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## World music and the search for difference

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**ABSTRACT** World music has been immersed in a series of complex ethical, political and aesthetic debates since its emergence as a new musical category in the 1980s. These debates have been fuelled by competing perspectives that portray world music as either an exemplar of progressive cosmopolitan politics that foster cultural hybridity or as reinforcing fixed and unitary conceptions of difference through an essentializing representation of cultures.

By utilizing interviews with key people involved in the organization of world music in Britain, this article centralizes this tension by examining the role of difference in world music. Bourdieu's concept of cultural intermediary is used here as a descriptive label for the work of those involved in this research and as an explanatory tool to highlight how difference defines the interaction between the substantive and symbolic processes within the British world music scene.

This article argues that the work of cultural intermediaries demonstrates the ambivalent cultural processes within the performance, management and consumption of world music. This is evident in the series of recursive shifts within world music that employ a model of difference that draws on both the binary logic of traditional meanings of race/ethnicity and hybridity. In so doing, this article also examines how world music affinity and consumption, which takes people across arbitrarily ascribed boundaries, challenges the idea that normative racialized identities are meant to provide a fixed set of cultural values, musical tastes and social attitudes.

**KEYWORDS** cosmopolitanism ● cultural intermediaries ● Englishness ● ethnicity ● hybridity ● race

### INTRODUCTION

The fascination with difference and its commodification is one of the most significant features of globalization and is exemplified by the success and

widespread presence of hip-hop music and style. World music<sup>1</sup> is also created, produced and consumed transnationally, and epitomizes the fascination with difference even more potently than hip-hop<sup>2</sup> given that it incorporates a vastly heterogeneous collection of musical styles. In extension, world music also features diverse cultural traditions and musical communities that are subject to cross-fertilization and hybridization. As such, in contrast to dominant perspectives of hip-hop's localized 'urban rage' (Alexander and Alleyne, 2002: 545) as an expression of the social and political concerns of marginalized ethnic groups, world music is often imagined, celebrated and packaged as an exemplar of global harmony and as a 'blueprint for a multicultural society' (Jowers, 1993: 72–3). More than a new sales category, therefore, world music is often considered to be a shorthand for a set of culturally progressive cosmopolitan values and a source of political identification that is typically associated with more affluent consumers<sup>3</sup> and, in the UK, they are often believed to be white.

This specific characterization of white consumers of world music is supported by the views of the participants in this research and to a large extent is confirmed by observations at world music events in the UK. However, it can have a distorting effect on the meanings of world music by propagating a familiar paradigm of white appropriation of indigenous musical forms and thus asymmetrical power relationships based on exploitative exchange. In so doing, it also reifies a form of whiteness whilst implying cultural insularity for indigenous Others. This article engages with this characterization and clarifies the various exchanges and flows between stakeholders involved in the creation, production and consumption of world music.

Within the interpretation of world music outlined above, difference is referred to as a political resource to imagine a global unity that transcends racially and ethnically ascribed boundaries. As a totalizing musical formation, however, world music can represent a source of tension in relation to the *particular* representational boundaries of each musical form and the potential blurring or erosion of such boundaries through cross-fertilization and hybridization. These boundaries are often interpreted as corresponding to statements of the politics of difference, whether of nation, community or, most significantly, race (Erlmann, 1996). However, once blurred or hybridized,<sup>4</sup> the normative and descriptive function of difference within world music becomes more complex. This tension operates at varying levels (symbolic, structural and interpersonal) and has different implications and outcomes that are dependent upon the stake or role individuals have within the world music industry (as musician, producer/executive or consumer) and within different social contexts (whether commercial, national or ethnic). This article contributes to this special issue by analysing the predicament of difference within world music by focusing on the

perspectives and views of the producers, executives and critics, who define, organize and control the world music industry<sup>5</sup> within the UK.

By utilizing the idea of cultural intermediaries<sup>6</sup> (see for example, Bourdieu, 1984), this article will empirically ground claims about world music and those who organize the industry by focusing on their role in the link between production and consumption. It argues that the work of cultural intermediaries demonstrates the ambivalent cultural processes within the management, performance, and consumption of world music. This is evident in the series of recursive shifts within world music that employ a model of difference that draws on both the logic of essentialism *and* hybridity. In so doing, this article also examines how world music affinity and consumption, which takes people across arbitrarily ascribed boundaries, challenges the idea that normative racialized identities are meant to provide a fixed set of cultural values, musical tastes and social attitudes.

