arebaba Pakistani”, traditional, performed by Siti Binti Saad.

Improvising in Oriental music using maqamat is called *taqsim*. It has a set of rules on how to handle the maqamat. The improviser introduces one jins, presents a maqam and then modulates to another jins for then to go into a new maqamat before returning to the “tonic” jins. There are many levels of executing a taqsim, and the most virtuous oriental musician knows his way around all maqamat. The taqsim is very often rhythmically non-metric, and played solo or accompanied by a single background note. Other times, but more seldom, it is metric, but then often played with a non-metric feel, giving it a rhythmically “floating” effect. The way a taqsim should be performed is up to the arranger of the music to decide.

### 4.5 Taarab Instruments

The instruments in ideal taarab are similar to the instruments of the classical oriental music from northeast Africa and the Middle East. Musicians I have talked to tell about difficulties get a hold of instruments, because they have to be bought and shipped from countries like Egypt or Turkey, and they are expensive instruments. Both the big groups in Zanzibar, Culture Music Club and Nadi Ikhwan Safaa have their own collections of instruments and also the DCMA, which is of great importance for the continued existence of taarab in its original form. The music’s future relies on the maintenance of the instruments.

### 4.5.1 Oud

The oud is a fretless short-necked lute with a drop shaped body. It is one of the most common instruments in Oriental music. The oriental music theory, the measurement of each tone, the quarter note system, derives from the nature of the oud. In Zanzibar it is usual to have nine strings, four pairs and one single, the deepest single string is tuned in F followed by A – D – G and C stringed in pairs. Sometimes there is a darker C below the F, but this is not common in Zanzibar, even though there is a space for it on the instruments. It seems like musicians have the C bass string if strings are available. Some musicians have proper oud strings, made by international brands, others use strings for classical guitar, which are easier than oud strings to find in shops, and some use fish lines, which is available everywhere and very cheap. The problem with fish lines is that it is impossible to get the correct gauge, and that fish lines are not properly stretched and ready for playing like the boutique made strings are. The consequence being that the tone tends to sink in pitch, and falls easily out of tune.

The string is plucked with a plectrum called *rishah*. The quill of an eagle feather originally made the rishah but this is rare today, not common at all in Zanzibar and they use rishah made by plastic, and many make them themselves by using the plastic from DVD covers or similar. The rishah is flat and approximately 10 centimeters long and shorter than half a centimeter wide. The rishah is held between thumb and index finger and goes through the fist to the little finger. Normally the oud is played with alternating upstrokes and down strokes. A good oud player knows how to play the maqamat technically and well intonated and with a well-balanced use of the rishah.



Illustration 11: Oud

#### 4.5.2 Qanun

The qanun has a trapezoid shaped body and the musician plays it sitting down with the qanun on his lap or on a table or a qanun stand. The bass strings are closest to the player and the highest pitch furthest away. There are from sixty three to eighty-four strings<sup>15</sup> that are arranged and tuned in sets of three, so that the neighboring strings produce the same tone. The tonal range is in Arabic terms, from *qarara-jaharkaah* to *jawab-kurdan*, which is from F1 to C2, in western terms, and it is tuned diatonically according to the piece to be played. Near the tuning pegs there are 4 attachable and detachable metal bridges, called *urab*, which is used to tune the strings (see illustration 13). It alters the length of a set of strings to change the tuning to flat, half-flat, sharp or half-sharp. This way tuning can be changed rapidly and the player can easily go between different maqamat and modalities.

The strings are plucked with a pick, like a rishah but shorter, attached by a ring around the tip of the index fingers. The players often pluck the strings with a rapid tremolo and there are various playing techniques to produce different sounds. It is quite common to play the right and left hand an octave apart. In Zanzibar today it is the most virtuous instrument with a handful of very good players. The leading qanun players are young and willing to practice and learn, and they tend to look outside of Zanzibar, like the Middle East or Turkey, to discover new music. And young Zanzibari qanun players are constantly developing their musicality and technique.

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<sup>15</sup> This depends on the qanun. In Zanzibar they have Qanuns with 78 strings in use now.



Illustration 12: Rajab Suleiman and his qanun



Illustration 13: Qanun: The risha and the tuning pegs (urab)

### 4.5.3 Violin

The violin is a European instrument and also very common in classic Oriental music, and in Zanzibar in taarab and kidumbak. It can be played both with a bow on the strings and plucked. To play with bow is the most common and plucking is often used to get a percussive



effect, when, for example, playing backing patterns for the vocalist or one of the other instruments' *taqsim*. The violin group is the biggest group in the ideal taarab orchestra. In Zanzibar the majority of players hold the bow between the thumb facing the player and the rest of the four fingers on the upper side with the little finger about ten centimeters from the bow end.

#### **4.5.4 Ney (Nāy)**

The ney is an end blown cane flute. It is made by plastic or natural material (bamboo or cane). As it has no mouthpiece it is considered difficult to play and there are not many players in Zanzibar playing ney today. It has six front holes played with the right hand, and one back hole for the left hand thumb. The range is up to three octaves. The natural cane, or bamboo, is very unstable and the unpredictability in the instrument makes the tuning difficult to control and fit with the other instruments. This might be why it is not widely used in taarab. But there are a few good elderly ney players in Zanzibar.

#### **4.5.5 Cello**

The cello, like the violin, comes from the European music tradition via oriental music. It is supposed to have been a great part of the taarab orchestra but somewhere along the way it must have fallen behind and disappeared from the present line up. The explanation for this can be the instrument's size and the warm and humid climate in Zanzibar with its salty air from the ocean demolishing wood and metal. Now it is on its way back into the orchestras and the tradition. Both Nadi Ikhwan Safaa and Culture Musical Group has cello in their orchestras now, but they are not always playing at performances.

#### 4.5.6 Accordion

The accordion is in taarab used more or less as a melodic instrument only. The type of accordion I observed in Zanzibar was the piano accordion. I did not hear any accordion players using the left side of the instrument. Some players can use the left keyboard for drones, and chords are infrequently played with the right hand, but this is rare to hear. Taarab is heterophonic, like oriental classical music, based around melody and not chords. In Zanzibar I heard musicians saying that the accordion replaced the harmonium that came from India<sup>16</sup>, maybe inspired from Indian film music and the imported by shipping and trade between Zanzibar and India.

#### 4.5.7 Double Bass

Like Violin and cello the double bass comes from European music via oriental classical music. The double bass usually holds a mixed role between playing the melody with the rest of the group and playing short separate bass lines; there are some notes following the melody and some keeping the beat, and marking a tonic note. It is most commonly plucked and rarely played with a bow. Using a bow is not excluded, and can be used to hold a long note, for instance in solo parts. At other times the bass is played in a way that sounds like the *sanduku* in kidumbak orchestras, very percussive and not tonally significant.

#### 4.5.8 Riqq

The riqq is a tambourine made of clay, wood or aluminum with a varying number, but around ten pairs of cymbals set in the frame of the tambourine. Traditionally it is covered with fish- or goatskin. It is played holding the riqq with the left hand by the thumb and fingers, keeping the fingers so that one can strike the rim of the frame while holding the drum. The right hand is for drumming on the center and the edge of the membrane. This gives the sound of light and heavy beats. At the same time the cymbals are sounding. Taarab compositions usually

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<sup>16</sup> It came to India from Western Missionaries (Norwegian Encyclopedia <http://snl.no/India/musikk>)

keep a firm rhythmic pattern, sometimes altering the pattern to follow the composition, and sometimes incorporating improvised fills. One can also play directly on the cymbals giving the instrument another character, and alter between the two techniques.



Illustration 14: Mahsin Basalama playing riqq

#### **4.5.9 Tablah (or *Dumbak* or *Darbukka*)**

Tablah is an hourglass shaped drum often made of clay or metal. It is a very important part of the rhythm section of taarab. It comes from the oriental music tradition and is imported from the Middle East. It is played resting the drum on the left thigh. With the left hand it is tapped by using the ring finger and one makes ornaments with the remaining fingers (not the thumb) while the right hand keeps the weighted beat. It has a wide range of sounds and is very popular in Oriental music. Like the riqq, and together with it, the tablah keeps a steady beat pattern, frequently ornamented and altered. It has many names but is in Zanzibar referred to it as tablah, not to confuse with the Indian *tabla*. A local variation in shape is the *kidumbak*, but it is never used in taarab.



Illustration 15: Mahsin Basalama playing tablaha

#### **4.5.10 Bongo drums**

As in Arab music taarab has the Cuban bongo drum in the rhythm section. It is a pair of small drums, the one slightly bigger than the other made out of wood, metal or composite materials joint together by a thick piece of wood. The bongo drums are often factory made and, unlike other percussion in Zanzibar, have a modern tuning system, similar to the drums of a modern drum set. Like the other percussive instruments it is played following certain patterns. In the rhythm section it is the instrument with the most “open” part, meaning it is played more freely, while the others keep their patterns.



Illustration 16: Bongo drums

#### 4.5.11 Keyboard

Surprising to many, the electric keyboard has become a part of the ideal taarab in both Culture Musical Club and Nadi Ikhwan Safaa. It is usually played with some sort of string sound, to blend in with the violins on the melody. It was only in the bigger groups that I encountered the use of keyboard.

