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On Identity—Contemporary Music Research in the Asia Pacific Region: Introduction

Timothy D. Taylor and Kirsty Gillespie

Anthropology, as the study of human societies, has always been inclusive of music in some form or another, whether simply referencing a culture's music through evocative book titles or delving in detail into musical forms and performances themselves. Music is acknowledged as a gateway to understanding a people's experience—in particular song, which gives voice to human expression not always possible in everyday language.

From another angle, music research has increasingly engaged with anthropology and this has occurred most notably in the development of the discipline of ethnomusicology, which grew from comparative musicology, and the publication of one of its key texts, Alan Merriam's *The Anthropology of Music* (1964). This issue of *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* (TAPJA) contributes with a special focus on contemporary music research in the Asia Pacific region.

As with anthropological research generally, research into music of Asia and the Pacific has a long and distinguished history, from Colin McPhee's work in Bali to Judith Becker's in Java to William Malm's in Japan and many more. The three articles that contribute to the special focus of this issue continue in that great lineage, contributing to our understanding of how people in this vast region variously make and consume music, and how their relationship with music plays a role in shaping them and their worlds.

Jonathan McIntosh's (2009) illuminating article invokes what has become a pressing question in ethnomusicology: identity. Timothy Rice (2007) demonstrated how quickly 'identity' entered the analytical lexicon of ethnomusicology in the 1980s, even though few writers historicised or theorised it (although some useful publications include Friedman 1994; Geertz 2000; Brubaker & Cooper 2005); it became a taken-for-granted category extremely quickly and this emerges in this issue of the journal.

Correspondence to: Professor Timothy D. Taylor¹, University of California, Departments of Ethnomusicology and Musicology, USA. Email: tdtaylor@ucla.edu

Still, it is important to encourage scholars of music and culture to explore the identity question further. Identity, as Taylor has written elsewhere (Taylor 2007; drawing on Shannon 2001 among others), is a relatively recent American construct. Following the publication of Erik Erikson's *Childhood and Society* in 1950, the concept quickly gained a foothold in American culture, slowly supplanting the previous 'folk' conception of self that had held sway for a couple of generations, namely 'personality' (for a useful discussion of personality in the American context, see Susman 1984).

Something of the complexity of the conceptions of identity and selfhood emerges in Åse Ottosson's (2009) rich portrayal of Aboriginal musicians on tour, which depicts the subtle transformations that the performers undergo as they encounter unfamiliar Aboriginal communities and predominantly white towns. 'Identity' is in some ways pre-established in these white towns: the subaltern status of Aboriginal people is reinforced in these provincial towns through the repugnant behaviour of the majority that is reminiscent of the American south some decades ago. The pull of life back home competes powerfully with the siren song of popular music fame of away. Tension between country (Aboriginal musicians) and city (white musicians) helps point out that this ancient dichotomy still produces misunderstandings, such as what constitutes the normal preparedness for a gig. Ottosson perceived that the Aboriginal musicians took a deliberately careless attitude to their playing after a few days of touring with white musicians and adopted exaggerated behaviour in the presence of 'whitefellas', all of which pokes fun at whites' assumptions about them, assumptions with which the Aboriginal musicians are all too familiar.

These kinds of behaviours appear markedly different from the kind of racial encounters studied in the US. W. E. B. DuBois's famous observation from 1903 about African Americans, often misunderstood by American scholars, lays out the problem nicely:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (DuBois 1969, p. 45)

African Americans (and other ethnic minorities) in this view are trapped by representations of themselves that they are unable to counter. However, the 'blackfellas' Ottosson describes are operating within quite a different dynamic, at least in the ethnographic encounters she describes so vividly.

What Ottosson presents also differs from Stuart Hall's more recent observation that '[t]he English are racist not because they hate the Blacks but because they don't know who

they are without the Blacks' (Hall 1989, p. 13). Yet, although Ottosson's ethnography reveals significant prejudice among some white Australians towards Aboriginal people, it does not seem to be the case that Aboriginal people are caught in a self-conception that is determined by whites, or that would be void without blacks. Instead, Ottosson's 'whitefellas'—and 'blackfellas'—know who they are and how they are represented: this is a different kind of dynamic of self-hood than is familiar to students of European and American culture. Self-conception ('identity', if one must) involves more than choosing a music, more than fashioning with goods. It is a complex 'serious game' of social actors' agency and intentionality (Ortner 2006) that can be nuanced according to place, the presence of others, gender, generation, situation and more, as many have written and is shown so well in the contributions to this issue of the journal.

