

FROM THE EAST TO THE WEST AND BACK AGAIN

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The feeling that something is wrong with our perception of the world came to my mind several times. It hit me for the first time in the USA when I saw an American map of the world: the American continent was placed in the middle of the map, and on the margins, distorted and squeezed, were Asia and Europe. On the next occasion it was in the fall of 1998, when I was sharing a course with a Canadian lecturer entitled Canadian Music: Discovering Canadian Identity through Music. The lecturer had studied ethnomusicology back home and attended a seminar led by an Inuit singer. All the students were white. They were interested in the subject and diligently took notes. At the end of the term, one student came the lecturer/singer asking about the possibility to write a diploma thesis on her and the music of her tribe. Every other lecturer would appreciate such a request, but not the Inuit singer. Why do you want to speak on our behalf? Who gave you the right to represent us? Absolutely not. Give me all your notes and records from classes and please do not write anything.

Seven years ago, this story shocked me, but gradually I have come to like and understand it. Now I can understand Native Americans when they do not allow white Americans to continue in building a construction in which ancient graves were discovered. I understand why they do not like the white authors to write books about the First Nation's history. I am a fan of the Egyptians who ask the Germans and French to return mummies and obelisks from European museums to their original country. I also understand the anger of the aboriginal peoples of Australia, who complain about American writer Marlo Morgan and her book *Mutant Message from Down-Under*. It bothers me when on a sight-

seeing tour in Opočno mansion while observing the hundred year old Colloredo-Mansfeld collections from Africa and America, I hear from the young guide that the Masai and Navajo tribes are extinct.

All these stories contain several key words that have already been uttered at this colloquy and will be mentioned again: identity, representation, authenticity, exoticism, roots, and transformation. With the experience from the colloquy held here in Náměšť two years ago, where I was looking for parallels between postmodernism and world music, I will speak about the mechanisms of post-colonialism and world music, including issues of East and West.

Post-colonialism¹⁾ is more or less a technical term, not a term coming from the arts and humanities. Similarly, the term world music did not originate in the arts, either. It came from the music business field. Colonialism came first, post-colonialism after it. Colonization means conquering, governing and then ruling a foreign country. What will remain when colonialism is over? Post-colonial theory is seeking to answer this question. Most of the materials are in English and most of the examples speak about the British Empire and its colonies. The two most important dates in post-colonial theory are 1947, when the British started to lose control over their colonies (the independence of India, for instance), and 1978, when a basic text on post-colonial studies appeared. Its title is *Orientalism* and its author is Edward Said²⁾.

Said claims that the Orient in the eyes of the West is the most frequent and most profound idea of the Other. The West used to define itself when it created the category of Orient. Let me make a digression now – the Czech speaking tribes of the Boemi used to define themselves as well, and it was through the name they gave their German speaking western neighbours: Němci – those who are dumb, who do not speak (Czech),

1) Sim, Stuart, ed. *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*. London and New York: Routledge, 2001.

(2) Selden, Raman a Widdowson, Peter. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993, pp. 190-191.

who are other. Back to Edward Said. According to him, the term Orientalism includes the 4,000 year history of the relationship between Europe and the Orient; furthermore, it is a scholarly discipline which since the 19th century has been producing specialists in Oriental languages and cultures; and finally, it covers the long-term experienced images, stereotypes, and ideologies of the Orient as the Other.

Generations of western scholars have produced myths about the laziness of people from the Orient, about their cunning and unfaithful nature, says Said. His book raised a huge wave of criticism; on the other hand, it initiated studies of newly independent states from Africa to the Caribbean, and southern and South-eastern Asia. Even before Said, the so-called third-world countries were discussed in connection with post-colonialism and their fight for independence (for example, Algeria after 1950).

What remains when the colonists are gone? Contemporary Australian writer Stephen Gray ³⁾ uses an example of the aboriginal peoples – they have freedom and empty hands, and this leads them to alcohol. Canadian First Nations teacher Jo-Ann Episkenew ⁴⁾ says that it leads to a return to one's roots. According to her, it is only today that Canadian First Nations people are going back to what they were not taught at school; they feel like victims. They publish their stories of abuse and mistreatment, as the story or book means healing for them. Writing in English means that they can address international audiences, not only members of their tribes. Farther south, Native Americans of the U.S. Southwest speak about “using the enemy's language to heal ourselves“ ⁵⁾. In Britain, a very frequent sentence has been “the Empire strikes back”. Until recently, it has just been used in connection with

3) Gray, Stephen, at a Postcolonial Spring School seminar, Freie Universitat Berlin, April 4-8, 2005.

4) Episkenew, Jo-Ann, at a Postcolonial Spring School lecture, Freie Universitat Berlin, April 4-8, 2005.

5) see Owens, Louis. *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel*. Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1992.

literature, as in "the Empire writes back". Different regions, different examples.