All these instruments mentioned above gives us the characteristic sound that taarab has. It is understandable that the sound often reminds of music from the Middle East but not to a certain of where. Oud player Ahmad Al Khatib from Palestine thought that some taarab sounded in his ears as “[...] a mix of Omani (Arab Gulf) rhythms with Melodies influenced by Egyptian music (folk+classical), with African touch [...]”.

## 4.6 Other significant instruments in Zanzibar

### 4.6.1 Ngoma

*Ngoma* is the word for drum in Kiswahili and the name is used for the local wooden drums used in music in Tanzania. They are found in different shapes and sizes, made out of wood covered with cow or goatskin. All the different styles of traditional drum music are also called *Ngoma*. None of the ngoma drums are a part of ideal taarab but worth mentioning since it is an important part of traditional music in Zanzibar, and a part of the musical vocabulary.



Illustration 17: Ngomas of Zanzibar

### 4.6.2 Sanduku

The Sanduku is the instrument that defines the sound of the style kidumbak. It is a box with a stick upon where a string is attached from the box to the top of the stick. The name sanduku means box in Kiswahili. It is played by plucking the string with one hand and moving the stick to loose or tighten the string to form different pitches, often in a rapid ascending or



descending glissando. The string is an extremely thick fishing line. It has a very percussive and fat sound thus with a clear tone. The sanduku is not used in taarab, only in kidumbak. But I mention it here since kidumbak is an important part of Zanzibar's music culture and many taarab musicians plays kidumbak as an introduction to taarab and many are still playing kidumbak on occasion.



Illustration 18: The author playing sanduku

#### 4.6.3 Kidumbak

The style of music called *Kidumbak* is named after a small hourglass clay drum. It is simply made out of clay with goatskin and it is not ornamented like the tablah (dumbak), but often painted. It is an important part of the kidumbak orchestra. It is not in use in taarab, but it is, like the sanduku, a traditional instrument of Zanzibar used in a related music form. The

dumbak is played with regular drumming technique, like the dumbak, and one can, by putting the left hand inside the back of the drum, drum alter the pitch of the drum. Taking the hand in or out while beating the drum creates an ascending/descending pitch.



Illustration 19: Kidumbak

In taarab orchestras from other areas of the Swahili coast one can find electric guitar, organ, but also different windpipes, reeds and brass instruments.



## 4.7 Venues

There are four different venues where taarab is performed for an audience. These have different roles for the audience. The first venue, and most frequent, is in the hotels and restaurants around the island. This is where the smaller groups, a kind of “chamber” taarab groups, play (Madsen 2007:53). These chamber groups play a set of music to the crowd of mostly non-Zanzibari people. They often put a few popular Western songs into their repertoire to please the management and audience. Musicians told me that they play Western music in the taarab repertoire as a way of surprise to acquire extra attention from the crowd, who usually are guests at the restaurant for a meal or a drink in the evening.

Many of the musicians I talked to usually do not fully appreciate these jobs as a matter of art, but as something they do to make an income, a way of keeping music as a profession. I have a big understanding of this being a jazz musician and sometimes have to play evergreens or other “crowd-pleasers” in order to have the possibility to continue working with music, and it is fully understandable that they do not appreciate these jobs compared to a concert where they are fully in control of the repertoire. But there is a big difference between the venues and the attitude of the performers. Matona has a stable group that is playing regularly at the Monsoon restaurant, and in other hotels on the island. Matona is also using this group with his other projects, like the fusion project with belly dancer Tamalyn Dallal, where they mix Arabic dance and music with Zanzibari dance and music and Western classical ballet and music. The group uses these pieces in their performances at the restaurant to make the band and the pieces better, but also to “make the repertoire more interesting”. Matona works hard to make a unique and excellent group, and therefore uses a lot of time, and any opportunity to work, on details with his fellow musicians.

There were some hotels and restaurant playing taarab on a regular basis during my fieldwork in Stone Town: The Serena In, Mercury’s Restaurant, Beit el Chai, 365 Hurumzi and The Monsoon. Apart from these, many of the vast amounts of hotels and beach resorts outside town, on the coasts of Zanzibar, has taarab as entertainment on a regular basis.

The second venue for performing taarab in Zanzibar is at the two major festivals on the island. It is the film festival, *Zanzibar International Film Festival* (ZIFF) and a festival for traditional music from all over the world called *Sauti za Busara*<sup>17</sup>. These festivals draw a big crowd from all over the world. ZIFF presents both music and films. They both have taarab and other traditional Swahili music, at the same time as presenting art forms from all over the world. As examples, in 2008 Culture Musical Club played at both festivals and there was a premiere on a documentary film on Nadi Ikhwan Safaa at the film festival. My personal highlight must have been the performance by the famous taarab singer Bi Kidude at Sauti za Busara February 2009.

The third venue is the local arrangements for both public and official matters where Culture Musical Club or Nadi Ikhwan Safaa performs. There is also a group called *Sanaa Taarab Group*, or *The National Group*, that has taarab musicians from both the two mentioned groups but also musicians who are not members of any of these. The National Group performs at different state matters and at official and governmental fund raisers.

These arrangements are held at big locations in town or in the outskirts of town, in suitable big gathering halls. My description in the beginning of this chapter is from one of these events. These performances are always attended by a lot of audience with a majority of people from Zanzibar.

The fourth venue is the concerts arranged by the Dhow Countries Music Academy. The DCMA has a monthly concert where students and teachers perform for a mixed crowd of tourists, expatriates and locals. There can be theme nights showing one genre, or there are evenings where all the orchestras at the academy play, or the presentation of a workshop. The DCMA has at the end of every school year a big public concert outside of the academy's location.

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<sup>17</sup> Translated from Kiswahili means "Sounds of Wisdom".



Illustration 20: A student taarab orchestra performing at DCMA April 2009

#### 4.8 Music and Lyrics

As mentioned before a full taarab orchestra, including singers, consists of up to thirty people. How many of each instrument can vary and often there is a group of singers functioning as backing singers who are taking turns on being solo singers. Sometimes there is one violin; other times there are more. I was told that the instruments in the group often depend on which musicians are present.

The music is heterophonic in the sense that the melody is played by all melodic instruments and very seldom accompanied by a counter melody or chord progression. It is most common that the melody is played unison by the entire orchestra supported by the rhythm section, including the bass. The rhythm section usually contains tablah, bongo drums and riqq. Each percussive instrument plays their separate pattern, and played together the drums make a total rhythmic structure. The bass follows the melody for a few lines and then keeps the rhythm and the ground note in other parts. Some songs are completely instrumental, and referred to

as *bashraf*, which is a term from Turkish instrumental music and an adopted term in Zanzibar taarab. Other compositions are either with male or female vocals.

Though music in Zanzibar has many foreign influences, its individuality is by many Zanzibari said to be found in the nature of the language. The lyrics are the most important ingredient in a taarab composition. The composition of taarab lyrics is distinguished from the composition of lyrics of other types of music in East Africa for its “preparedness and detachment” (Khamis 2001:46). This means that they are composed before they are put into music and not created impromptu whilst composing melody as in other parts of the East African region. As Khamis writes, the lyrics are relying on “strict and rigid rules of prosody, its a shape resembling that of Arabic poetry often claimed to be its precursor” (Khamis 2001:46). In the footnote Khamis says:

I use the word “shape” here to counter the longstanding claim that Swahili traditional poetry is an outright imitation of Arabic poetry. The word *shape* refers to the *externality* of a poem – that is a way a poem is perceived on the surface rather than how it is composed internally. I reserve the words *form* and *structure* for a reference to its inner mechanism, the linguistically intrinsic features and their cultural endowment that give uniqueness to the poetry of a certain language and culture and distinguish it from poetry of other languages and cultures. We maintain that is from these intra-structural criteria and their cultural concomitants that we can distinguish a given poetry from poetry of other languages and cultures.

(ibid)

The lyrics are written after a poetic formula known as *Shairi*. *Shairi* encompasses a number of poetic forms categorized according to the number of lines (*mshororo*) in a stanza (*ubeti*), how lines are divided into segments (*vipande*, sing. *Kipande*), the number of syllables (*harufi*) in a line and the rhyme scheme (Topp 1992:61). It is very common that a poem has three or four lines. These lines have 16 syllables, often divided in two, becoming two phrases of eight. The group of eight syllables rhymes with each other, and the end of each line. A poem has three or four verses each alternating with a chorus, called *kiitikio*, consisting of two lines. It is not always this strict, but a common frame for the poetry used in taarab. As an example of traditional lyrics is the very popular song called *Watu Wananiuliza*, the text,

shairi is by Mohammed Ahmad, and the music is composed by Seif Salum. In performing this song every line is repeated before going to the next.