Dan Bendrups's (2009) contribution provides another example of the complex negotiations of identity and self-presentation in yet another subordinate/superordinate setting. In particular, it highlights the problem of a peripheral (in the sense of Wallerstein 1974) musician attempting to break into a larger music market, in this case Chile. Which self should one mind, one's 'creative' self or one's ethnic, Rapanui, self? Historically, the metropolitan core-dominated music industry has expected that musicians from the periphery sound like they are from the periphery, no matter how much popular music from Western countries these musicians know and integrate into their own sound (see Taylor 1997, 2004). Adopting a more folkloric musical style can be a way to win an audience seeking 'authentic' world music, but it is self-marginalising, because the xenophobic global music industry almost never permits non-English speakers and/or non-American and Europeans into the more mainstream categories such as rock and pop. Manutomatoma's complex negotiations of Chilean and Rapanui musics, which necessarily entail negotiations with his audiences, result in a complex hybrid music that is less common in the world music scene (one exception that comes to mind is the Australian band Yothu Yindi, as discussed by Stubington and Dunbar-Hall 1994).

Yet, such hybrids can have a downside because they could be seen as providing a racially dominant group with a touch of the other, but only a touch. Manutomatoma's success in Chile, and the opening up of the Chilean music market for Rapanui music more generally, does reward Rapanui musicians, but perhaps at the cost of reinforcing Chilean hegemony over Rapanui and preserving stereotypes of its inhabitants, which Manutomatoma's album cover (figure 2 in Bendrups 2009) does nothing to combat. Manutomatoma's subsequent formation of the band *Fusión Rapanui* and their eschewal of native garb puts them closer to Homi K. Bhabha's famous dictum that 'colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a *subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*' (Bhabha 1984, p. 126; emphasis in original). However, it is possible to see this mode of self-presentation as a tactic (de Certeau 1984) that permitted the band to gain a foothold in the Chilean musical mainstream. This, at least in a European and North American context, is fairly rare. Taylor (2007) has written of the tendency of fans and the music industry to construe 'hybrid' music as 'authentic'; that is, with the general paucity of sales of ethnographic

field recordings or other music that can lay a greater claim to authenticity than others, some hybrids of local music with Western pop and rock sounds in the very late 1990s and early 2000s started to be championed by critics and in the music industry as 'authentic hybrids'. This has proved an effective way to continue to relegate such musicians to the margins, far from the mainstream music categories.

The three articles collected here demonstrate how salient 'identity' has become as a focus in scholarship on music, as well as how complex identity on-the-ground can be. If identity as a naturalised category appears in these articles, its presence in them demonstrates nonetheless just how negotiated, transitory, situational and constructed it is.

These papers serve as a reminder to anthropologists of the rich data available in all sites and circumstances for those willing to engage with the musical lives of the people with whom they work. And it need not be for the intrepid alone: all that is necessary is for those concerned to abandon the fear of the 'black dots'. After all, the three articles in this issue are proof that musical analysis is not absolutely necessary in order for a researcher to say something meaningful about music as social behaviour. In Said's words:

The most interesting, the most valuable, and the most distinguished modern writing about music is, to use Edward Cone's phrase, writing that self-consciously sees itself as a 'humanistic discipline'...the study of music can be more, and not less, interesting if we situate music as taking place, so to speak, in a social and cultural setting. (Said 1991, pp. xi-xii)

Anthropologists, then, are in a unique position to offer some of the best writing on music that can be written—or recorded, filmed, inscribed or typed.

Anthropology in the present day encompasses multiple modes of communication, in keeping with developments in communication technology and technology in general. This may be most evident in the establishment of courses in 'visual anthropology' around the globe, a new branch of the discipline that embraces the opportunities for thick description (Geertz 1973) that audiovisual documentation can afford. Research results are increasingly published in formats other than the printed word: websites are created; CDs, CD-ROMS and DVDs are made. TAPJA has acknowledged the importance of such multimedia research products by creating a multimedia reviews section within the journal. Instigated by Peter Toner, and first appearing in December 2005, the section aims to include as many kinds of multimedia formats as exist that relate to anthropological research in the Asia Pacific region. The journal welcomes submissions of multimedia material from researchers and publishing houses across the world, and looks forward to watching the multimedia reviews section grow.

Note

- [1] Timothy D. Taylor is a professor at the University of California, Los Angeles (Departments of Ethnomusicology and Musicology). In addition to numerous articles on various musics, he is the author of *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets* (1997), *Strange Sounds: Music,*

Technology and Culture (2001) and *Beyond Exoticism: Western Music and the World* (2007). He is currently writing a history of music used in advertising in the US from early radio to the present day. Dr Kirsty Gillespie is a Visiting Fellow in the Division of Pacific and Asian History, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University. Her research has focused largely on the music of Papua New Guinea, in particular the music of the Duna people of the Southern Highlands Province and the people of Lihir, New Ireland Province.

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