The research was based on interviews<sup>7</sup> with 32 people,<sup>8</sup> many of whom were instrumental in the development of the world music phenomenon in Britain from the 1980s and are responsible for its current organization and promotion.<sup>9</sup> The occupational roles occupied within the world music industry incorporated a combination of creative, managerial, pedagogical and administrative activities: including writers and critics for magazines, newspapers, journals and books; creative directors, marketing personnel and A & R (artist and repertoire) representatives from world music labels; music producers and musicians from internationally acclaimed bands; BBC radio and TV producers; and, finally, academics and others involved in both the formal and informal study of music and culture from non-western contexts.

The following sections will draw on these interviews whilst maintaining anonymity of all of the research participants through the use of pseudonyms. First, I outline the salience of the idea of cultural intermediary for this article. Next, I examine the main dilemmas that derive from the dominant characterization of world music. I then examine the ambivalence associated with processes of making 'hybridity' at the level of performance and consumption. Finally, I explore how world music challenges the idea that normative racialized identities are supposed to prescribe musical affinity and taste.

## **WORLD MUSIC PROFESSIONALS AS CULTURAL INTERMEDIARIES**

Bourdieu's (1984) notion of 'cultural intermediaries', which describes groups of workers that are instrumental in the provision of symbolic goods

and services,<sup>10</sup> is a useful label to apply to the roles of the world music professionals who participated in this research<sup>11</sup> (cf. Negus, 2002). It is also an appropriate explanatory tool for this discussion, as it acts as a focus for understanding the space between production and consumption that they occupy in terms of coming in between musicians and consumers to define, produce, critique, and promote world music. This is not to say that producers and organizers within the world music scene are in total control of the creative processes shaping the musical output; rather that there is a relationship between musician and producer and ultimately between musical and industry considerations (Frith, 2000). The idea of cultural intermediary, therefore, ties together specific lines of enquiry concerning the substantive and symbolic role that difference plays within world music.

There are two salient points about cultural intermediaries that need to be highlighted. The first derives from a form of tension that Bourdieu believed to be located within the sense of class identity associated with these occupational roles, which manifests as the blurring of certain conventional distinctions within aspects of their everyday life and working practices (Negus, 2002). Most notable is the blurring of the gap between personal taste and professional judgement or rather between leisure and work. Music is clearly the source of blurring between work and leisure in the context of world music, as it is not only of paramount importance in their work as music critics or producers, it is also central to their leisure pursuits as music consumer/listener or amateur musician and reflects an aspect of their political identification as well as their intellectual interests. The tension between their personal views as world music aficionados or musicians and their professional duties will be discussed throughout this article.

Second, a fundamental aspect of the work carried out by cultural intermediaries is symbolic production via marketing, advertising and other forms of promotion in an attempt to shape the use and exchange value of cultural goods (Crompton, 1998). In addition, they manage the connections these values might have to people's lives through persuasion and marketing techniques as well as through the creation of a market. Therefore, the aim of cultural intermediaries is to link a cultural product to potential consumers by attempting to establish processes of identification between, for instance, a computer game and a teenager, a soap opera star and a spectator, and for the cultural intermediaries in the world music industry, a CD of Senegalese music and an English listener.

In order to establish identification with particular forms of world music, cultural intermediaries need to manage and promote difference in such a way that it takes listeners across whatever preconceived boundaries of taste they may have. However, this also implies a perspective on the overall relationship between world music as a totalizing cultural formation in relation to its constituent musics, whether these are conceived as hybrid,

syncretic, pure or traditional musical forms. Both the management and personal experience of this process of identification is key to understanding the ambivalence towards the cultural processes of hybridity that underpin world music, which will be discussed below. The representation and marketing of world music therefore depends on a displayed expertise, which takes the form of ethnomusicological knowledge and fluency with the music's connection to ethnic or national groups, local traditions and cultural practices (Frith, 2000).

## MANAGING DIFFERENCE IN WORLD MUSIC

On a symbolic level, world music represents a totalizing cultural formation that is shaped by the interaction between global musical production and the various local musical practices often understood in relation to distinct cultural groups. For cultural intermediaries, this presents a series of dilemmas about the overall formation of world music relating to processes of hybridization and authenticity. Evidence from this research suggests that these dilemmas mainly derive from the dominant characterization of world music as representing cultures from outside of the Anglo-American mainstream context. Ethnic and racial difference is therefore constituted through a discursive system based on fixed binary categories such as 'the West and the rest' and 'us and them' along with 'traditional/roots' and 'modern'. There was a general awareness among people I interviewed of other perspectives of world music, such as the view that world music, as an all encompassing musical category, is indefinable or in some cases meaningless. This perspective, however, is not pursued in their explanations suggesting that it has a limited potential for making sense of their work within the world music industry. In this section, I highlight the tensions surrounding the management of world music as a source of difference by focusing on their use of binary categories to explain it as a cultural formation.

