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Whose Difference? Whose 'Multiculturalism'?

Paper to be presented at the British Forum for Ethnomusicology One-Day Conference, 21st October 2017, Faculty of Music, University of Cambridge

Theme: 'Listening to Difference': Music and Multiculturalism

Amanda Bayley (Bath Spa University) and Laudan Nooshin (City, University of London)

Abstract

Does the language of 'multiculturalism' reinforce or transcend difference? And whose purpose do such discourses serve? Whilst a number of writers have sought to refine the discussion by suggesting alternative terms such as 'inter-cultural' or 'trans-cultural', few have problematised the notion of 'culture' in this particular context (notwithstanding the extensive literature on 'culture' as a concept more broadly). Specifically, in relation to music, there is a relatively new and growing ethno-musicological literature documenting collaborative projects of various kinds, mostly based – and led and funded by musicians and organisations - in the cosmopolitan urban centres of the 'global north'. Such collaborations are not new, of course, but have received added impetus by factors such as the emergence of the 'world music' industry from the 1980s, the rise of digital communications technologies, and increased human mobilities of various kinds. Like the broader lay and marketing discourses, much of this scholarly work is celebratory in tone; relatively little of it engages critically with issues such as the power relations involved in such cultural 'exchanges'. In particular, the language of multiculturalism - including talk about exploring the spaces 'between' cultures - is predicated on a view of culture as relatively stable and bounded, rather than as a fluid and ongoing process. Viewed from the latter perspective, all cultures are arguably 'multi'.

This paper will explore these questions with reference to several 'cross-cultural' projects, including Ukrainian singer Mariana Sadovska's collaborations with the Kronos Quartet and German percussionist Christian Thomé; and Iranian musician Kayhan Kalhor's work with the Kronos Quartet and the Silk Road Ensemble. We explore the discourses by which these musicians and others position their work in relation to perceived cultural boundaries and ask whether those participating in such 'multicultural' projects are not in fact often from the *same* cultural formation (Turino 2003) sharing more culturally than the discourses of 'multiculturalism' allow for, and reinforcing an essentialised privileging of difference over shared commonalities (Agawu 2003).

Agawu, Kofi (2003) *Representing African Music. Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions*. Routledge.

Turino, Thomas (2003) 'Are We Global Yet? Globalist Discourse, Cultural Formations and the Study of Zimbabwean Popular Music', *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, 12(2): 51-79.

AB: **PPT 1 (TITLE)** This paper follows on from a panel which I organised at the BFE annual conference earlier this year, entitled 'Developing Creative Languages between Musical Cultures'. A number of discussion points following the panel seemed particularly pertinent to the theme of this conference, so Laudan and I decided to offer a joint presentation exploring some of the problematics around the discourse of multiculturalism: at times we take quite different positions; our aim is not to present a singular view but more a counterpoint of ideas.

LN: What kind of systemic violence is enacted and validated through terms such as 'multiculturalism'? To what extent do they lend weight to far right ideologies which depend on essentialised notions of cultural difference, with a disregard for the weight of history where 'multi-ness' has tended to be the norm. Take a country like Iran which for millenia has been home to people speaking different languages, practicing different religions, and with different ethnic or tribal affiliations, but where there is no word for 'multiculturalism'. So why now, in this particular time and place do we feel the need to mark multi-ness as different, and what – and *whose* - purpose does this serve?

In February 2011, British Prime Minister David Cameron gave a speech in which he claimed that 'state multiculturalism' in the UK had failed and was responsible for a ghettoization of society and a breeding ground for radical Islam. I quote: **PPT 2** 'we have allowed the weakening of our collective identity. Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives apart from each other and apart from the mainstream. We have failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong. We have even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run completely counter to our values.'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3xsnEzA8Fw>

Setting aside the question of exactly who 'they' and 'we' are, the media and other responses to the speech revealed both the sensitivities around and the many different understandings of 'multiculturalism'. A few years earlier, in 2004, and from the opposite end of the political spectrum, former Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Trevor Philips also pronounced the 'death of multiculturalism', invoking similar language to Cameron amidst concerns that relativism has led to a more divided Britain and to a rise in racism.

My concern is less with definitions of multiculturalism - and whether it is alive or dead, a success or failure - but the concept itself, and the plethora of alternative-but-essentially-the-same terms: 'trans-cultural', 'cross-cultural', 'inter-cultural', 'pan-cultural', and so on.

