SOMEWHERE BETWEEN DISPLACEMENT AND BELONGING: JAZZ, MOBILITY, AND IDENTITY IN EUROPE

José DIAS*

*Institute of Ethnomusicology, NOVA School of Social Sciences and Humanities, New University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal

Abstract: *Jazz in Europe is largely shaped by the mobility of its actors, and informed by both the experiences of actors on the ground and their projection of what European identity is or should be. The mobility provided for European Union Member States by the Schengen Area has exploded the ways in which Europeans perceive and collaborate with each other. Jazz musicians and promoters identify mobility as part of their practices. Contextual factors – such as easier accessibility to communication and mobility –contribute to reshaping the European jazz scene, by creating a new generation of jazz actors who seem more integrated within Europe and who more naturally develop collaborations with their counterparts from different countries. The official discourse of the EU often stresses the notion of 'Europeanness' as a set of fundamental abilities. Promoting mobility of its citizens is a key aspect to ultimately inform the notion of a Pan-European ideal. However, contrasts between European counties, such as geographical and economic peripherality and centrality, and differentiated cultural and education policies, still stand as significant challenges to those who operate in the field. The fact that mobility opportunities for artists across Europe are still irregular raises a number of questions around music practices, identity, aesthetics, and the role of the different actors within the ecology of jazz in Europe.*

Keywords*: jazz, Europe, identity, mobility, networks, collectives, cultural policies*

1. INTRODUCTION

To understand Europe you have to be a genius –
or French.[1]

Both Europe and jazz in Europe are intricate frameworks where different cultures, identities and negotiations coexist. In fact, one could argue that there are several *Europes*, where numerous kinds of jazz are being made. Europe has developed itself through history as a constant flow of people and cultural products. These continuous interchanges have largely helped to provide Europe with a sense of cultural unity and identity (Bohlman, 2004:34). Mobility is a crucial element of music practices all over the world. Jazz music, as essentially improvised collective music, is built upon cooperative creation. Jazz artists constantly seek and feed collaborations, not only with their national counterparts but also – and increasingly – with others from different nationalities.

In the US, in the beginning of the twentieth century, alongside radio broadcasting and film, mobility played an important role in the dissemination of jazz across its fifty states and the Western World. In post-WWII, the touring of American jazz artists across Europe was a powerful tool for diplomacy and a sonic and performative metaphor for the establishment of a 'New European United States', which would be shaped in line with the American democratic and cosmopolitan values as part of the Marshall Plan. European jazz artists rapidly adopted American jazz narratives and canons as their own. However, in the late 1970s, jazz education in Europe began taking its own path – largely led by the innovative approach to improvised music studies at the University of Stavanger – and the notion of a genuine 'European jazz' was introduced – mainly due to a challenging choice for iconography, artists and repertoire by Manfred Eicher at ECM records.

Jazz today is a part of the cultural fabric of many of the European countries. From its role in music education, to cultural programming and academic research, jazz is present in various forms

---

[1] Cf. Madeleine Albright, in *The Economist*, Oct. 21, 1999.

of cultural production in Europe and in its official rhetoric.

In fact, in the political arena, the official discourse of the European Union often stresses the notion of *Europeanness* as a set of fundamental abilities. Promoting open trade among Member States, mobility of its citizens, multicultural peaceful coexistence, and a European common foreign policy are key aspects to that ideological trail. 'Jazz' is often used as representation of an idealised notion that can channel distinctive – and, in some cases, contradictory – ideological messages: it can be as much a symbol of national cultural heritage, as of Europeanist policies, or of international trading partnerships. EU official institutions not only construct different narratives around 'jazz' at will – they also interpret those narratives according to their agenda. 'Jazz' is just a small part of an immense jigsaw of assembled narratives that promote an ideal. And 'jazz', as an ideal, legitimises and authenticates national and European constructed idiosyncrasies: an inherent engagement to promote culture, multicultural coexistence, and its citizen's mobility.

Contextual factors – such as easier accessibility to communication and mobility – have exploded the ways in which jazz artists today create collaborative work within Europe. The digital revolution in the 1990's, that led to a radical paradigm shift in the music industry and in the ways in which music is produced, disseminated and consumed, seemed to provide artists with new tools to produce and gain higher control over their own recorded music. A world wide access to the Internet seemed to give musicians and promoters a chance to publicise their work, their festivals and their image. Affordable travels between countries inside Europe and the Schengen Treaty of 1985 seemed to deliver artists the prospect of creating international links and expanding their live audiences. In short, physical and virtual mobility seemed to provide artists with exciting new scenarios where the industry's middle man were finally excluded, where artists could open direct lines of communication with their fans, where artistic collaborations would bloom throughout Europe, and – most importantly – where the contrasts between peripheral and central countries would be smoothen.