In order to understand the dominant characterization of world music presented here, it is important to note that world music is not ahistorical (Erlmann, 1996), and therefore reflects specific political moments and related cultural processes. Emerging in 1980s Britain, world music became an expansive soundtrack to signify the postcolonial politics of this time:

There was increasing awareness about disparities and about the realities of postcolonialism . . . and how [British] society, under the Conservatives in particular, and capitalistic economics were underlying it and identifying with other countries and cultures of other countries and . . . the music of those cultures was some sort of . . . liberal project. . . . It was quite self-conscious. (Doug, travel writer, music journalist and musician)

For those who were instrumental in the early and subsequent development of the world music industry, the music represented a form of inclusion and a way of encouraging 'dialogue between east and west despite asymmetries of power' (Jowers, 1993: 72–3). Politically, therefore, the transcultural negotiation and dynamic global movement of culture that world music symbolized, signified an unsettling of traditional binary meanings of race and ethnicity. However, this research found there to be tension between these politicized ideals of world music and the binaristic thinking underpinning the conceptualization of difference, as outlined above. Western popular music was also considered to be experiencing a 'recession of creativity' (Glanvill, 1989: 59); hence, world music was viewed as a source of rejuvenation and an alternative to mass-produced pop for music audiences, as well as musicians.

Within this characterization of world music and based on testimonies of their own experience at concerts and music festivals, difference is perceived as positive and unthreatening and is highlighted in the following description of world music festivals:

People are not, I think, threatened by difference, I think they are actually attracted by difference and I think that is a really significant thing to say. I think that in this inner city society that we're talking about . . . white people are afraid of black people and that is why communication does not occur . . . People I think are kept apart by insecurity and by an important word, prejudice. . . . It just doesn't matter if you are a black man, a white woman, a brown person or whatever. It is just that people are people and so yes I think that this idea that people are therefore somehow excited or inspired by differences I think is something radically different from what tends to happen in normal society.  
(Tony, director of world music organization)

Although difference is understood as a positive resource, rather than as the basis of a form of discrimination or to confirm a hierarchical order of races, it raises the question as to why, unlike in 'normal society', difference is unthreatening in these contexts. One way of understanding these contrasting interactions is in relation to the idea of practical and perceived proximity to and distance from 'difference'. However, a more critical stance adopted by other cultural intermediaries characterized world music events as a fantasy of difference and global harmony, based on stereotypical ideas of difference that world music consumers are comfortable with. For example, Nathaniel (academic) argues that if more black people were to actually attend world music festivals they would scare people away because 'white people don't go to those festivals to meet black people particularly or, when they do, they go to meet a particular kind of black person'. Additionally, Martin (music critic and journalist) summed up what he perceived to be the attitude towards difference at world music festivals as being 'almost a kind of politically correct reverse racism, which is actually fostered I think by some people in world music'. Moreover, Martin claimed also that:

I think with all world music there has been this sense of a fallacy of cultural engagement, that you're engaging with these other cultures when you're not and [at world music festivals] I suppose you get that writ large because you have people selling all this 'ethnic' stuff there as well. So it's like what you're getting there is an aspect of white middle-class culture as it exists in the early 21st-century. That's what you're getting, you're not getting Indian culture or African culture you're getting that brought here as an aspect of our culture.

All of which portrays world music as a source of difference per se (cf. Erlmann, 1996), where the particular local musical practices and ethnic groups represented within the aegis of world music are subsumed by a normative discourse of difference.

