MUSIC AND IDENTITY

Transformation and Negotiation

Eric Akrofi, Maria Smit & Stig-Magnus Thorsén (Eds.)
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outh Africa and Sweden have a long history of cooperation, which intensified during the last decades of the 20th century. Culture then came into focus, mirroring a variety of political and social changes. In the mid 1990s musicology emerged as a new area. A Travelling Institute for Music Research in South Africa (TIMR), established in 1999, aimed at building capacity and initiating common research projects. The South African National Research Foundation (NRF) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) provided funds for TIMR (which was active from 1999 until 2004), resulting in several networks and research projects.

In 2002 support was given to the Swedish South African Research Network on Music and Identity (SSARN). International workshops were held with funding from the Travelling Institute and finally we received a grant from the NRF-Sida fund “South African – Swedish research partnership programme bilateral agreement”. This made it possible for SSARN to organise a series of local and international seminars from 2004–2006 in order to broaden our perspectives and deepen our knowledge in the area of music and identity. Also, the hosting universities, namely Walter Sisulu University and the University of Stellenbosch, both in South Africa, and Göteborg University in Sweden, provided financial support for our meetings.

Publishing a book, out of experiences of the network, was a goal from the beginning. The book project called for further expertise and Professor Kofi Agawu, Princeton University, USA, and Professor Even Ruud, Oslo University, Norway, scrutinised texts and gave all writers clear-cut scholarly feedback. Professor Christine Lucia, Wits University, Johannesburg, South Africa, wrote a lucid introduction in order to place the subject in a wider research context. Undersigned Maria Smit did the extensive final editing in cooperation with the publishing house.

We are most grateful to all institutions and persons, who made the publication of the book possible. However, in the first place we want to thank all participants, who since 2002 have shared thoughts, ideas, and research through discussions and texts. Not all the essays produced during these years have found a place in this book, but they have given input to the network’s inspiring work.

For the Swedish South African Research Network (SSARN):
- Eric Akrofi, Walter Sisulu University, South Africa
- Maria Smit, Stellenbosch University, South Africa
- Stig-Magnus Thorsén, Göteborg University, Sweden
INTRODUCTION

Christine Lucia

The aim of the Swedish South African Research Network on Music and Identity, the project that came to fruition in this book, was to develop research discourses around music, identity, and culture, shared between two areas of the world: Sweden and South Africa. It was an ambitious aim that saw the project exploring, over several years, a number of theoretical and methodological issues, covering enormously divergent musical experiences, and developing research capacity among participants along the way. In the process, greater mutual understanding of sociopolitical and educational problems and research concerns across two continents was established than existed before. The project grew geographically, with the idea of “South Africa” expanding to include participants from Namibia, Kenya/US, and Ghana, while “Sweden” expanded to include participants from Denmark and Finland; eventually some participants from Australia also joined because of their interest in South African music. Like an intellectual touring vehicle, the project shifted gears, changed direction, and refined the reason for its journey along the way. This was reflected in changes in some participants’ offerings and in the way people dropped in and out. A core group of about twenty-odd people was established fairly early on, hence the twenty-three chapters of this book.

The original vision of the project was never lost: to study ways in which music articulates identity discourse in Nordic and African contexts, and to explore the interface between two very different parts of the global music-scape. Given the theoretical possibilities underpinning such aims and the fact that the people involved in making this book came from different aspects of music as a discipline (exemplified in the contrasting disciplinary modes of music education and cultural studies for example), it is inevitable that the book is not homogenous. It reflects the sum of its contributors rather than a single initiating concept or theme. It grew into maturity as a collection of ideas in ways that have left some areas of theory and methodology well explored while others are more implicit. Some issues are covered with greater thoroughness than others. The resulting sense of incompleteness is par for the course, however, because the recent history of these two areas of the world and the political change each has experienced (especially South Africa, whose transformation is a key element underpinning the contingent nature of arguments in this book), has not provided neat solutions, but
rather, has continually exposed new problems. That is what the book does too, then: it exposes fissures, weaknesses, uncertainties; and explores what at times seem like fragile relationships between countries, cultures, individuals, and institutions.

Identity is not examined in this book as a philosophical or historical concept so much as a manifestation of culture and nation: many chapters of this book concern themselves therefore – whether explicitly or not – with identity as an ideology, as an expression of selfhood and subjectivity asserting itself across a number of sites. In Adornian terms identity is itself the site that links a concept to its object, the “thing”. In this dialectic relationship identity is already an ideological phenomenon, a move outwards from what Frederic Jameson calls “the imprisonment of the self (Id) in itself”, where, “crippled by its terror of the new and unexpected, carrying its sameness with it wherever it goes [the self] never meets anything but what it knows already” (Jameson 2007, p. 16). The counter-image of the self, in this Freudian aspect of Adorno’s thought, is the utter newness and strangeness of “non-identity”, exposure to which in a constant dialectical relationship over time allows “what is left to be tolerable to experience, while it tirelessly reassures us that we really still do have a persistent identity over time” (p. 17), thus ensuring a sufficiency of sameness to become a “defense mechanism” (Ego) which can also be “a weapon, and instrument of praxis and survival” (Ibid).

This is only one kind of theoretical underpinning for identity, then, and it is an important one for this book. Identity study as a whole is a vast, indeed multiple area of scholarship producing a widely divergent literature, both non-fiction and fiction, and concerning itself with gender, race, the body, the community, the nation, and fundamental issues of repression and domination at all levels of society. The social construction of identity and its link to modernity is indeed one of the major thrusts of scholarly writing in the past fifteen or twenty years (see for example Giddens 1991). Identity is also a concrete reality in people’s daily lived experience, and issues raised in the literature have been linked in very specific ways to empirical data in humanities disciplines such as political science, sociology, psychology, history, anthropology, religious studies, and education. Music has its own specific links as well, and is sometimes seen as one of the cornerstones of identity formation, used as a site of observation by scholars in other disciplines, the “social immersion” of music being the very thing that makes it “obviously attractive for sociologists and, more recently, cultural theorists” (Williams 2003, p. 76).

Identity is intimately connected to performance, since music as cultural expression only exists in and through performance. The performance of culture is a major issue for music ethnographers – how people perform it, what that means, how societies and individuals frame, articulate, and own cultural identities – and there are numerous texts