In a book published in Czech translation in 1999 ⁶⁾, Shankar Raman speaks in one chapter about abrogation and appropriation (referring to Bill Ashcroft and others in *The Empire Writes Back*, 1989). To put it in very simple terms, after the departure of colonial authorities, it is important to reject the colonial authority which was embodied in the language and institutions (that is to overcome it), and then it is necessary to change this background into a productive source of new identity (that is to accept it). After the departure of the colonists, there is no way back. Instead of (ab)original languages, people speak English or French; instead of tribal structures, there are Western type institutions. After regaining independence, it is still impossible to go back to the idyllic times before the coming of the colonizers. All is gone. How to live with it and not go mad? The best advice is not to think about the past, not to try to put it back. Live here and now.

In my opinion, accepting this approach must be very difficult for people who are observing the situation from the outside. Czechs spend their free time dressing like Plains Indians, sleeping in tepees and playing hand-drum; they make Scottish kilts and march to the sound of Scottish bagpipes; they play the aboriginal didgeridoo and chew plant roots. Do they want to turn the time back? Then we may use the term exoticism. According to Franz Fanon, exoticism is a certain form of simplification ⁷⁾. Exoticism captures, imprisons, and encodes. Then it produces stereotypes, and mass production reproduces it in numerous variants. In her article "Mass Exoticism" ⁸⁾, Clara Gallini speaks about

6) Raman, Shankar. "The Racial Turn: "Race", postkolonialismus, literární věda". In Miltos Pechlivanos et alli., ed. *Úvod do literární vědy*. Translated by Miroslav Petříček. Praha: Herrman & synové, 1999.

7) Gallini, Clara. "Mass Exoticism". Iain Chambers, Iain and Curti, Lidian. *The Post-colonial Question*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 216.

8) *ibid.*

souvenirs and furniture. It would be easy to find parallels of exoticism in music.

To live here and now, paradoxically, you must find the roots. Jo Ross and Kate Burrough comment on this in their introduction to *NewRoutes*⁹⁾:

Roots are about when and how we grow up . They provide a way of absorbing the colours and flavours of our environment and our experience along the way. A strong sense of identity often comes from a real connection to our roots and a sense of belonging within a community. The need to express this sense of identity is powerful and instinctive – and it is no surprise that the music made through this process speaks so openly and communicates so clerly between people around the world.

Let me add some words about identity. In his commentary in the article “Our Identity”¹⁰⁾ sociologist Antonín Rašek says:

In psychology, identity represents an awareness of a continuous identity and a typical feature of normality. In developmental psychology we work with the term “search for identity”, which is a typical feature of adolescence. [...] This is linked with the need of a human to be what he/she really is, be himself/herself, be able to find the place in his/her life. In other words, to live an authentic life and not play other people’s roles. [...] The background to the term identity contains the word attitude. An attitude to the world, to Europe, to a political party, social group, your country [...]. Our roots are deeply set in an attitude to the country, language, and nearest people. Identity prevents us best from civilization deviations.

We may easily apply these words to people and music too.

9) Ross, Jo and Burrough, Kate, ed. *NewRoutes*. London: The British Council, 2000, p. 4.

10) Rašek, Antonín. “Naše identita”. *Mladá fronta Dnes*, April 30, 2001.

11) Ross, Jo and Burrough, Kate, ed. *NewRoutes*. London: The British Council, 2000, p. 5.

In an article in *NewRoutes* ¹¹⁾, Black British jazz musician Courtney Pine says:

The absorption of roots through music is as natural as breath itself. [...]. In my lifetime I have seen many musical flavours assimilated by younger generations [...] What excites me about the direction of the roots scene today is how easily both the artist and audience straddle the various strands of musical expressions available.[...] The strength of this diversity is not about where these artists were born but more about the message that each musical flavour brings to my senses, how it makes me feel.

In conclusion, let's look at the Czech lands and local world music with regards to the above. We have never been fully colonized. We take foreign influences voluntarily; when they are over, we don't have to feel any trauma. In the country today, we can find both the music which would fit the exoticism category (simplified and firmly rooted in the past), and a creative music, which is able to transform foreign influences into a productive stream of its own identity. We don't have to worry that an artist was not born in a foreign country, that he or she is a Czech who plays music of another nation or ethnic group, another religious or social group. What is important is the message, the feeling. On the other hand, while meeting bearers of authentic tradition, some complex issues of representation arise: who do I represent; who allowed this to me; what are my objectives. Does it mean that I have no identity of my own so I have taken over somebody else's identity? Do I play roles of other people because I have no attitude to my own language, and the place where I live? Why have I become estranged from it? Do I hate the identity which the media and society offer me in my own country? Am I looking for an escape? Will music from another country help me find my roots in my own country? Obviously there must be different answers from the Czech generation of the 1970s and 80s who lived under communist ideology, and the free world generation of the 1990s and 2000s. Some answers were suggested in other papers presented here.

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