There is a degree of self-consciousness accompanying the attraction to difference and inclusive politics signified by world music in relation to the stereotypical images of the musicians it incorporates, who:

... are quite often artists of colour, black people or people of colour who'd be defined as of colour, not white [and] you get some ... real notion of authenticity, stepping back in time ... artists who aren't part of the modern world, that I think is the image. I'm not saying that I believe that or don't see beyond that but that is certainly one of the images. (Linda, music producer and musician)

On the one hand, this presents itself as a political dilemma for many of the cultural intermediaries, as there is a recognition that the image of world music should not reinforce asymmetrical power relations between ethnic groups, preferring it to be imagined as globally inclusive and inscribed by multiple forms of difference at all levels. In real terms, world music is inclusive: one only has to look at the diversity of music at world music events and also that which is documented within world music encyclopaedias (see for example, Broughton et al., 1999; Broughton, 2000). However, the marketing currency within the world music industry typically draws on stylized versions of ethnicity to categorize the music (Taylor, 1997) which contributes to the image of world music as embodied by 'non-white'/'ethnic' musicians as a source of difference, reflecting wider social and political processes that normalize whiteness.

It is widely acknowledged that an aspect of the dominant characterization of world music within the industry is also to render the music as 'authentic' in contrast to music created and produced in western contexts (see, for example, Gilroy, 1993; Taylor, 1997; Frith, 2000). To explain this tension, it is useful to remember that world music is also just another commodity in consumer societies, and commodities do tend to simplify cultural value to make them more accessible to a wider public (Crompton, 1998). In order to ensure that world music remains recognizably distinct, the cultural intermediaries are left to accentuate world music's unique selling point, that is, its difference. In marketing terms, often this equates to



an idea of the exotic, as the antithesis of ‘western pop artifice and decadence’ (Frith, 2000: 308), although certain kinds of hybridity are also constructed as authentic within the world music industry, which will be discussed below. To guarantee the authenticity of what is being sold requires the ethnomusicological knowledge and cultural literacy of intermediaries. It is common, therefore, to find that the binary division of ‘the West and the rest’ is drawn on to support the image of world music as authentic and more ‘real’:

In the West, music is essentially a commercial leisure pursuit, you buy a CD, you go to a concert, you go home and you forget about it, you see it on television – that’s it – it is a commercial product. In most other parts of the world, music is actually about life, it’s something functional, you use it at a wedding, or there’s songs which are expressing something. (Sean, editor of world music magazine and dictionary)

This popular characterization suggests that within the marketing of world music any creative involvement of western producers may be downplayed in order to reaffirm local music authenticity. In fact, the image of world music generally presented itself as a dilemma for a few of the cultural intermediaries in their working practices, specifically those involved in music promotion and marketing, to the extent that some believed that they had to portray world music in a simplified way to suit market considerations. According to Martin (music critic and journalist), who has interviewed many African musicians, this impacts on musicians themselves too, who often downplay the interpersonal tensions in the creation and performance of their music in order to preserve the marketing image of their ‘otherworldliness’.

The discursive system through which world music is constructed using binary divisions such as ‘the West and the rest’ often draws on the same recalcitrant race-thinking that categorizes whiteness as normalized and dominant, whilst Others are deviant or more specifically, exotic (cf. Hall, 1992; Frith, 2000; Gunaratnam, 2003). In an extreme case, the idea of race as a form of primordial difference was implicit in an explanation of the musical creativity and performance of the Baka people in the forests of Cameroon in contrast to their own:

They have really powerful music, which they do for ceremonies and things. We haven’t used [it] in our music because it’s not appropriate, it’s too powerful, when you record it in the forest it goes blank on the tape because it’s too powerful . . . they are much more whole in the way that they are with their survival and life and the bits of the brains that they use that we don’t. I’m sure in the past we’ve been more magical, but they’re [still] like that. (Sally, music producer, musician and educator)

Although this explicitly primitivist comment about the Baka people, as still in possession of magic or powers that the West has lost, is an extreme example, there were other essentialized ontological distinctions made referring to musical skill and rhythm as located ‘in the blood’ as well as

other cultural stereotypes, especially for people of African and South American descent:

. . . those other cultures are made to look kind of cool and sexy aren't they, and it breaks away certain stereotypes that we might have about blacks. . . . South Americans and Latin American people . . . they're all made to be really cool, they're party people and really cool so we don't think of them as guerrillas in the jungle or something like that or Communist nutters out in the jungle. (John, journalist)

The images and perceptions of ethnic and racial difference within world music evidenced here can manifest as a substantive problem at music festivals for black and other minority ethnic groups present as consumers. The majority of people from minority ethnic backgrounds in this research attested to this:

I mean there are people from other minority groups like myself . . . friends of mine have been because we genuinely love the music but it's always really awkward for us because there is this fantasy going on. I mean it's fantastic music and you can't doubt that. (Pauline, educator and musician)

The individual or collective fantasy referred to is a product of the type of structural articulation being assumed between music and identity/difference, which in this case is a 'purely imaginary identification' (Born and Hesmondhalgh, 2000). The symbols of identity and fantasy that marginalize and deny their difference (cf. Fanon, 1986[1952]) are experienced at close proximity at such events. Hence, the discomfiture on an interpersonal level that is inscribed for minority ethnic people is a result of the ambivalence in the process of identification or desire for difference being characterized through world music.