The first problem, as I see it, is that no matter what prefix one selects, these terms are all predicated on an assumed starting point of separate, relatively-bounded, cultures. Notwithstanding the small number of as yet uncontacted peoples, the idea of human cultures as discrete entities and the boundaries between them, are a construction. If multi- is the norm, then the prefix is redundant.

And then there's the culture concept itself, which has of course been extensively problematised; discourses around culture have tended to be noun-based rather than focusing on culture as a process or a verb. There are resonances here with Christopher Small's notion of musicking; perhaps we need an equivalent 'culturing'. But if culture is a process, plural and fluid, what then does it mean to talk about the 'spaces *between* cultures' as Amanda will discuss in a moment – between what?

As ethnomusicologists, we are invested in difference. And we therefore need to ensure that we are attentive to the ways in which *difference comes to be constructed* and understood, how such constructions become naturalized, and how certain kinds of difference become privileged over others. My contention is that there is a form of systemic violence in the naturalized discourses of Euro-American multiculturalism which are rooted in earlier colonial notions of 'race'. Anthropologist Adam Kuper has somewhat controversially suggested that **PPT3** 'the concept of culture is in fact a form of racism, replacing biology as the assumed basis of distinct human groups, but no less essentialist for it ...'. He argues that 'anthropologists would be better off avoiding the "hyper-referential" word altogether, and instead talk precisely about what we mean - knowledge, belief, art, technology, tradition, or even ideology.' [Camille C. O'Reilly, Review of Adam Kuper (1999) *Culture: The Anthropologists' Account*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showpdf.php?id=4034>]

Assuming we retain the culture concept, how one defines a culture is clearly not easy. Ukrainian singer Mariana Sadovska (who Amanda will talk about later) describes *her*

music as being from a different 'culture' from that rural areas of the Ukraine, or even from the past; 'tradition is a different culture', she says, echoing L.P.Hartley's idea of the past as a foreign country.

Writing in 1996, the philosopher Homi Bhabha continued the debate surrounding 'culture-sympathy' and 'culture-clash' articulated by T.S. Eliot in his *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* of 1948. Bhabha refers to a 'part' culture **PPT4**:

this *partial* culture, is the contaminated yet connective tissue between cultures – at once the impossibility of culture's containedness and the boundary between. It is indeed something like culture's 'in-between', bafflingly both alike and different. [...] the translation of cultures, whether assimilative or agonistic, is a complex act that generates borderline affects and identifications, 'peculiar types of culture-sympathy and culture-clash' (p. 54).

More recently, Ylva Hofvander Trulsson's and Pamela Burnard's discussion of 'Insider, outsider or cultures in-between' has drawn on Bhabha's ideas on multiculturalism and 'cultural hybridisation', as well as Katrin Goldstein-Kyaga's and Maria Borgström's concept of the 'third identity' to **PPT5** 'describe the identities of globalization's footsteps as cross-border, multidimensional, contextual and changeable in different situations' (2016: 121). Trulsson and Burnard reinforce the point that Laudan was making, regarding all cultures being 'multi': they conclude that 'Today's society, in general, and especially in big cities, is characterised by flowing, changing boundaries, where people's identity cannot be described in terms of belonging to individual and distinct groups' (2016: 122). So what terminology can we usefully employ to express these multiple layers of connection, or what Clifford Geertz refers to as 'a complex web of interpretations' (1973)?

Historical problems with the term 'intercultural' are what led Erika Fischer-Lichte to choose 'interweaving' for the title of her Research Centre at the Freie University in Berlin

PPT6. Founded in 2008, the Centre's mission is to **PPT7**:

investigate the interweaving of performance cultures and of cultures in performance in the broadest sense in cooperation with theatre scholars and cultural theorists from many parts of the world. The topic [...] profoundly question[s] fixed concepts of cultural identity. Through performative practices and

modes of presentation, political and social dimensions become apparent: processes of interweaving are inextricably linked to questions of economic power, migration, corpo-realities and identity politics, as well as to strategies of appropriation and translation.

Within the context of theatre, the term 'interweaving' is not loaded with the historical baggage that 'intercultural' is, and is therefore considered helpful for looking at 'new and different kinds of interaction and cooperation in performance'. Fischer-Lichte states **PPT8**: 'We do not only concern ourselves with productions which use elements from here or there, but also with the collaborations taking place in the larger world of theatre – also those *within* a culture through its internal diversities'. (Dialogue: Erika Fischer-Lichte and Rustom Bharucha 6 August, 2011). This again resonates with 'a complex web of interpretations', the reference to 'internal diversities' implying 'multi'.