Verse           Watu wananiuliza / Kipi niloenda kwako  
                  Laiti ningeliweza / Kupata Ridhaa yako  
                  Wao Ningewaeleza / Wakajua siri yako

Chorus           Kipi nilopenda kwako / Watu wananiuliza  
                  Nataka ridhaa yako / Nipate kuwaeleza

Laiti Ungeliridhia / Ningetaja Sifa Zako  
Nao wakakisikia / Kisa cha kuganda kwako  
Pepo Nimeshaingia / Sipababnduki nilipo

Chorus

Wivu umewaanadama / Vipi nikapenda kwako  
Nawaseme wanosema / Silitupi pendo lako  
Katu sitorudi nyuma / Usihofu moyo wako

Chorus

Wangapi unaowaju / Sijaona sa yako  
Wote Nimewabagua / Sababu ya uzuri wako  
Katu hawatonitoa / Nikakosa raha zako

Chorus

The lyrics are based on proverbs and metaphors. The ideal taarab is today almost exclusively about love. How wonderful it is, how terrible it is and all the things love can do to a person. Sometimes in Zanzibar's history there has been taarab containing political propaganda, maybe made for a specific campaign or arrangement, but that is not the taarab that has stayed in people's hearts. I spoke to some elder musicians remembering playing taarab with lyrics praising the revolution, where the government made a set of rules on what lyrics should contain and, especially right after the revolution, that the music should have more the feeling of a military march. The group of the "mother of taarab" Siti Binti Saad composed lyrics with a sociopolitical context for the non-Arab people, especially those living in the urban part of Ng'ambo.

Musicians I talked to, who have reflected on the issue of how taarab sounds different from the Arab influence, suggest that it lies within the differences in the languages. The linguistics of Kiswahili influences the rhythm patterns in the music. The way words are being articulated and phrased influences the tonal sound produced and the rhythm, and that makes taarab unique and different from the Egyptian music.

Each verse is sung to the same music. As in *Watu Wananiuliza*, and very often in taarab, there is an instrumental introduction, and the verses are separated by an instrumental interlude. Illustration 21 shows the instrumental interlude in *Watu Wananiuliza*, the piece is in maqam Nahawand D.



Illustration 21 Interlude of *Watu Wananiuliza*

#### 4.9 Siti Binti Saad, the mother of taarab

It was surprising in this historical and cultural context that a countryside girl from a poor family, her parents being freed slaves, gave taarab fame, and made the music, originally reserved to Arabic ruling class, embraced by the local population. She is in Zanzibar called the “mother of taarab” and is often referred to as the originator of the Zanzibar taarab.

Siti Binti Saad was the daughter of freed slaves originated from the mainland of Tanzania, taken to Zanzibar and sold as slaves (Fair 2001). After being freed her father became a farmer and had a small piece of land on the countryside in Zanzibar. Her mother made and sold pottery, a skill that Siti also adopted and helped out doing. In 1911 she moved in to the Ng’ambo area of Zanzibar Town, like many other poor people did, looking for jobs and income. Siti sold pottery and the legend has it that she sang to attract customers. In town she met some musicians who played taarab, the legend saying it was on the market while singing.

In the period of 1895 and 1920 taarab gradually moved into the public spear as young men from wealthy and politically connected families began playing it as their own music (ibid). In 1905 the first non-royal taarab orchestra was formed called *Nadi Ikhwan Safaa*, and in 1910 the second one came called *Nadi Shub*. During the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the two orchestras were competing and taarab became familiar to a bigger part of the urban population.

Probably around World War I, one of the musicians of the time named Muhsin Ali, met Siti. This is according to the legend as it is told among musicians in Zanzibar. Muhsin Ali started to teach Siti the Arabic language, reciting the Koran, and introduced her to Egyptian music. And, importantly, he helped her train her voice for singing and formed the group with Siti. In the beginning they performed mostly Egyptian music, singing in Arabic, similar to the music of Umm Kulthûm<sup>18</sup>, but they started early to compose songs in Kiswahili, which were performed in informal venues according to Fair. The group was small and consisted of four, including Siti. Siti got a reputation as a marvelous singer and it is told that not a wedding or

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<sup>18</sup> Umm Kulthûm (1904-1975) was a very famous female singer from Egypt, recording more than 300 records (Bohlman 2002).

any kind of feast was held without her singing. But it was when Siti Binti Saad started singing taarab in Kiswahili that the music and the taarab songs became popular among the local population, especially in the area of Ng'ambo when singing songs with contents of social concern. Within Zanzibari customs and tradition women seldom participated in men's activities in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, so when Siti performed with her group she usually had her head and body covered completely by a veil, or she was standing behind a wall. Soon her music got very popular among the population in Ng'ambo but also the wealthy parts of Stone Town. She played at many festive occasions, like weddings and gatherings around the island, such as fundraisers and concerts out in the open. "The new form for taarab created by Siti Binti Saad and her band was one cultural symbol that gave musical expression to the desire of Zanzibar's burgeoning urban population to be recognized as full citizens of island society" (Fair 2001:175). The music became a political mean and an identity for the people of Zanzibar.

In March of 1928, as the Ng'ambo<sup>19</sup> ground strike moved into high gear, Siti Binti Saad and her taarab band traveled to Bombay for their first recording session. Although the band was absent during the height of the strike, their music played a critical, if indirect, role of bringing the strike to fruition, as the band's music helped to craft the community and mold the class consciousness that were at the root of the strike. (...) In Addition, Siti Binti Saad and her band used their skills as performers to give poetic form to the often trenchant critiques of economic and political power that circulated in Ng'ambo during the period between the two world wars. Their songs assessed the inequalities that permeated urban society and literally created a record of the thoughts and visions expressed by their friends and neighbors in Ng'ambo about alternative ways to structure personal and social relations.

(ibid:169)

In 1928 she was so well known and had so much fame that she was invited by the record company *Columbia and His Masters Voice* to record in Bombay<sup>20</sup> in 1928. On that album there were songs both in Arabic and Kiswahili. The spread of the record made her popular in

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<sup>19</sup> Ng'ambo meaning other side was the area east of Stone Town splitting the two parts with a creek. In general the rich lived in Stone Town and the poor in Ng'ambo (Fair 2001:20)

<sup>20</sup> Now called Mumbai, changed its name in 1995.



a broad sense, by poor people, rich people, in Africa and the Arabic parts of the world (Topp 1992:76-80).

This is one shairi from Siti's group showing how direct and bold they were comparing to the time. They ask for understanding and respect between people and not to be treated differently even though one is poor. This kind of lyrics addressed in Kiswahili to the people in general made taarab reach a large part of the urban and suburban community. This example is called "The Poem of What Poverty Does".

Hufanyani la kufanya akapendeza fakiri  
Machoni akalingana kwa mfano wa tajiri  
Hayana jihad hayana nimekwisha takbiri

Ufakiri ni dhaifu mfano waje kama nasi  
Japo uwe mtukufu uwake kama johari  
Lazima hufanywa dufu huwi katika shauri

Ufakiri kama kiza hakina nuru  
Jamii hukufukuza na uwe mtu fakiri  
Huna litalopendeza kwa saghiri na kabiri

Na akili halingani sawa na mwenye kururi  
Zaliwa bitakweni safi minal kadiri  
Watu hukufanya nyani aula hinziri

Ufakiri jambo zito aliloumba Kakhari  
Mkubwa huwa mtoto na rijali huwa thori  
Usemalo kama ndoto mwema hufanya ayari.

Tajiri ahali makadirie pasipo mtu kusema

Translation:

There is nothing you can do to make a poor person look good  
If you compare him/her with the example of someone who is rich  
There is no struggle that can overcome it, I have finished  
God is great.

Poverty is powerlessness its example is like a reed  
Even if you should become an honored person and you shine like a jewel  
You are always treated as dumb and useless, you are never consulted

Poverty is like darkness and darkness has no light  
Society will disregard you as if you were a beggar;  
You have nothing that will please the young or the old.

Your intelligence does not compare to someone with money  
Born with more good manners than wealth and power  
You will always be treated like a baboon, or worse, like a female slave

Poverty is a heavy thing, the one who created it Confusion  
An adult is always considered a child, and the manliest of men mere animal  
Your words are treated like a dream, an honest person is always made out to be  
a rogue

A rich person is always among those who are counted without even having to speak

Translation Laura Fair (Fair 2001:7-8)

## 4.10 The revolution

The revolution in 1964 marked an end of colonization and Arabic rule, and it also shook taarab off its foundation and sent it suddenly into a different direction more or less over night (Topp 1992:98-101). In the 1960's Africa had a number of revolutions where countries aspired for their independence and so did Zanzibar. The British gave up the protectorate in Zanzibar in 1962, but the Omani rulers were still on the island, owning most of the land and therefore having the main power. This led to a short revolution in 1964 where the Zanzibari people basically took their land back (Mapuri 1996). The revolution was led by John Okello from Uganda, a character who was very popular among the local population and he made himself an army called the 4<sup>th</sup> brigade. In some stories Okello was for the Zanzibar revolution what Che Guevara was for the Cuban revolution. He formed a small army of determined African nationalists and led them into a blood bath killing somewhere between 5000 and 17000 Indians and Arabs and their descendents in one night<sup>21</sup>. One elder man I met, who lived out in a village during the revolution, told me he could remember seeing dead bodies everywhere after Okello's men had raided his village, and they were not Arabs. He meant the mob had taken advantage of the situation and killed neighbors for land or to get rid of internal disputes. The sources are of course not unison or recorded. More stories tell about Okello's army going from village to village shooting with automatic weapons on all kinds of people. The book *Zanzibar: The 1964 Revolution: Achievements and Prospects* (Mapuri 1996) tells a more moderate story of the actual killings and emphasizes that Okello used strong words and threats "in the hope of instilling fear in his listeners" and that the real casualties were minimal (ibid:54). In the book *Heban*, by Ryszard Kapuscinski, a Polish journalist covering many of the revolutions in Africa during the 1960s, tells us that foreign reporters were kept off the island during the revolution and that they had no possibility to know what was going on (Kapuscinski 2001:68-91).