We have seen how some of the tensions involved in the work of cultural intermediaries draw unevenly upon ideological and political constructions of world music, as both disruptive of, and an exemplar of, binary categorizations. In some cases race, as a primary ascriptive biological marker of difference, is also drawn on to explain musical talent and performance. The characterization of world music presented above is common to all of the cultural intermediaries interviewed here, regardless of their ethnicity and gender. Expanding on this, we can now begin to consider how intermediaries engage with processes of making hybridity through musical exchange and performance.

## IN SEARCH OF HYBRIDITY

Rather than the global dimension of world music providing a broader and potentially messier register through which difference is conceptualized

beyond taken-for-granted binary categories, the above discussion based on findings from my research demonstrates that cultural intermediaries often define world music as a cultural formation in fixed opposition to the West. It is, however, evident that the process of musical change and development is understood by the cultural intermediaries in more fluid terms to reflect what is perceived as an inevitable process of hybridization. The cultural intermediaries unanimously agreed, for example, that music 'is a free currency' and that 'musicians should be able to play whatever [they] want'. However, it becomes a more complex issue when the exploration goes beyond the level of description of musical change and development and concentrates on the relationship between music, difference and identity.

In contrast to the potential complexity that hybridity creates for the specification of particular musical forms in relation to the highly changeable 'border-zone relations' (cf. Guilbault, 1993), the presentation of music at world music events was problematized by some of the cultural intermediaries:

I think it is quite problematic in the way culture gets treated, in terms of the bands that are selected and how people are encouraged to present themselves and it does promote fairly essentialized ideas about culture. (Nelly, musician and academic)

Moreover, despite complying with the presentation and promotion of the music as being expressions of difference that are tied to particular ethnic groups or national contexts in some aspects of their work,<sup>12</sup> problematic issues remain. There is overwhelming acknowledgement of the divisive historical legacy of colonialism in creating categorical distinctions of cultural incommensurability:

We're trapped in this idea which is a very sort of colonial idea really that if you mixed traditional cultures or if you put them side by side with western culture that they will become syncretized or acculturated or debased. I think there's still some legacy of that. (Louise, music producer, world music DJ and academic)

Alongside the awareness of the limitation such intransigent colonialist ideas have in relation to processes of hybridization within world music, the archetypal and ahistorical boundary between 'western' music as modern in contrast to 'traditional' music as therefore, 'non-western' is reinscribed. This has implications for the conceptualization of the hybridizing processes at work. As such, it is mostly understood as constituted by a fusion of separate and distinct western/modern and non-western/traditional musical styles.

For musicians such as Youssou N'Dour, one of Africa's most popular musicians and one of the world music industry's biggest stars, this understanding of hybridity also correlates to how he perceives his musical development and commercial appeal:

In Dakar we hear many different recordings. We are open to these sounds. When people say my music is too western, they must remember that we, too, hear this music over here. We hear the African music with the modern. (cited in Taylor, 1997: 135)

Many of the intermediaries pointed out that there is an identifiable consumer preference for Youssou N'Dour's music that is perceived as 'pure' Senegalese, as opposed to the more hybrid variations:

If bands are coming over from wherever . . . very often they're encouraged by their tour managers to actually play a more traditional music here than they actually play at home because actually people here don't want to see bands with synthesizers and drum machines, they want something that's somehow more pure more traditional than that which they regularly play at home so in a way there's two things happening at the same time. There's a pressure to be traditional [at home] and to release more traditional albums, and certainly if people are releasing stuff for the international market the same thing often happens that there's a pressure to be more traditional. Very often it's a slightly more sophisticated way of thinking, I mean what tends to happen is that bands from these places they want to make their music as modern and western as possible because they think that is what will make it more acceptable, often that's not the case and the western audience wants something more traditional. (Sean, editor of world music magazine and dictionary)