Fischer-Lichte and her colleagues thus present one solution to the problem of 'intercultural', although it might be argued that, within musicology (or ethnomusicology), the term does not carry the same baggage. 'Intercultural' was first applied to music in 1990 at an International Symposium and Festival (organised by the Centre for Intercultural Music Arts in London); the first volume of the journal devoted to the topic begins its definition of intercultural music as 'that in which elements from two or more cultures are integrated' (Kimberlin and Euba, 1995: 2) which again presupposes that cultures are easily distinguishable. Perhaps there are reasons (beyond the scope of this paper) for treating the identity of the music differently from the identity of the musicians, who, as Trulsson and Burnard state, 'cannot be described in terms of belonging to individual and distinct groups'.

Complementing this standpoint it is useful to consider perspectives from dance: for example, Royona Mitra might have adopted the term 'interweaving' to describe the work of the British-Bangladeshi artist, Akram Khan, who straddles the worlds of the South Asian dance form of *kathak* from the north of India, and contemporary dance. Instead, she describes his work as dancing 'new interculturalism' (p. 15). She adopts Rustom Bharucha's terminology where interculturalism **PPT9** 'refers to an individual's philosophical and political principles that nuance the way in which the person perceives and interacts with people, artefacts, politics and traditions from cultures other than their

own' (Bharucha, 'Dialogue', 2011). She says: 'Interculturalism [...] represents a conceptual, processual, embodied lived condition driven by one's own *multiple* affiliations to cultures, nations and faiths' (2015:15) [my emphasis].

Bharucha's argument (in 2011) for keeping the term interculturalism is because, he says, 'it is politically necessary for us artists, as citizens, to find ways of countering the dominance of official state-determined "multiculturalism"' (Bharucha, 'Dialogue', 2011: 10; also quoted by Mitra, 2015: 15). Outside any artistic affiliations, Ted Cattle's book, *Interculturalism – The New Era of Cohesion and Diversity* (2012), attempts to create a clear and progressive vision for interculturalism and to set it free from another baggage, that of multiculturalism. For him, 'multiculturalism is the past, the future is interculturalism'. ('About Interculturalism')

Unsurprisingly then, Mitra's analysis of Khan's work as *new* interculturalism 'echoes [...] Cattle's championing of interculturalism as both a departure [...] from and a more progressive alternative to its failed precursor of multiculturalism' (2015: 20-21). Among other things, Cattle suggests that:

interculturalism dislodges identities as fixed and emphasises their processual nature such that identity-positions are now chosen as opposed to inherited. Most importantly, [he] argues that where multiculturalism has 'dramatised difference' between communities, interculturalism, by virtue of its emphasis on enabling dialogue between communities, focuses on similarities between them as a way into these interactions (2015: 22).

'Enabling dialogue between communities' links to Timothy Cooley's idea of **PPT10** 'cultures of exchange that have always been a part of musical identity' (2013: 368-9). Despite Kofi Agawu's landmark essay from 2003, 'Contesting Difference', there have been few attempts in musicology to emphasise similarities rather than difference, yet similarities often seem to provide starting points for collaborations between different musical traditions. Examples include the album **PPT 11** *Clychau Dibon* (2013) by Welsh harpist, Catrin Finch, and West African kora player, Seckou Keita, and a project I have written about on **PPT 12** cross-cultural exchanges between string quartet, Zimbabwean mbira and dance (2014-2015).

So what does all this mean for musicians collaborating across cultural boundaries, as they perceive them? I will briefly discuss the case of Iranian composer and virtuoso *kamancheh* player Kayhan Kalhor (b.1963). **PPT13** Kalhor was born in Iran and left as a young adult, studying for a music degree in Canada and later returning to Iran. He now lives in the US, but spends much of his time touring. Since the late 1990s, Kalhor has made a name for himself on the world music circuit and is one of the few Iranian musicians to have undertaken 'cross-musical' collaborations.

I'll play an extract from a recent collaboration between Kalhor and the Rembrandt jazz Trio from Holland; from a concert in Rotterdam in March 2015 **PPT 14**. The piece is called *Chaharpareh*, named after a section of Iranian classical repertoire, which forms the basis for the piece. [To be clear, this is just to give you an idea of one of Kalhor's collaborations; I won't be talking about the music 'itself' today].