There is no doubt that there were actions involving weaponry and the fact that Arabic and Indian population were either killed or had to run away on short notice. It was the Afro-Shiraz Party (ASP) who took power and Abeid Amani Karume was installed as president of

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<sup>21</sup> The Bradt travel guide writes that there were more than 17000 killed in one night during the revolt of the revolution (McIntyre&Shand 2006:26).

the Peoples Republic of Zanzibar. Shortly after the revolution most Indian and Asian people had to leave the island and their belongings and properties were confiscated. The Omani sultan had been in Tanganyika at the time of the revolution and left for Great Britain where he lived in exile after the revolution.

The Republic of Tanzania was formed shortly after the revolution. But another important event was the collaborations that Zanzibar initiated to fill the gaps of the British, Indian and Arabic workers who had departed. Zanzibar collaborated now with countries like Cuba, China, The Soviet Union, East Germany and Bulgaria. This resulted in foreign workers and military personnel sharing their influences with the people of Zanzibar.

Since the relations to Oman and surrounding countries in the Middle East had been so close since the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, it was difficult to determine what and who was “Arabic” and what and who was Zanzibari. Just like taarab being music originating from the Arabic music, but gradually becoming a part of Zanzibar’s traditions after many years of being performed. The new government, maybe well minded, gained control over the taarab clubs and located them with each branch of the ASP branch houses installed in each parish in Zanzibar Town, giving the political active members control over the groups and also the contents of the music played, and other group activities. In an attempt to transform taarab into a tool of Party propaganda and state-centered nationalism the new government established groups administrated by the government. A Zanzibari I talked to told me that after the revolution the groups were told to play more like the army marching bands and that the lyrics should not be about love but be supportive to the revolution. The Nadi Ikhwan Safaa had to translate their name from Arabic to Kiswahili; Ndugu Wanaopendana, which means “brothers who love each other”. The women taarab group Royal Navy, a name influenced by World War II had to change their name to “Wanabaharia” which means “those who work at sea”. Later Nadi Ikhwan Safaa got the name from the ASP branch of their area and was called Malindi Group. Today one uses both Nadi Ikhwan Safaa and Malindi about the group (Fair 2002:64).

Many taarab groups that were independent social clubs were taken under government control and often moved to their ASP branch, and I was told that later groups were dissolved and merged with other groups. The group called Culture Musical Club was formed with

members from many of the urban groups, and they played on state matters for Zanzibar. Some other groups came along after, but to this day there are only two groups left, playing steadily; Nadi Ikhwan Safaa, often called Malindi, and Culture Musical Club also called *Milana Utamaduni* in Kiswahili, or only referred to as Culture.

The reorganization of taarab was a mean to “de-Arab” the culture, to demonstrate a point in different aspects of the revolutionary thoughts (Topp 1992:101). This political reorganization did not just include music, as many other activities got connected to the branch offices and controlled from there. I must add that people in Zanzibar do not like to talk about the revolution and they also dislike discussing too freely on government matters, especially in a critical sense. The new revolutionary government did not in any way ban people from playing music, but if people wanted to play taarab in Zanzibar Town it had to be within the criteria of ASP. The ASP favored Culture Musical Club and the band got a massive amount of musicians from the surrounding urban groups. Today Culture has more than 60 active members.

#### **4.11 The oriental legacy**

To this day musicians speak of influences from Egyptian music and also music from Yemen and Oman. According to my sources, taarab is “more influenced by Yemeni music than Egyptian music today”. This allegation is supported by the fact that many of Zanzibar’s population are descendents from Omani or Yemeni people settling on the island during the last two centuries. Even though they see themselves as Zanzibari people, they do not rule out where they have their origins. And it is the same in music. Many have an interest in, and they like listening to, Arabic music, music from their roots. As in the syllabuses of the Dhow Countries Music Academy there is an emphasis on Oriental music in the teaching traditional taarab instruments. And the teachers at the academy teach and learn the same as Arabic music students do. They use the books with pieces transcribed by Ahmad Al Khatib called *Sharkiyat* as the basis when teaching oriental music. These four books are also used in

Palestine, Yemen and Egypt, and for teaching Arabic music in Europe. In these books there are an ascending level of difficulty from piece to piece. Some of the teachers and musicians at the DCMA find it a bit unbalanced with the amount of Oriental pieces being taught compared to Swahili music, but while I was there they were working on new syllabuses for the taarab instruments and they showed a concern to include more Swahili music as part of the education.

Apart from strong influences from the Gulf countries (Khamis 2005) and Egypt there is also a type of taarab with a clear Indian influence mixing taarab with instruments from Indian music and Indian singing but with a clear notion that it is Taarab. I have not, in the six years I have been in contact with Zanzibari musicians, heard this kind of taarab performed live, just recorded material. On the album “Zanzibar: Music of Celebration” there are two tracks with Chaganlal Keshavji Pithadia playing the songs *Indian prayer* and *Nakupya Salamu* and it is taarab with a characteristic Indian sound to it.

#### **4.12 Taarab in Tourism**

Culture Musical Club and Nadi Ikhwan Safaa are not noted to play very often anymore. Culture are sometimes touring outside of Africa and plays in the tourist season at some of Zanzibar’s high-end hotels. Due to very low payment they do not play with a full line up. They are usually six to eight people. Since the salary is very low the band members do not really take pride and do not always care if they are not able play at these events. The musicians do fear confronting the managements of the hotels in concern of loosing the assignment. I must note that the times I talked to the audience, consisting of only tourists, about the music and the concert, all were very satisfied with the experience listening to the music and seeing the band perform, and it is no doubt that the arrangers, the hotels and restaurants, profit from it through an increased number of customers.

One interesting aspect is how the musicians in Culture Musical Club goes from being amateurs, in the sense that they do not usually get paid playing music for the social experience, to becoming professional players playing for a salary. This changes the direction of the music and the group's physical form; line up, instruments and set list. In a thesis from Danish scholar Daniel Madsen on taarab and tourism, he uses the term *chamber taarab* as a term for the smaller groups of taarab now performing in the hotels and restaurants around the island (Madsen 2007:53). A term he first got from the manager for the Sauti za Busara festival, Yusuf Mohammed. Looking at the definition in the New Grove Music Dictionary it is like reading about these smaller taarab orchestras.

In current usage the term “chamber music” generally denotes music written for small instrumental ensemble, with one player to a part, and intended for performance either in private, in a domestic environment with or without listeners, or in public in a small concert hall before an audience of limited size. In essence, the term implies intimate, carefully constructed music, written and played for its own sake; and one of the most important elements in chamber music is the social and musical pleasure for musicians of playing together.

([www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/05379?goto=chambermusic&pos=3](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/05379?goto=chambermusic&pos=3) downloaded 30.09.2008)

This is a very precise way of describing taarab with both the social aspect of the music, and stating the importance of music being played for “its own sake”. Just like taarab is music for listening, it is also music to move the listener and it is a social event for the performers of the music.

In tourism, as Madsen has noted, one can see an increase of commercialism in traditional taarab music, including hotels, restaurants and among the musicians. The hotels do not have to pay much for a band with a small number of members and the single musician is earning more the fewer they are. The musicians sometimes get paid as little as 5000 Tanzanian Shilling<sup>22</sup> (Tsh) for a concert. The consequence is that the groups are decreasing in order to

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<sup>22</sup> 5000 Tsh Equals to 2,70 € or 3,70 \$ April 2010

get a higher salary for each person. Usually the groups performing in these events have no name and they are being anonymously referred to as “live taarab music”.

Another way of income for the musicians at these events is through selling CDs. Tourists and audience are, according to my sources, frequently buying CDs and it becomes a substantial part of their income at these performances. Selling CDs at the event means one can keep the income up, but bear in mind that they are usually produced, and all production costs paid by the musicians.

During my fieldwork I have seen groups of maximum ten members in a group playing traditional taarab at the hotels or restaurants in Stone Town, including two female singers. One group told me that sometimes they do not “[bother to even use a singer because the audience does not understand the words anyway]”. These small groups usually consist of qanun, oud, violin, accordion, vocals and percussion.



Illustration 22: Matona’s group playing at Monsoon March 25th 2010.  
Ismael Muhsin, oud, Abeid, tablah, Matona, violin and Nassor Amour, qanun





Illustration 23: Culture Musical Club playing in Serena Hotel March 18<sup>th</sup> 2009.