The above quotes draw on the same discursive system that categorizes the distinction between modern/traditional as western/non-western to explain both the creative development and commercial appeal of African musicians such as Youssou N'Dour. However, in contrast to Youssou N'Dour's description of African musicians, as developing their music organically through a creative engagement with 'western' and therefore 'modern' music, Sean describes this creative process in commercial terms as African artists wanting to capture the western market by sounding more 'western' or 'modern'. Thus, there is no apparent synchronicity between the cultural flow of music within an African context described here and market preferences for authentic African music. For musicians, therefore, this preference for the 'traditional' is not just experienced as a commercial form of pressure, as it also poses a challenge to their sense of musical development reflected at a national and ethnic level too. Such discordant perceptions and expectations of world music, by consumers, music executives and musicians alike, problematize notions of what is 'traditional', 'modern' and 'authentic'.

However, the form of consumer resistance to the process of hybridization in music identified here is most often applied to musicians from commercial and national contexts that lie outside of the more economically dominant Anglo-American music industry. Some interviewees testify to there being double standards for artists from western contexts, such as Paul Simon, who are free to combine their music with other indigenous or traditional forms without any commercial penalty (Duran, 1989; N'Dour,

1992; Taylor, 1997). In fact, within this context such fusion is often culturally desirable and musically feted by many critics and consumers alike.

The world music industry thus also utilizes an optimistic version of hybridity, as an inevitable cultural process to extend the meaning of authenticity to refer to music's survival as being dependent on a 'free trade in sounds' (Frith, 2000: 312). To explain this and how the world music industry profits from both, some forms of musical hybridity are arguably perceived as 'organic' and others are considered to be intentional.<sup>13</sup> Music formed from empathetic borrowings and appropriations between cultures are therefore perceived as more 'real', as opposed to deliberate and 'artificial' industry-constructed hybridities designed to intentionally shock by mixing musical practices and sounds for the sake of creating something novel. Consumers of world music may of course react positively or negatively to either. For example, Orquesta de la Luz, a Japanese salsa band, is popular at world music festivals and in the past has topped world music charts even though as a band they defy both the normative expectation of what Japanese music should sound like as well as who can 'legitimately' play salsa. However, the following consumer's perception of Dry and Heavy, a Japanese reggae band, is not so favourable:

I saw a strange one just now . . . this Japanese reggae group, replicants, you know feng shui reggae or something, which sounds really bizarre. I'm not sure. Ten minutes of it is novel but then after ten minutes it's almost like laboratory created stuff. (Paul, actor)

This description trivializes the band's musical contribution because of its 'intentional' hybridity; however, the festival programme itself described Dry and Heavy as a band providing a 'refreshing dose of originality' (WOMAD official festival programme, 2000: 47).

According to Frith, the optimistic version of world music is that creativity always involves cultural borrowing and that 'changes in musical tradition don't mean the loss of cultural identity but articulates the way it changes with circumstance' (2000: 312). Performances and recordings of music are, however, often expected to conform to normative relationships that are assumed between culture, race and nation.

I would never say you're Cuban you've got to be playing Cuban music, musicians of course are free to do whatever they like. I don't always like the fusions that occur because I think actually people playing in a tradition outside of their own on the whole tend to do it less well than playing their own stuff and very often you can hear that . . . You've got a much harder time in a way if you're playing from another tradition, it's obvious if you've got a CD or a concert by a white sitar player and an Indian sitar player, which one you are going to go and hear. Most people are going to listen to the Indian player and so I think people have a hard time who are trying to play other music. (Sean, editor of world music magazine and dictionary)

For cultural intermediaries, the desire for authentic performances of music by appropriate ethnic groups or individuals based on consumer expectations about the relationship between music and identity is recognized as a potential limitation for musicians who wish to expand their repertoires. This is apparent upon looking more closely at the relationship between world music, identity and the extent to which world music is believed to challenge the idea that normative racialized identities provide a fixed set of cultural values, musical tastes and social attitudes.

## **WORLD MUSIC AFFINITY AND CONSUMPTION**

Cultural intermediaries are responsible for both the creation of audiences for world music and establishing forms of identification between, for instance, white English listeners and Senegalese music. On a descriptive level, it is apparent that the proliferation of difference through cultural hybridization within world music is already by definition disruptive of the notion that musical affinity is tied to specific racialized identities, especially given that ethnically diverse groups consume world music.