<https://www.barbican.org.uk/whats-on/2017/event/kayhan-kalhor-the-rembrandt-trio?ID=21344> **Example 1, 2 mins.**

So, thinking about what's happening here, I have found Turino's work on cultural formations quite helpful. Writing about Zimbabwean popular music, Turino proposes three types of [what he terms] **PPT15-1** 'trans-state cultural formations: immigrant communities, diasporas and cosmopolitan formations'. Whilst these categories are not unproblematic, the idea of cosmopolitan cultural formations is interesting for the ways in which it opens up spaces for identities that cut across ethnic, religious, linguistic and other differences, and away from reifying culturally deterministic discourses. Thus, **PPT15-2** 'The ideas, practices and technologies of a given cosmopolitan formation travel through communication loops independently binding people culturally who are not, otherwise, related by location or heritage' (2003:63). Understood in this way, cosmopolitans in Harare may share as much, and sometimes more, in their lifestyles and dispositions with their cosmopolitan counterparts in Tehran than with their compatriots in more rural, traditional and poorer parts of Zimbabwe.

He observes: **PPT15-3** 'Early in my fieldwork I was struck by the fact that my Shona colleagues at the University of Zimbabwe seemed to have as much or more in common with me than they did with rural Shona peasants. I was also struck by the fact that my middle-class neighbours in Mabelreign suburb knew less about rural Shona music and

indigenous ceremony than I did and sometimes more about jazz and US country music than I did'. (2003:63)

In the same way, although there are obvious differences between Kalhor and members of the Rembrandt Trio, these musicians arguably all participate in a particular metropolitan cosmopolitan cultural formation; one could say that they inhabit the same culture. Whilst there is a process of musical encounter and even exchange taking place, to what extent this is 'cross-' or 'multi-'cultural is less clear. Whilst I accept that this argument doesn't necessarily apply to all 'cross-cultural' collaborations, it is certainly not untypical of musicians working in the 'world music' scene. And it raises questions about how we theorise different kinds of exchange and whether the 'multi-' or 'cross'-cultural-*ness* lie in the musicians or in the music? And there's another point to consider: such collaborations tend to take place within the same cultural formations - usually in the global 'north' - and attracting audiences from the same in terms of class and cultural capital. Interestingly, outside Iran, Kalhor is best known for his collaborations; but within Iran, it is his work with other *Iranian* musicians that he is known for.

The African ethnomusicologist, Akin Euba, identifies 'intercultural composition' when elements are derived from two or more cultures, emphasising the important connection between fieldwork and individual composition espoused by Béla Bartók. Turning to a twenty-first century equivalent, keeping traditional songs alive liberates Ukrainian singer, Mariana Sadovska's compositional process: her recent collaboration with the German percussionist, Christian Thomé (in 2015) offers a reconciliation between folk music and 'modern' music, embracing a new soundworld of percussion and electronics that takes the songs into a new direction. [Play Sadovska example. 1:52] **PPT16**

Sadovska considers her task different from someone who is interested in preserving ancient music because (in her words) she is 'having to find how [these songs] should be sung today' (Interview 19 February 2016). The tradition remains alive through re-imagining the songs, integrating them into new sonic environments rather than preserving them in their original forms.

The way traditions can be adapted and layered upon each other suggests parallels between Kalhor's and Sadovska's compositions and performances, and Khan's dance

and choreography. For the latter, Mitra observes that **PPT17-1**: 'Khan shifts Bhabha's concept of the third space as a condition of interstitiality between one's home and host nation, to an aesthetic of multistituality that emerges at the intersections of three or more artistic disciplines' (Mitra, 2015: 28).

Conclusion

So, to conclude: what's in a name and does any of this matter? There is a real challenge in engaging with everyday discourses in our work without reinforcing or naturalizing them. Discussing what he calls the 'discourse of globalism', Turino observes that:

PPT17-2 As ideas and terms become more widely diffused and increasingly taken for granted across fields, it becomes simultaneously more difficult and more important to begin from a position of critical disbelief regarding the premises of the discursive practice ... (58) The importance of discourses for supporting asymmetrical power relations is now understood in some detail ... [we have] a vantage point to consider the political effects of the language and premises we use *before* we contribute to the naturalization of discourses that are detrimental to ourselves and the people we work with. (2003:76)

We believe that the discursive practices around multiculturalism matter immensely, for the ways in they reinforce an essentialised privileging – and fetishisation - of difference over shared commonalities. The whole notion of the multicultural is a Euro-American orientalism which arguably emerged in the vestiges of colonialism, and as part of the modernist obsession with binaries. We know that 'capitalism trades on difference' (Turino 2003:73, referring to the work of Appadurai and Erlmann), and this is particularly relevant to the 'world music' artists we have discussed, who share more culturally than the discourse of multiculturalism allows for. Wolfgang Welsch's concept of 'transculturality' would seem more appropriate for capturing the reality of 'entanglement, intermixing and commonness' that promotes exchange and interaction rather than separation (Welsch 1999:10), and reflects the multiple layers of connection and web of interpretations mentioned earlier. But more broadly, what are the power relations at work here? Does the language of 'multiculturalism' reinforce or transcend difference? And who stands to gain and who to lose from the idea of distinct cultures as the starting point for a supposedly relatively new thing called 'multiculturalism', the kinds of boundaries it presupposes and the new ones that it constructs?