### 4.13 Taarab in Islam

Zanzibar is more or less a Muslim society. It is said to be 98 % Muslims (McIntyre&Shand 2006:34). All the taarab musicians I have been in contact with during my fieldwork consider themselves Muslims, and are respectful of, and to a vast degree, do follow the Islamic *sharia*<sup>23</sup> and the religious traditions of the region. For example when the call for prayer is recited from the minarets of the mosque, all musical activity is stopped at the DCMA.

In the Western world today there are a lot of assumptions and myths about Islamic culture. These assumptions and myths are built on fear of terrorism; like attacks from militant groups with a religious stand from the Arabic region such as the attack on the World Trade Center September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001. This was a terrible act of terrorism, which started The United States of America's *war against terror*. During the time after 9/11 there was a lot of fear for Islamic

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<sup>23</sup> The body of doctrines that regulate the lives of those who profess Islam.

groups carrying out acts of terrorism. I will not go into this debate since it is a vast topic with many variables, but I will mention it and try to dismantle some prejudgments based on fear and misunderstanding in conjunction with the Islamic faith.

In general it Zanzibar is a strict religious society. The majority of the people are going for prayers frequently. Women cover their hair and often wear *bui-bui*, a completely covering headpiece only showing the eyes and with a long gown completely covering the body. Men often wear the traditional *Kanzo*, a, usually white, robe and a hat, called *Kofia*, an ornamented round hat in various colors. Clothing is just as much tradition as beliefs. And fasting during Ramadan, the Holy month for all Muslims is participated by everyone who is healthy enough for it. I did experience many levels of executing religion when I was in Zanzibar, from people displaying strong religious beliefs to people expressing that they are Muslims but following the sharia only to a small degree. Louis Ibsen al Faruqi mentions in *Music, Musicians and Islamic Law*, that Islam is the most widespread culture and therefore has many local variations (al Faruqi 1985). Whether in Spain, Egypt, Iran, India or Zanzibar there will always be different ways of executing Islamic laws.

al Faruqi looks at musicians and Muslim law and sets a group of standards on music, or “*artistic engineering of sound*”, as she calls it, according to the *sharia*. She is using the term artistic engineering of sound instead of music to find a proper term that can be understood by western scholars and people with Islamic background and beliefs. The Arabic term *musica* is of a secular meaning only, and is used to fit the western terms of music (al Faruqi 1985:6). In this paper she has made a table on what is, in general, seen as tolerated music and what is not recommended listening for a follower of God, in accordance to the sharia. In the last category there is music that can invigorate people to carry out acts of sin described as music with an unaccepted substance. This kind of music is seen as *haram*. Haram is the opposite of *Halal*, which is everything that is legal according to the sharia. This does not mean that one has to go to prison for doing haram, but it is the execution of a sin and doing against God’s will that should be avoided. In between Haram, unaccepted, and Halal, accepted, al Faruqi uses *mubah* as neutral and *makruh* as not advisable, but still accepted.

She has called the table “Hierarchy of handasah al sawt genres” (illustration 24). *Handasah al sawt* is translated to “artistic engineering of sound” to avoid the term music because the

recitation of the Koran, has a specific tonality, using the theory of the maqamat, but according to Islam it is not seen as musical activity, it is a religious activity. In her table we can see that the pitched recitation of the Holy Koran stands at the peak of importance and acceptability followed by religious chants, and they are both categorized as *non-musica*. What is artistic engineering of sound (and *musica*) and considered legal, *halal*, by Muslim law in this table is sung poetry, family and festive music, work songs and military music.

**Table: HIERARCHY OF  
HANDASAH AL ŞAWT GENRES**

	Qur'ānic Chant ( <u>qirā'ah</u> )	
<b>NON-MŪSĪQĀ</b>	Religious Chants ( <u>adhān</u> , <u>tahlīl/talbiyyah</u> , <u>takbīrāt</u> , <u>madiḥ</u> , <u>tasbiḥ</u> , and <u>taḥmīd</u> )	
	Chanted Poetry with noble themes ( <u>shi'r</u> )	LEGITIMATE
	Family/Celebration Music (lullabies, women's songs, wedding songs, etc.)	( <u>HALĀL</u> )
	"Occupational" Music (caravan chants, shepherd's tunes, work songs, etc.)	
	Military Music ( <u>Ṭabl Khānah</u> )	
<b>MŪSĪQĀ</b>	----- Vocal/Instrumental Improvi- sations ( <u>layālī</u> , <u>āvāz</u> , <u>taqāsīm</u> , <u>istikhbār</u> , etc.)	
	Serious Metered Songs ( <u>dawr</u> , <u>muwashshah</u> , <u>taḡnīf</u> , etc.) & Instrumental Music ( <u>bashraf</u> , <u>dā'irah</u> , <u>samā'i</u> , <u>dūlāb</u> , etc.)	Controversial ( <u>HALĀL</u> , <u>MUBĀH</u> , <u>MAKRUH</u> , <u>HARĀM</u> )
	Music Related to Pre-Islamic or Non-Islamic Origins	
	Sensuous Music Associated with Unacceptable Contexts	ILLEGITIMATE ( <u>HARĀM</u> )

Illustration 24: Handasah Al Sawt (al Faruqi 1985:8)

Looking further down the table, we find the music that is controversial and in the categories of *halal*, *mubah*, *makruh* and *haram* we find improvised vocal-and instrumental music and

traditional music. She uses all terms from Halal, legal, to Haram, illegal, because there are geographical and historical variations on these terms. For example, taarab has no religious meaning and nor does it come from times of other religious beliefs and therefore should not be viewed upon as haram, illegal. It is music for enjoyment and relaxation. It does not stimulate the listener to do against God's will in lyrics or rhythm. My suggestion is that taarab can fit into the category *mubah* and sometimes *makruh* because of lyrics with offensive contents, such as political and social criticism and some lyrics being sensuous, but never explicit. Under the categories listed as accepted sound making, we find music related to pre-Islamic and non-Islamic origins, e.g. the different ngoma styles of Zanzibar. The premarital ngoma dance-style *Unyago* is, full of explicit content in order to prepare the young woman for her marital duties, in all aspects, accepted as a traditional ceremony. This is a ritual for females only; males are not allowed to be a part of this, which can be the reason for it being accepted in an otherwise strict religious society. An interesting occurrence that happened during my fieldwork was when the unyago was performed in front of an audience. Is it still accepted when it leaves the women-only ceremony and is shown to the masses?

In the last category, haram, there is music with unaccepted contents. This is "sensuous music associated with unaccepted context". In Zanzibar this is where the modern taarab, mipasho, would fit in since it is played in bars and discos and has explicit lyrics and shows a strong sexual context (Khamis 2002).

No music is banned officially in any parts of society in Zanzibar, but there is a cultural challenge for music and musicians to be respected. The table and al Faruqi's research have to be viewed as a general description of the sharia and standards concerning music making in a Muslim society. Just in Zanzibar there are some different Islamic directions and people of different ethnic backgrounds all have different views on music and religion.

#### 4.14 Taarab in life

A big part of the people of Zanzibar has an everyday struggle to make ends meet. Only a small part of the population has a full time job with a steady income and most people have to find work as the season provides it. The main source of income comes from agriculture and fishing. The increasing interest for Zanzibar as a holiday destination results in new jobs within tourism and a growing economy<sup>24</sup>. Many people I have been in contact with, who live in Stone Town, have odd jobs, e.g. working at the harbor when it is needed, or in tourism, briefly assisting tourists, or growing and selling vegetables, if they have the possibility to do so.

One can help out friends or relatives and have an income for a short period of time. A good example on the fragile economy is when I first arrived in May 2008 and there was a power cut, which lasted for 30 days. The power cut led to changes in people's lifestyle and habits. Water became a valued merchandise, being sold at a high price by those who controlled wells. At the same time one had to cook with wood, coal or a kerosene cooker, and one had to find alternative lighting, and as the crisis went on people saw the necessity to buy or rent electric generators. To keep up with the situation, many Zanzibari had to invest more time and money than they could afford. Many of the music students at the Dhow Countries Music Academy, and some of the teachers had to prepare all this domestic problems and get an extra income to pay for all the additional expenses that came with the power cut. During this month it was difficult for many musicians to have time to practice and work with music. Restaurants and hotels closed due to the expenses a fuel-operated generator caused, which led to musicians losing their work for 30 days.

Zanzibar's economy is increasing and hopefully the island's people will control a big part of it as it grows. Working with any art form is not easy when one needs to make ends meet. The Dhow Countries Music Academy is giving musicians a secure job, as a means to develop music, dance and theater, and to build strong performers. A stimulated and well-exposed

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<sup>24</sup> The tourism in Zanzibar says to be mismanaged leading to a drainage of resources, like water, seafood and nature (McIntyre&Shand 2005:30)

cultural environment, will maintain the cultural identity for Zanzibar, strengthening the nation.