Research shows that there are discernible trends in musical preferences and affinities that are shaped by gender, age, ethnicity and class. It is thought that world music appeals more to middle-class listeners in their 30s and 40s, who have distanced themselves from the commercial popular music genres and have become more open to exploring new genres (Shuker, 2001). Additionally, world music is understood to be symbolic of a cosmopolitan political identification as well as being a source of difference per se, which is demonstrated by this research. The apparent connection between world music and a specific class location is confirmed by many of the cultural intermediaries interviewed here, for example:

I just think that the concept of liking such a wide range of music from many different parts of the world is a concept which only unfortunately at the moment a relatively narrow socio-economic group can take on board. (Frank, music producer and journalist)

But there is also a common perception and expectation that consumers of world music are not just 'middle-class thirty-somethings'; many of the cultural intermediaries also perceive there to be a normative relationship between white English consumers and world music and that this is fundamental to its social and cultural formation:

The fact is that world music is an almost entirely white middle-class phenomenon. When I said it is the world from here, I meant it is the world from a white middle-class English living room. The world music audience is probably

the best educated and one of the most affluent audiences of all. (Martin, music critic, and journalist)

However, whilst this may be a discernible trend within the consumption of world music, there is a danger that it distorts the overall meaning of world music and excludes other uses and significance of the music for other social groups. According to Martin, performances of African music at the Royal Festival Hall in London, for instance, would also attract another distinct audience; notably those Africans native to the particular country of origin of the music being performed. An explanation for these distinct audiences is given in terms of the degree of cultural dilettantism versus cultural loyalty held by each group. Thus, many intermediaries defined the white audience as having cosmopolitan tastes in contrast with 'non-white' ethnic groups, who are believed to have a preference for and affinity to their 'own' music.

Some respondents' attempts to further explain the distinction between the musical preferences and affinities of both audiences are fraught with tension and complexity in relation to their sense of the situated aspects of identity:

It's really important not to forget that world music, that term and that whole categorization, really is for white people. I mean the large black population in Bristol is Jamaican and the majority of Jamaicans don't like African music – I don't know why and to an extent – I don't know why they should. I mean obviously . . . someone might say, 'Rastafarians, you've got to know your roots, you've got to know where you're coming from and where you're going', all that kind of stuff sure, but then for the same reason that should mean I've got to like English folk songs and I'm not sure if I want to. Maybe I will do. I'm not sure I want to get to that state. So it appeals to a person that has developed his perception and appreciation of cultural diversity and I'd say that that's almost beyond, you're moving into an area of beyondness, you can get into all kinds of stuff, maybe a global village, atomized society or whatever, where all of a sudden it's part of a diffusion of identity. (Peter, world music DJ and promoter)

The idea that normative racialized or ethnic identities are meant to provide musical tastes and affinities is questioned here by Peter who remains sceptical about the need to explore English folk music in order to learn about his own cultural roots. Whilst aware that 'Jamaican' people do not necessarily have an affinity to African musical forms or a sense of having African cultural 'roots', nevertheless, there is an acknowledgement that often there is an expectation of them to do so. The explanation offered for world music affinity constructed around the idea of a 'diffusion of identity' suggests an awareness that world music by definition challenges the normative relationships between music, identity and difference because it takes listeners across ethnically and racially inscribed boundaries.

Several cultural intermediaries who perceived aspects of white consumption and performance of particular world music forms as

politically, existentially and ethically dubious, are also often aware of the underlying tension within this logic when the cultural exchange is reversed, i.e. when, for example, black people want to explore what are perceived as traditionally white or European musical traditions. For instance, Pauline, an opera singer, is very aware of the perceptions and expectations of her in relation to performance in traditions outside of what are normatively associated with her Caribbean background:

I think because I've been on the receiving end of it so much I don't tend to think like that. I mean I've always had people coming up to me saying you know why are you doing this from the moment I started playing in orchestras, so I've kind of learned not to pigeon hole. When I was little I was surprised at white people doing our music, especially when they were trying to be people they were not. (Pauline, opera singer and lecturer)

A further tension is noted in relation to whether or not the same degree of musical fluency and technical proficiency can be achieved by musicians who are perceived as 'crossing-over' to perform and record other cultural traditions and musical practices.

Technically I think they can do it, but gosh that's a tough one, I think if they want to achieve the same degree of intensity, if there is this attitude of searching for something they will never do it, you can't do it like that. I think it is possible. I'm being really hesitant because I know that when I was doing classical music and people objected to, they'd raise objections about me doing something saying 'oh you can never understand this' and I've had to prove that I can and have success with it. It is a tough one.