Time, however, would prove them wrong. The economic crisis of 2008 not only exposed the frailty of the model of the emergent independent music industry, but also accentuated the schisms between peripherality and centrality within Europe. Virtual mobility proved to be effective only when combined with strategic institutional support for physical mobility, which, in turn, evidenced that it

was not equally accessible for artists from different parts of Europe.

What has mobility brought to jazz in Europe? What kind of impact it has on the aesthetics of the music? More importantly, how can intra-European mobility inform the notion of a pan-European jazz identity?

As a result of my personal experiences as a jazz musician, I approached the field with the assumption that discourse does not always concur with practice. Musicians continually build and reinvent their own narratives and image by responding to institutional discourse, peer-review, press and audience reception, so that 'their' storyline will help them communicate their music, capture new audiences, achieve greater media exposure and/or obtain public funding. In the role of jazz academic, I believe the phenomenon of musicians building their own narratives warrants considerable exploration.

2. IDENTITY

2.1 Europe. In Philip Bohlman's (2004) *Nationalism and the Making of the New Europe*, it is argued that the process of building national identities is the key to understand European music, in the sense that it contributes fundamentally to the ontology of European music, that is, to music's 'way of being' in Europe (Bohlman, 2004:xxii). Drawing on Bohlman's notion that music-making articulates values and attitudes of social groups and, therefore, it contributes to celebrate or challenge identities; I argue that jazz in Europe represents both a celebration of, and a challenging to European identity. Moreover, Bohlman suggests that national identities are constantly being defined and redefined by different people in different places, even if the music that sets the process in motion is originally from someone and somewhere else.

Europe is often represented by its political institutions as a cultural whole. However it is an ever-changing and multidimensional entity. In the same way, cultural products within Europe tend to serve as complex and, at some points, contradictory representations of European and national identities. Europe is, *per se*, a cultural network. It has developed as a constant flow of people and cultural products between different European cities, which have become, throughout history, more or less important actors of that network. However, over time, defining Europe has proved to be an arduous task and the subject of extensive academic dispute. More than a geographical entity, Europe is – and always has been – a complex construction and an idealized projection of 'political significance and immense

symbolic weight… without agreed boundaries' (Wallace, 1990:7). Rather than a peaceful harbour for religious coexistence – between northern Protestantism, southern Catholicism, the eastern Orthodox world, the Jewish diaspora and the Islam – Europe has built its history upon tangible discrimination. Caught between its past and its present, the once 'Old World' that introduced and imposed itself on Africa, the Americas and Asia, has become the destination for African, South-American and Asian immigrants, migrating from former imperial colonies. Today, Europe culture is composed of some 50 languages and 30-40 ethnic groups and, while trying to define the 'self', Europe inevitably establishes boundaries to the 'other' (Tonra & Dunne, 1998:11). Subsequently, the official rhetoric around Europe as a cultural whole is also an intricate construction of thorny complexity.

It is safe to say that today Europe's cultural identity results from a long line of adjustments to an ideal set of social and political values – participatory and pluralist democracy, liberal humanism, freedom of thought, belief, speech and association. This set of values is very close to – and inspired by – the democratic model inherited from the US.

European leaders have defined 'Europeanness' not as a set of distinct ideals, attitudes or symbols, but as "the will to hold together their fellow members' disparate sets of values, behaviours and emblems" (Sassatelli, 2009: 47). Europe can serve as an ideal place for the construction of an 'imagined community', where its members may have similar interests or identity (Anderson, 1983:72). Therefore, European cultural identity could be perceived as 'the nameless and indefinite stance' that derives from that precise act of will (Boylan, 2006:288).

2.1 Americanisation. The Americanisation of Europe played a decisive role in understanding jazz practices in Europe. The mutual fascination between the US and Europe has, particularly during the twentieth century, nurtured that process. On the one hand, Europe has been largely influenced by American cultural products, of which jazz is an important part. On the other, Americans welcomed (and to some extent craved) the legitimation of jazz by European enthusiasts.