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Taarab is the result of a combination of the history of Arabic travelers, merchants, slave traders in east-Africa, the European colonialism, trade, shipping, explorers and missionaries, the monsoon winds to and from the East with its trade and emigration, the migration patterns of people in East Africa and by traveling becoming easier making tourism in Africa increase. All these factors and the involvement of some key people, like the sultan Sayyed Bargash, who sent his servant to learn Egyptian music, to Siti Binti Saad, *swahilinizing* the music and, most importantly, recording as Early as 1928, and then the 1964 revolution turning taarab into a national brand. These are all important factors for what taarab is today, but it would never have been without the people who are continuously performing and composing taarab, keeping the music alive. The ideal taarab, summed up, is music for your senses; a kind of music where you are delighted by its beauty; music you sit down and listen to, to be soothed by the music. Taarab is in Zanzibar “the joy you feel when listening to music”.

## 5 – DHOW COUNTRIES MUSIC ACADEMY

For many musicians in Zanzibar the Dhow Countries Music Academy has become an important location for both musical education and employment, and an arena for musical exploring. And importantly; the DCMA is a place for traditional Zanzibari music such as beni, kidumbak, taarab and the vast varieties of ngoma styles.

The academy was founded by Hildegard Kiel from Germany and opened in 2002. It was founded on the emphasis on teaching traditional music, training musicians and teachers, and to give people the possibility to learn traditional music of Zanzibar, and in that way secure future musicians and the future for local music forms in Zanzibar. The academy provides the population the opportunity to take instrument lessons and theoretical classes. There are mainly Zanzibari musicians teaching at the academy, but there is a teacher's exchange program organized through the Norwegian organization *Fredskorpset* (FK) that involves the *Edward Said National Conservatory of Music* (ESNCM) in Palestine and the University of Agder (UiA) in Kristiansand, Norway. The exchange is founded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) and the partners involved. This exchange is planned for a five-year cycle and the DCMA has had teachers from both Palestine and Norway teaching since 2006. I was myself a teacher at the DCMA from May 2008 till October 2009 in this exchange.

There are also a vast amount of volunteers teaching, and being taught, at the Academy, usually for shorter periods. This can be scholars or music teachers from around the world who are traveling through Zanzibar, or who has a specific desire to teach at the DCMA.

Most students at the academy follow a 3-year certificate program, giving them a basic formal musical training and education. In this program the students learn to master an instrument, and to play in one or more of the student orchestras, and they are offered classes in Western and/or Oriental music theory. Students are encouraged to study traditional music styles and/or dancing. Being the only school of its kind it is still working on the curriculum and ways to educate students and to further educate teachers. The DCMA has a scholarship program for

talented students where the students can be provided with an instrument. All students are entitled scholarships to pay the tuition fees based on income and background.

The academy has its own library with a big amount of sheet music, cassettes and CDs, and also books on different topics in music, teaching and musicology. The contents of the library are mostly based on donations. At the same time as teaching musicians and music teachers, the DCMA provide courses and education of their administrative staff, both in the library and the administration. You also find recordings and notations of traditional Zanzibari music, which the teachers at the DCMA has collected and notated.

The DCMA also work to mediate between musicians and concert organizers to secure a fair payment, and treatment of musicians. And the academy is working as a management to seek out job opportunities for musicians nationally and internationally. The DCMA expands their international network and uses those contacts to promote Zanzibari music around the world.

In Zanzibar the Dhow Countries Music Academy has an outreach program in Pemba and in a village on Unguja called Mahonda. In Pemba and Mahonda the DCMA provides the local communities with instruments and teachers from the academy have classes on a regular basis. The DCMA is also continuously working towards the primary schools in the Stone Town area, to give them the opportunity to have music classes, but there is little or no will from the ministry of education at this time to cooperate with the DCMA on this matter. There are one or two private schools in Stone Town that have music classes regularly with teachers from the DCMA present<sup>25</sup>.

Quite frequently there are workshops at the DCMA. There has recently been a series of workshops with Zanzibari musicians, focusing on the elderly musicians with knowledge of traditional music. And there are also workshops with visiting musicians, doing musical fusion genres or teaching a certain subject. And students and teachers from the DCMA are often participating in international workshops, such as UMOJA, which is a cross-cultural collaboration between many African and European cultural organizations with the main

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<sup>25</sup> This was status in September 2009.



source of funding from NORAD. UMOJA organizes concerts in all the participating organizations' countries.

The Dhow Countries Music Academy is a non-governmental organization (NGO), which means it has to rely on funding from various independent contributors. Economy is a daily matter at the DCMA, with short time funding from most sources of support.

Illustration 25 shows the visions and aims for the organization as seen on their webpage.

**Vision**

External: Building a society that values traditional and contemporary music as a catalyst for development.

Internal: The Dhow Countries Music Academy Zanzibar (DCMA) will become the leading internationally accredited center for traditional music education in East and Central Africa.

**Mission**

To play a key role in strengthening the music industry of Zanzibar, by researching, training, promoting, preserving and developing the musical heritage of Zanzibar and the Dhow Countries locally, regionally and internationally.

**The main aims of the organization are:**

- \* To provide an opportunity for the inhabitants of Zanzibar and the Dhow Region to study music related to their cultural background, with a special emphasis on broadening the educational opportunities for young people, women and children and to thus preserve the rich musical heritage of Zanzibar.
- \* To promote professional excellence among musicians through training, seminars, workshops, debates etc.
- \* To give skills and resources to a group of talented young people so that they can make a living from music.
- \* To increase the number of jobs already available by marketing and promoting musicians to local venues, regional promoters, international festivals, etc.
- \* To foster communication, networking and peaceful relationships on an international basis with emphasis on the Dhow Countries region (Africa, India, Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia Islands of the Indian Ocean and the Arabic States).
- \* To establish a music library service that will provide all necessary means for students pursuing their musical careers.

Illustration 25: Visions and aims for Dhow Countries Music Academy  
(From DCMA's web page, [www.zanzibarmusic.org](http://www.zanzibarmusic.org) downloaded Nov. 11 2010)

The number of students and staff at the DCMA is increasing every year, and the academy has become a well-known institution internationally. But the DCMA is still struggling when it comes to gaining recognition in the local community. My informants mention that, in general the people of Zanzibar do not recognize musicianship as a respected job. Parents do not wish their children to become musicians, concerning the myth of the musician living a life of promiscuity. In her master's thesis Hanna T. Høyem investigates women's situation in the Zanzibari music scene (Høyem 2009:76-78). She found that young girls are being discouraged to participate in the male dominated area of music life, fearing for sexual harassment.

The father of a family I got to know well, answered, when I asked if their kids played any instruments, or if they wanted to, that there was no time for after school activities. After school the children have to attend Koran school and Arabic language lessons. The children were usually home at eight in the evening, and by that time they had to help out with domestic chores. The father also implied that it would not be suitable for their children to play music, as he said: "Our religion tells us parents that our children should not be playing music". As I am not used to see taarab as an obstacle for religion I was quite struck by this view, but my presumption is that this is a general point of view in Zanzibar. It might not be just because music is haram according to Islamic laws; it might be because it is not a secure way of life and income if their children decide to become musicians. Even Matona, who now is a well-established musician, has had a hard time trying to make it as a musician, and originally his father did not want him to play an instrument.

Being a musician has only been profitable for the few. And it is a hard struggle to compete about the few jobs that are on the open market, especially in Zanzibar. And musicianship often involves traveling and inconvenient working hours, often working late evenings. My informants, playing in the chamber groups, are often concerned about their families when one is working late and frequently is traveling. For the bigger groups it is a different story. Most of the musicians in Culture Music Club and Nadi Ikhwan Safaa are not professionals and the members have the music group as a leisure activity. There is a tendency that Culture Musical Club is pointing more towards a professional direction. They are recording, touring and have

recently started tuition in taarab instruments and music, and music theory. Still it is not enough to be a full-time musician.

The Dhow Countries Music Academy has an important role in promoting music in Zanzibar, for Zanzibari people as a positive feature of Zanzibari culture. The main aim of the academy is that it will be more economically independent and led by a Zanzibari management, and in that way grow to involve a vast amount of musicians in Zanzibar. To introduce music as a capacity building activity to children, and to have more adolescents interested in the local music and encouraged to play and perform music. The DCMA is a place where one can find information on almost any music style. In the academy's library one can listen to old recordings to Umm Kulthûm and discover that the early recordings of Siti Binti Saad sounded quite similar. And one can listen to Miles Davis or Beethoven or the former Ghazi Musical Club. The DCMA is unique in the way that one can study kidumbak with the great Makame Faki or encounter a workshop with the grand lady of taarab, Bi Kidude, or thoroughly study traditional and modern music with experienced musicians who can see the traditional music-cultures in an international context.



Illustration 26: Mahsin Basalama and Mohammed Othman recording “Dhow Crossing” in Kristiansand, Norway 2004

## 6 TAARAB INFLUENCES

The Dhow Countries Music Academy is sponsored by Western organizations and managed by a German manager. It has strong ties to musical institutions and individuals in Europe and USA. One of them is the University of Agder (UiA). As a bachelor student at UiA I got the opportunity to travel to Zanzibar in 2004, mainly to assist the new guitar teacher and to find musicians and material for a planned CD between the two organizations.

My notes from that time describe the welcoming I had when arriving the DCMA. I remember how everybody tried to teach me how to greet in Kiswahili, and how everybody made me feel welcome. I wrote in my notes that “the academy is so full of sound and life”. My first encounter with kidumbak was also a joyous moment. A repeated melody played on the violin accompanied by a lot of percussion, shakers, sticks on a chair, the kidumbak drum and the sanduku bass.