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Whose Difference? Whose 'Multiculturalism'?

**British Forum for Ethnomusicology,
One-Day Conference, 21st October 2017
Faculty of Music, University of Cambridge**

Theme: 'Listening to Difference': Music and Multiculturalism

**Amanda Bayley (Bath Spa University)
Laudan Nooshin (City, University of London)**

British Prime Minister, David Cameron (February 2011)

‘we have allowed the weakening of our collective identity. Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives apart from each other and apart from the mainstream. We have failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong. We have even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run completely counter to our values.’

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‘the concept of culture is in fact a form of racism, replacing biology as the assumed basis of distinct human groups, but no less essentialist for it ... anthropologists would be better off avoiding the “hyper-referential” word altogether, and instead talk precisely about what we mean - knowledge, belief, art, technology, tradition, or even ideology.’

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‘this *partial* culture, is the contaminated yet connective tissue between cultures – at once the impossibility of culture’s containedness and the boundary between. It is indeed something like culture’s ‘in-between’, bafflingly both alike and different. [...] the translation of cultures, whether assimilative or agonistic, is a complex act that generates borderline affects and identifications, ‘peculiar types of culture-sympathy and culture-clash’ (1996: 54).

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‘investigate the interweaving of performance cultures and of cultures in performance in the broadest sense in cooperation with theatre scholars and cultural theorists from many parts of the world. The topic [...] profoundly question[s] fixed concepts of cultural identity. Through performative practices and modes of presentation, political and social dimensions become apparent: processes of interweaving are inextricably linked to questions of economic power, migration, corporealities and identity politics, as well as to strategies of appropriation and translation’.

<http://www.geisteswissenschaften.fu-berlin.de/en/v/interweaving-performance-cultures/index.html>



‘We do not only concern ourselves with productions which use elements from here or there, but also with the collaborations taking place in the larger world of theatre – also those *within* a culture through its internal diversities’.

‘Dialogue: Erika Fischer-Lichte and Rustom Bharucha’ (2011), *Textures*. <http://www.textures-platform.com/?p=1667>

Intercultural music:

‘that in which elements from two or more cultures are integrated...’

Kimberlin, Cynthia Tse, and Euba, Akin (1995), ‘Introduction’, *Intercultural Music*, 1: 1-9.

‘refers to an individual’s philosophical and political principles that nuance the way in which the person perceives and interacts with people, artefacts, politics and traditions from cultures other than their own’. (2015: 15)

‘Interculturalism [...] represents a conceptual, processual, embodied lived condition driven by one’s own *multiple* affiliations to cultures, nations and faiths’ [my emphasis]. (2015: 15)

‘echoes [...] Cantle’s championing of interculturalism as both a departure [...] from and a more progressive alternative to its failed precursor of multiculturalism’. (2015: 20-21)

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Catrin Finch & Seckou Keita - Clychau Dibon (2013)

Cross-cultural exchanges between string quartet, mbira and dance (2014-2015)



Kayhan Kalhor and the Rembrandt Trio

Rotterdam, March 2015

‘Chaharpareh’

Kayhan Kalhor (*kamancheh*)

Rembrandt Frerichs (fortepiano)

Tony Overwater (bass viol)

Vinsent Planjer (percussion)

<https://www.barbican.org.uk/whats-on/2017/event/kayhan-kalhor-the-rembrandt-trio?ID=21344>

‘trans-state cultural formations: immigrant communities, diasporas and cosmopolitan formations.’

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‘Early in my fieldwork I was struck by the fact that my Shona colleagues at the University of Zimbabwe seemed to have as much or more in common with me than they did with rural Shona peasants. I was also struck by the fact that my middle-class neighbours in Mabelreign suburb knew less about rural Shona music and indigenous ceremony than I did and sometimes more about jazz and US country music than I did.’ (2003: 63)

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Mariana Sadovska and Christian Thomé (2015)

‘Khan shifts Bhabha’s concept of the third space as a condition of interstitiality between one’s home and host nation, to an aesthetic of multistitiality that emerges at the intersections of three or more artistic disciplines’. (Mitra, 2015: 28).

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