America has always been appealing to Europeans. Since the first settlers' reports began arriving in Europe, their accounts fed the desire of the 'Old World' for this 'New World' (Pells, 1997). But from the beginning of the twentieth century – not least due to the growing exposure to American culture through imported film, literature and records – Europe would ultimately embrace

the myth of America as the paragon of modern democracy.

In its 2004 edition, the Berlinale Film Festival screened a curious set of rediscovered short documentary films from the late-1940s and early-1950s. They were part of an extensive film program made as part of the Marshall Plan, designed to promote a new beginning for post-WWII Europe. The benefits of international cooperation, free trade, democratic (re)education, multilingualism, tolerance of multi-ethnic societies, and the promise of a 'New United States of Europe' were translated into audio-visual narratives featuring boys and girls from all over Europe, symbolising the future generation according to American democratic ideas. These films, alongside radio and advertising, were crucial elements of mass media propaganda for democracy, which used recurrent re-enactments of economic success stories attributed to Marshall Plan aid (Mehring, 2012:2). By making use of young people as actors to introduce the 'new Europe', the European Reconstruction Program – the official name for the Marshall Plan – redefined Europe as 'young Europe'. Ironically, 'new' and 'young' seem to have been the European's chosen adjectives to define the mythic notion of the America (Ellwood, 2012).

If, from its early reception in Europe, jazz has been embraced as a symbol of the exotic (Gioia, 1989) and elevated by Europeans to 'serious music' during the interwar period (Prouty, 2010), in post-WWII the desire for consuming American cultural products increased even more.

The profusion of Hollywood's 1930s and 1940s musical films often featuring jazz musicians on screen; the dissemination of V-discs by American troops in WWII across liberated European countries; the European exile of many prominent American jazz musicians; and even French *Nouvelle Vague*'s mystification of American popular culture references taking jazz as its constant soundtrack were only some of a whole range of contributions to the notion of cultural imperialism.

However, over the course of time, Europeans seem to have gradually incorporated American cultural symbols and products as their own and have abstracted them from many of their American foundations. American cultural icons in Europe today are essentially value neutral, perceived as icons of a global youth culture (Dunne & Tonra, 1998:13).

2.3 Between displacement and belonging. From Hot Club in Lisbon, to Jamboree Jazz Club in Barcelona, the Unterfahrt in Munich or La Fontaine in Copenhagen, we can see the same iconographic elements: print-memory from

previous local jazz festivals, pictures of jazz musicians, and even the display of old trumpets or saxophones on the wall. When combined, these elements nurture a narrative and convey a very precise message: you are in a jazz club. Apart from the local dialect featured on the flyers lying on the tables, almost everything else loses its locality. That jazz club could be anywhere else in Europe, if not anywhere else in the world and even maybe at any time in history. In most cases, those iconic elements and narratives seem to be used as ways to legitimise that place's jazz authenticity; and as result of that, local features appear to be constantly blurred by global communicational codes.

Jazz artists live between displacement and belonging. On the one hand, both jazz and jazz communities have been and are, more and more, global and nomadic, less and less associated to a particular culture. On the other hand, part of an artist's jazz identity is his or her nationality.

2.4 The white canvas. This paradox is even more evident in the case of European jazz artists. In the course of my PhD research on jazz networks in Europe, from 2011 to 2015, I interviewed many jazz musicians from different parts of Europe and some from the US. In contrast to American jazz musicians, most European jazz musicians thought of themselves as free from the weight of the jazz tradition. However, at the same time, when asked to elaborate on why they choose to play jazz, they often engaged in a discourse very close to the American narrative, justifying their choice through their assertion that jazz is a symbol of multiculturalism, pro-active democracy, and struggle for the individual voice.

This seemingly ambivalent discourse – and puzzling, at first – between rejecting a parallel with the 'other' while adopting his narrative is ultimately the core of theories developed around the notion of identity from authors such as Jacques Derrida, Stuart Hall and Simon Frith. Derrida's (1982) principle of 'constitutive outside' establishes that it is impossible to draw an absolute distinction between interior and exterior – every identity is irremediably affected by its exterior. In a markedly similar approach, for Hall (1996) identity is built through the relation to the 'other' – the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks and to what it does not want to be.