After a while I started to learn taarab with the wonderful violin and oud player Mohammed Othman. He introduced me to taarab songs and we played together for a while. The tonal language and the feeling in the music amazed me. During this teaching we started to musically interact by improvising and doing taqsim. Me in my way, and him in his way, and it really worked out well. We were both keeping our ears open for each other’s way of playing. It was really a moment of mutual sharing ideas between musicians.

I had heard about an international concern for taarab, but did not know how to relate to it. I was wondering how it had been before, and how it is different today. In an interview with Mahsin Basalama, he confirmed the story that taarab was almost gone at the time the DCMA opened. No one was interested in old people playing taarab, and Western popular music dominated the scene. This concern was confirmed by Annemette Kirkegaard, who during fieldwork in the early 90’s observed musicians changing the acoustic instruments, oud, qanun and so on, with keyboards and electric guitars, and that the taarab asilia was neglected.

Mahsin continues by telling that he “never liked taarab before I joined the music school. And now taarab is back and people are playing it in a professional way.” Giving the DCMA credit for reviving taarab from its redemption. “Now I know taarab and other music because of taarab. For example when listening to hip-hop and RnB it is much easier to understand what are they doing. Taarab is different now because we are playing it with more education.”

Rajab is more concerned on the future of taarab, seeing it difficult to find young talented musicians who want to join the big orchestras. There is a hierarchy in the taarab orchestras where the student is watching and listening to the group, for a long period of time, before being accepted to play with the orchestra. But with Rajab’s group, Culture Musical Group increasing their professionalism, they need musicians who threats musical activity other than as a pastime activity. They need musicians who can practice and are willing and able to travel. This demand might split the group in half, and if there are no more musicians coming in, that could dissolve the group as a unity, and none of the parts would be big enough to survive on its own.

The DCMA has 5-6 students who are members in Culture Musical Club or Nadi Ikhwan Safaa. This is a sign showing that DCMA has started to produce talents who can take part of traditional taarab. There is one female instrumentalist in each group, and both are students at the academy. The DCMA are striving for gender equality and this is a good step on the way, even though there are struggles (Høyem 2009).

When I asked Mahsin if he thinks that the DCMA make their students play, perform and compose differently, applying several musical directions to taarab, he answered yes absolutely. The musicians at the DCMA are used to find material themselves on the internet and so forth, discovering new sources of inspirations. As an example of change, Rajab is applying chords in the music when playing with Culture, which is changing taarab from being heterophonic to become homophonic. I also heard the other qanun players at the DCMA do the same, and working on individual ways of applying chords. “Now we think of maqamat and chords, and different rhythms, not just 3/4 or 4/4”.

Mahsin introduced for me recordings he has done with a group called Hot Club Christiansand, a Norwegian group playing music in the style of Django Reinhardt and the French “gypsy” jazz. In these recordings the group play only Zanzibari or Oriental pieces, with a strong emphasis on the Oriental and Zanzibari sound but with a mix of the French swing. It is my opinion when hearing this kind of fusion between two so far apart traditions, they tend to crash or feel unnatural placed next to each other. But in these recordings they have managed to absorb the taarab feeling with the music. Mahsin is eager to continue to mix taarab with jazz, the swing feel and the rhythm, but he has concerns on how it will be welcomed by other musicians.

Matona, Mohammed Issa Haji, has recently released a record called “Made in Zanzibar – Matona with the Ikhwani Safaa Musical Club”, a project he has done with belly dancer Tamalyn Dallal. In this record there are classics from the Western classical musical repertoire like Ravels *Bolero*, and excerpts from Bizet's opera Carmen mixed with pieces from Zanzibar and Oriental pieces. Matona has made the musical arrangements on this record and has combined his knowledge of taarab, Oriental music and Western Classical music, and made a crossover style. The original idea of the project was to use classical pieces that are influenced by Oriental music and have them played the Zanzibari way. As belly dancer Tamalyn Dallal has visited Zanzibar before and knew the work of Matona, using Matona with his broad understanding for musical genres, as the arranger for this CD came only natural.

Rajab Suleiman, and his group Culture Musical Club has recorded numerous CDs and worked with European producers. In 2005 Taj Mahal, the famous American blues guitar player released a CD in collaboration with Culture. The CD is called “Mkutano – Taj Mahal Meets the Culture Musical Club of Zanzibar”. It is a record containing both music of Taj Mahal and music from Zanzibar. Taj Mahal brought his rhythm section, bass and drums, and Culture invited singer Bi Kidude to sing with them. This recording seems to me to be more of a jam session, and the musical worlds seem to collide on occasion, and according to some of the participants on the CD the cooperation was at times very difficult. But they overcame the challenges of these two constellations working together and managed to find a musical direction and made a unique musical product.

None of these collaborations are officially a part of the Dhow Countries Music Academy, but the musicians involved, Matona, Suleiman and Basalama are main characters in the academy, and at the DCMA they have been introduced to musicians and producers who want to collaborate in recordings and concerts. Mahsin met the Hot Club Christiansand (HCC) in an UMOJA-workshop in Dar Es Salaam, as a representative from the DCMA. He continued to work with HCC when being on an exchange in Norway in 2009.

Because of the very existence of the DCMA, these musicians get an opportunity, and sometimes by chance, do meet the right people they can work with. The DCMA is an informal meeting ground for musicians. For visiting musicians the DCMA acts as a place to encounter Swahili music, dance; musicians and dancers.

The previous manager at the academy, Muecke Quinckhardt, made an effort to give the teachers possibilities to be introduced to a vast amount of genres and inspiring individuals who are working with music. Her idea is that musical inspiration comes from inspiring people, and that the best musical ideas blossom when shared, and that they bloom out of the creativity from musical minds meeting.

When I worked with musicians in Zanzibar I was trying to understand the feeling of the music as best as I could by participating. I wanted to understand rhythms and tonal language, and to adapt and play the way the Zanzibari musicians do. My meeting with the oud gave me many ideas I could transfer to my guitar, and adapt to my playing. These are ideas I use in my music making today. In the same way, when I played with Rajab, Matona or Mahsin they investigated my ways of playing and tried to understand the feelings and sounds of my playing. They were interested and asked about my background and sources of inspirations. I had the feeling that I was their teacher and their student at the same time as we were colleagues. We shared experiences and ways of performing, playing and composing music.

On the notion of authenticity one can argue and say that the DCMA is “blurring” the traditions on how taarab should be taught and performed. Any musician who understands that most of the money in the music industry, is in the music market in the West; Europe and USA, will make an effort to get into that market and therefore try to “please” the market by

making their music as sell-able as possible (Taylor 1997. *Cultural imperialism* is a term used when the ideas of the West overrule the arrangements and usage of the music of the “other”, often caused by the West’s dominance in the global economy and especially in the music market. The struggle for modernization and building a global economy in the world, is mediating the Western understanding, concepts and culture (Barker 2004:171). Cultural imperialism is turning the “exotic” into something understandable for the culture of the West, and in that way being able to control the culture. Can we ask if capital forces and naive "orientalists" from the West conduct Zanzibari taarab today?



Illustration: 27 Workshop with Han Bennink, Michael Moore and Will Holshauser at DCMA May 29 2009



## 7 Conclusion

“Africa and Africans are modern, despite demands by some western listeners that both remain premodern” (Taylor 1997:198)

In conclusion, as the chapters above reveal, a polarization between musicians and their life as musicians is evident. They are bearers of a tradition, maintaining taarab as a musical identity for Zanzibar, its history and its people. Taarab has been, and still is, incorporated into many aspects of life in Zanzibar. It is considered a high art form; it has a certain sophisticated aura, but taarab is also used for festive occasions, and above all taarab has been an important social event for many men and women for more than a century. To many musicians in Zanzibar taarab's future is of an immediate concern.

This thesis set out to investigate how the Dhow Countries Music Academy influences the music genre known as taarab asilia. As we have seen the answer is woven by all aspects of culture, visualized and maintained within an institution. The DCMA's main influence on taarab is that it keeps the interest for taarab within close contact to the execution of other art forms. The influence on the music goes through the musicians who dare to explore the cross-cultural possibilities that emerge. It can be exploring musical preservation or experimenting with music, or both. Musicians are encouraged to investigate their history and culture and also to experiment with sound. To be an exploring musician means that one is never fully taught. When adding more to one's repertoire one is opening up for more ways to vary that repertoire, and the DCMA is a place where exploring is encouraged.

I have used my personal experience to understand the general meeting between musics and cultures. I doubt I will change history, but I have to ask myself if the musical meeting between Mahsin and me is similar to the one between Siti Binti Saad and Ali Muhsin? Can one single individual change the style within a genre of music? Alongside investigating the musical matter, I have tried to take hold of the standard understanding of society, politics, economy, religion and history, as it is perceived in the field. Is taarab an object of the past, belonging in a museum? In order to get an understanding it was necessary to intervene with

musicians and Zanzibari culture. By exercising reflexive fieldwork I could observe how musicians at the DCMA gained their musical knowledge when being exposed to new material.