While elaborating on the reasons for their choices to play jazz – as Europeans –, the musicians may have done precisely that: they reject jazz as their musical tradition but they take its idealised narrative – thus projecting their own ideal of what jazz should or might be. In fact, an identity is always already an ideal, what we would like to be, not what we are (Frith, 1996:121-123). And for

European jazz musicians, in the face of a musical genre that is traditionally assumed as not their own, jazz may work as a white canvas on which they impose their own narrative on musical identity.

Identity is a dynamic process constructed both internally and externally. Similarly, it is crucial to assume that the establishing of an official jazz narrative may be a key element to that process. Jazz's official narrative has been largely built by instituting differences and finding similarities between jazz and other music genres. Moreover, the narrative around music may verbalise social and political ideals, thus providing music its meanings. The European jazz narrative is deeply rooted in its historical reception of American jazz and the appropriation of its anecdotes, styles, and its glorification of individualism. The European jazz narrative is deeply rooted in absorbing the American liberal capitalist metropolitan ideology.

Any official narrative is the construction of a myth, which may or may not concur with practice. It is a goal, constantly in construction – as is the case with the myth of Europe.

As argues, the construction of identity is a 'form of self-understanding' that is 'accomplished when identities are being changed' (Rice, 2007:26). Perhaps jazz actors tend to construct their discourses around their métier as a form of better understanding it and defining their role within it. Europe's identity, as Bohlman (2004) debates, is ever-changing. Maybe jazz actors in Europe create narratives around what jazz in Europe is by projecting their idealised notion of what Europe should be.

3. MOBILITY

3.1 European mobility and all that jazz. In 2004 the European Parliament together with the European Council issued the Directive 2004/38/EC, which granted EU citizens the right to work and reside freely within member states. Three years later, when the implementation of that Directive was on the agenda, the EU Cultural Programme for 2007-2013 established three main objectives: 'transnational mobility of cultural players'; 'transnational circulation of artistic and cultural works and products'; and 'intercultural dialogue and exchanges'. Shortly after, the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) issued the Programme's official brochure, introducing some of the projects that had been granted financial support. One of those was Europe Jazz Network – a trans-European umbrella organisation with around 90 members, which includes national and non-national organisations –

venues, associations and festivals (Goh, 2011), whose info made very convincing links between 'jazz' and 'mobility' inside Europe. In fact, the whole notion of jazz networking across European States is very close to the Programme's motto and the brochure's title: *Crossing Borders – Connecting People* (2007).

> 'The World of jazz' was perceived here as an embodiment of Europe's 'mixing and cross-fertilization of cultures', and of 'the positive impact of migration patterns on Europe's culture'.

Towards the end, the short text concluded that 'the positive experience of jazz encouraged a more widely held appreciation of the enriching impact of migration on European culture in general' (*Crossing Borders,* 2007:32).

3.2 Cultural, economic and geographic peripheries. Mobility is indeed an essential part of jazz practices in Europe. However, cultural, economic and geographic factors establish crucial differences between European jazz artists. On the one hand, there are substantial dissimilarities between the levels of commitment and investment that each European country makes towards cultural policies to support its national jazz sector. On the other hand, the geographic factor within the European Continent is also a significant one.

Scandinavian countries have a long history of cultural policies designed to promote their jazz artists domestically and abroad. Such fact is particularly evident in the Norwegian case, where specific funding schemes allow artists to tour around Europe as part of the country's commitment to export national culture. Artists from Central European countries – such as The Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany and Austria – have the proximity factor on their side, which allows them to surpass the impact of distance when touring abroad. Contrariwise, artists from peripheral countries – such as Ireland, Greece, Spain and Portugal – suffer the consequences of both the distance factor and the lack of cultural policies that support the export of national music.

These three differentiating factors – cultural, economic and geographic – are crucial to establish contrasts in the impact that mobility has on the jazz sector of each European country.

3.3 Erasmus and jazz education. Jazz education in Europe has developed widely over the past three decades. Institutions offering high education in jazz performance have multiplied. Some have established themselves as important references to European jazz and became young international talent attraction poles. The mobility provided by Erasmus exchange programmes and the growing demand for higher education have created a new generation of musicians who seem more integrated within Europe and who more naturally develop collaborations with musicians from other countries. Nevertheless, significant differences between the kinds of education each country offers seem to exist, which appears to be closely linked to each country's cultural and educational policies.

Many young musicians perceived studying jazz outside their countries a rite of passage. This concept introduces an interesting angle on how young musicians today perceive their process of building a professional career. For them, mobility is a fundamental part of their professional and personal development. Studying and living abroad are perceived as life experiences that can enable easier access to a wider labour market and, therefore, to wider prospects of success.

However, once arrived to that market, many quickly realize the dimension of the competition they now have to face. That competition has been raised up to both trans-generational and trans-European levels – trans-generational, because older musicians have already settled their own space; and trans-European, because mobility is now common-place.

3.4 Tracing movable objects. Musicians' mobility may add new challenges. For local cultural programmers, mobility may signify an added difficulty in retaining a regular basis of artists who they could create consistent collaborations with. This fact may also compromise the notion of national jazz identities, which are the base for national culture export policies. On the other hand, mobility also encourages new aesthetic crossovers in European jazz. And because jazz is in itself an essentially permeable music genre, the outcomes of these crossovers will surely be interesting to analyse in the future.

The fact that the construction of jazz identities – as all others – is constantly being negotiated and functions as a form of self-understanding through music (Rice, 2007:26)

4. CONCLUSIONS

Mobility is an essential aspect of jazz practices in Europe. Europe has been built as a culture of networking cities, and as result European jazz actors function within this logic.

Across countries, the very perception of what jazz is – as sound and as cultural experience – finds different meanings. Mobility opportunities for artists across Europe are irregular. The intricate set of factors associated with mobility deepens the

complexity of jazz practices in Europe. The paradigm shift in the music industry; cultural, economic and geographic peripherality and centrality; the booming of jazz education across Europe; Erasmus and similar programmes that promote mobility for EU citizens – are crucial elements in mapping and understanding jazz as a European music practice.

Jazz is created and reinvented in the process of its dissemination and practice (Johnson 2002). I suggest that jazz identities in Europe result from the negotiation between discourse and practice (Sassatelli, 2009). As such, jazz catalyses the process of defining and redefining national and pan-European identities – somewhere between displacement and belonging.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of* Nationalism. London: Verso.
2. Bohlman, P. V. (2004). *The Music of European Nationalism – Cultural Identity and Modern History*. Oxford: ABC CLIO.
3. Boylan, P. (2006). On being European: the contribution of intercultural communication theory and pedagogy. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 6 (3&4).286-296.
4. *Crossing Borders – Connecting Cultures: The EU Culture Programme 2007-2013*. Brussels: European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture.
5. Decision No 1855/2006/EC. (2006). *Official Journal of the European Union*. European Parliament, Council of the European Union.
6. Derrida, J. (1982). *Margins of Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
7. Directive 2004/38/EC. (2004, April 29). *Official Journal of the European Union*. 77-123.
8. Ellwood, D. (2012). *The Shock of America: Europe and the Challenge of the Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

9. Frith, S. (1996). Music and Identity. In S. Hall & P. du Gay (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage. 108-127.
10. Gioia, T. (1989). Jazz and the Primitivist Myth. *The Musical Quarterly*. 73 (1). 130-143.
11. Goh, F. (2011). *Strength in Numbers – A study of Europe Jazz Network*. EJN.
12. Hall, S. (1996). Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'? In S. Hall & P. du Gay (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity.*. London: Sage. 1-17.
13. Johnson, B. (2002). The Jazz Diaspora. In M. Cooke & D. Horn (eds.). *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 33-54.
14. Mehring, F. (2012). The Promises of Young Europe: Cultural Diplomacy, Cosmopolitanism, and Youth Culture in the Films of the Marshall Plan. *European journal of American studies*, 7 (2), Special issue: Wars and New Beginnings in American History, document 11. Available: http://ejas.revues.org/9701 [Accessed: Sep. 11, 2014].
15. Pells, R. (1997). *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture since World War II*. New York: Basic Books.
16. Prouty, K. E. (2010). Toward Jazz's "Official" History: The Debates and Discourses of Jazz History Textbooks. *Journal of Music History Pedagogy*. 1 (1). 19-43.
17. Rice, T. (2007). Reflection on Music and Identity in Ethnomusicology. *Musicology*. 17-38.
18. Sassatelli, M. (2009). *Becoming Europeans. Cultural Identity and Cultural Policies*. Basingstoke: Palgrave McMillan.
19. Tonra, B. & Dunne, D. (1998). A European Cultural Identity: Myth, Reality or Aspiration?. *Social Science Research Network*.Available: http://ssrn.com/abstract=1739565. [Accessed Jun. 26, 2013].
20. Wallace, W. (1990). *The Transformation of Western Europe*. London: RIIA/Pinter.