The issue of the survival of taarab lies in the future generation. Will the next generation identify themselves with taarab or will hip-hop, reggae, R&B and other popular genres be a stronger source for self-identification, and be taken into their rituals and ceremonies? As Simon Frith says it: “[M]usic seems to be a key identity because it offers, so intensely, a sense of both self and others, of the subjective in the collective.” (Frith 1996:110). If we relate Frith’s thoughts on identification to a Zanzibari musician of one of the social clubs, we can argue that the musician sees himself more as a member of a social club, than identifying himself as a musician in the professional matter. The music is implied in the social club’s activities, where you meet friends and play taarab. The income, often very small, is seen as an addition to the overall income. During the high season of the tourist season, a handful from the orchestras works more or less regularly during the week. During high season and when there is a high frequency of concerts I observed musicians identify themselves as taarab musicians, but through an identity as a club member. “Identity is mobile, a process not a thing, a becoming not a being” (ibid:109).

Music is an aesthetic object but also a commercial product for sale. As taarab becomes merchandise, while still being a symbol for national identity, will the music expose the performers’ or the market’s understanding of Zanzibar and taarab? Gadamer emphasizes the impact history has on the subject’s understanding of an object (Lægreid 2006:223). By putting music into a different context one can alter the way the music is received and understood by the listener. The change in venues and commercialism constructs contradictions and conflicts in the field. There are two conflicts as I see them. On the one side there are forces wishing to preserve the original culture. These are musicians and Western organizations wishing to keep the “original” taarab and its historical contents. This side states that taarab is of historic importance and need to be preserved in order to maintain history. On the other side there are forces that wish to develop taarab. These are also musicians and Western organizations, and they want to explore the musical possibilities for taarab. The DCMA provides a space for both of these sides. Can the DCMA mediate between the roles as

a preserver of Swahili culture at the same time as they are developing a global musical milieu?

Conflicts between global and local, popular culture and traditional culture, between what is regarded high art and what is regarded as low forms of art, will be generated in a contradictory environment. Is taarab becoming a part of a cultural high? Did it originate from the Omani sultanate, as high art, but was soon adopted as “music of the common people” and descended to low art? Where does it belong today? Can aesthetics be divided by class in Zanzibar? Music has cultural value and music has an economic value. For the musicians I met in the field, taarab’s cultural value is emphasized. They see it as a traditional form of music belonging to Zanzibar’s history and the people’s identification. Mahsin speaks of the “real taarab, not the taarab one can hear in the hotels”. Does the taarab of the different venues have different cultural values? For whom, and who sets the standard for what is rated high and low?

Taarab, the way it is today, is challenged by modernization and change. These challenges are defended by institutions like the DCMA, to help preserve and to ensure that taarab’s roots and history are not forgotten. Rajab raises a true concern that taarab will lose its popularity, and his personal prediction is that taarab will be gone in ten years. He believes that people in Zanzibar will lose interest for taarab, as Western and Arabic popular music are of more interest to people in general. There is a conflict between the aesthetic side and the economic side. The popular music culture is in a state of flux, what is popular today is not popular tomorrow. The cultural elite is governing the aesthetic values that the art expose, by putting capital into certain forms of music. It constructs a conflict between western influenced music, including modern taarab, and traditional taarab in Zanzibar. These conflicts are intensified by the attention the “traditional” art form receives from sponsors, mainly from Europe or USA, in opposite to the popular art. But do economic insurance make taarab popular? Or is it the musician’s responsibility to govern their music themselves?

After the years I have been in touch with musicians from Zanzibar I see the great importance the Dhow Countries Music Academy has for preserving the legacy of Zanzibar’s traditional music, and especially for finding and raising the next generations of musicians. Whether or

not they will play taarab, they will at least have the knowledge of taarab and be aware of its part in Zanzibar culture. By recruiting the following generations of performers one can acquire both a preservation of the traditional taarab and its legacy, and a modernization, so it can continue and develop based on its roots. With modernization I do not mean to incorporate elements from popular music, but modernization within its nature<sup>26</sup> Taarab might develop with elements from Oriental music or Western music and music from East-Africa.

A pit-fall for the DCMA is if their position will dominate the artistic agenda for taarab musicians. The DCMA would like to guide musicians into the world of musics, and to give musicians the opportunity to get as much experience as possible. In that way the artistic administration may force upon what they see as good solutions on the musicians. The DCMA will be acting as the dominant part by defining culture, and the teachers' and musicians' relation to the artistic administration will be as "deviant children of the bourgeoisie" (Bourdieu 1984:316). It will make the relationship between musicians and administration unbalanced. There will be a gap of cultural, or more specific musical understanding between the makers of art and the capital contributors. Musicians need to "recognize the supreme affirmation of their spiritual point of honour in the negation of popular materialism implied in the artistic negation of 'bourgeois' materialism" (ibid). There is a danger that musicians have to surrender their personal approach to music to whom provides the capitol. However a dominating part over the dominated musician can might as well be politics, social structures or even a group leader.

Keeping the power balanced between musicians and the artistic administration is an important presupposition for the DCMA in its relevance in the Zanzibari community. Musicians are today a part of planning the curriculum and artistic activities. The DCMA's future relies on making the artistic contents as relevant as possible for the local musicians and local audience. Former managing director Muecke Quinckhardt told me that there is a goal that the DCMA will be self sufficient and run by a Zanzibari management in few years time, implying a hope that the government will take music education seriously and see the importance of culture as a means to strengthen nation-building.

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<sup>26</sup> Without denying that incorporating traditional taarab with elements from pop music is development.

The knowledge and understanding I developed during my fieldwork in Zanzibar could not have been achieved without participating in the culture. I realize that interpreting other scholars and researchers' papers and articles did not give me the same understanding as being in Zanzibar, intervening with people who lives everyday with taarab. In my methodology I attempted to find a method that, like I cited Timothy Rice on, was like weaving a "polyphonic theoretical material" (Rice 1997:103). The majority of my research is based on Rice's conclusion that "ethnomusicology does not have one existing theory for epistemological solutions to an ontological problem" (ibid). But even if ethnomusicologists cannot use one single method to understand the field they are investigating, they got to have a distinguished disciplined method to make a unified paradigm. I tried to find factors influencing taarab and I looked at different angels of the culture in an attempt see the music in context to the cultural whole, the cultural complex both locally and globally.

I want to encourage my colleagues in Zanzibar to do research on the local music genres and to keep exploring their heritage and history. Analyzes of music and music-cultures need an interpretation using a local taxonomy. I call for Zanzibari scholars and musicians to carry out research on their musical heritage. Zanzibari people are the ones best suited for researching Zanzibari music.



Illustration 28: DCMA

## Epilogue: Poetry

Zanzibari culture is the set of agreements shared by the Zanzibari people. In defining one of those agreements Mahsin implies that taarab is “the culture of Zanzibar”, emphasizing on *the*. It includes all aspects of life and lives “within every Zanzibari”.

If the culture of Zanzibar lives within taarab, then one can say it is possible to depict the culture of Zanzibar in a musical analysis. But what is taarab? The answer might be in the origin of the word. Taarab is “The joy one feels when listening to music”. It is a word that does not exist in our vocabulary. There is not a single English word that describes the joy one feels when listening to music. But we know that feeling. It exists beyond language. It is almost poetic. And that is what taarab is. Taarab is poetry. Taarab is a poem. Taarab is a poem that lives inside every Zanzibari. One can say it is the heartbeat of Zanzibar.

Doing research on someone’s heartbeat can be a difficult matter. It is so personal for the people, and the field methods feel exceedingly technical and inadequate. Recording, participating and interviewing is executed in a furtive manner. I go to the books to find support from the teachers, Merriam, Hood, Blacking, Nettle, Feld, Titon and Rice, who tells me to keep searching and to discuss with Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Geertz, to find a way to describe the joy Zanzibari feels when listening to taarab.

I have seen a music-culture that has been on the verge of extinction, basically the sound of a heartbeat fading out, seemingly because of materialistic reasons, and due to society’s view on being a musician. Instruments fell apart over the years and musicians forgot their trade, and no new musicians were recruited.

Sometimes one needs the “outsider” view to see beyond ones conceptions, or misconceptions. Did Hildegard Kiel feel the heartbeat fade? I can imagine she could see it in people eyes. She teamed up with a group of musicians and founded what revitalized taarab and the soul of Zanzibar. The Dhow Countries Music Academy became a place for preservation and innovation. Eight years later it is an international meeting point for

musicians, and a place where taarab is presented in its pure and original form, and where taarab is continuously exposed to new flavors. The DCMA gives room for Matona, Rajab and Mahsin to experiment with music and to explore the many worlds of music. This results in them, through being performers and teachers, influencing the next generation to take part in a traditional yet vivid musical heritage. In ever changing venues, as long as the DCMA is there, taarab will be distributed among the Zanzibari people, reciting the poem they know so well; Their heartbeat, their soul.



Illustration 29: The group Safar, teachers from the DCMA performing at the Old Fort





Illustration 30: Makame Faki and Rajab Suleiman at Serena Hotel



Illustration 31: Culture Musical Club at Serena Hotel



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## 8.5 Interviews

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