The historical legacy of colonial racial taxonomies and forms of racism directed specifically at black people in the UK has an impact on how cultural processes such as the above are interpreted on an interpersonal level. In terms of the underlying logic it is clear that Pauline, as a musician herself, does appreciate that at the level of culture, this position is difficult to maintain in terms of sanctioning others who choose to disrupt the normative relationship between music and racialized identities.

Pauline, like many other cultural intermediaries, explained white preference and affinity to world music through fixed ideas about white Englishness. For example, according to several intermediaries, world music is appealing to English people like themselves, who experience a dilemma in relation to their own cultural roots:

Well I think one probably doesn't appreciate the difficulties that you perhaps have in this country if you're not white . . . . I think the down side of it is that you know I do regret the fact that on the whole we are deracinated in this country in that we don't have a real connection with our roots, with our native culture. Perhaps the positive side of that is it makes me completely non-nationalistic and I'm not interested in you know England winning at



football and it does make me I guess much more open to other cultures and you know partly because I do miss you know something, a real traditional tie to, I find it very hard to say 'well, where are my roots, what is my home?' I'm not odd in that. (Sean, editor of world music magazine and dictionary)

It has been noted elsewhere that the white majority in the UK does not know whether they have any ethnic identity at all (see for example, Jeater, 1992), or that compared to the Scots and the Welsh, they find it considerably more difficult to say who they are (Kumar, 2003). In the context of world music, this is used to explain why 'lots of people have an interest in music, arts, and cultural things from different parts of the world' (Robert, educator and composer). Positive links are therefore established between this experience of being English and their openness to other cultures.

However, this perception of what it means to be English applies to some, not all, white English people and is arguably differentiated by other relational differences such as class, age and political outlook. As such, some cultural intermediaries found the openness to other cultures as a defining aspect of English culture itself:

I find English culture has a tendency to bring in lots of other influences. I think it takes bits and pieces you know little bits and pieces from all over the place and I think English culture gradually and progressively in Britain is becoming more inclusive of other cultures. (Bruce, music producer and promoter)

Whilst the explanation of the relationship between affinity with world music and white English consumers draws on already established discourses about white English identities (Phoenix, 1997; Nayak, 1999); the portrayal of world music consumers as necessarily white English and the performers as black or Other perpetuates a familiar discursive system based upon fixed binary categorizations between a normalized dominant whiteness and exotic Others. Moreover, privileging white consumption of world music and their presumed openness to other cultures above consumption by any other social group, reifies a form of cosmopolitan whiteness whilst implying cultural insularity for indigenous Others. What is needed is a more fluid thematic treatment of the instances of cultural cosmopolitanism and insularity moving across instead of simply within various lines of identification including race, ethnicity and class.

## CONCLUSION

World music is often perceived as an expression of asymmetrical power relations between West and East, between white consumers/producers and black/Other performers and musicians based on an exploitative form of cultural exchange. By examining world music in relation to the exchanges

between the various stakeholders at different levels and within diverse social contexts, it can be understood as a more complex and contradictory cultural phenomenon. As such, it gives us pause for thought about both the predicament and opportunity it presents to us as a site of difference.

In terms of processes of cultural exchange and hybridization, ethnic and racial difference has been engaged with, and promoted by, cultural intermediaries of world music as fluid and with multiple inflections and, with reference to the description of cosmopolitan multiculturalism used by the editors of this special issue of *Ethnicities*, as 'accessible to all without fear or favour'. Difference, therefore, symbolizes an opportunity for expanded categories of identification that challenge narrow notions of racialized or ethnic identities. From this perspective, the benefits of the cultural flow and exchanges within world music, whilst subject to certain conditions and relations of exchange, are not confined to the enrichment of the creative process for musicians but can be extended to consumers of world music, whose affinity with specific world musical forms takes them across arbitrarily ascribed boundaries of nation and race/ethnicity. However, the preferred performances and consumption of particular world music forms as embodied by specific ethnic groups, highlight how difference is also managed and packaged by cultural intermediaries as normative expressions of ethnic identities. In this sense, difference is reified within a narrower form of racialized or ethnic identification and is typically understood to reflect 'the world from here' or rather, 'what I/we as western consumers are not'.

In order to explain this predicament of difference and its Janus-faced character within world music, it is useful to acknowledge again that world music represents a form of re-packaging of particular differences into a totalizing cultural phenomenon. It is also promoted in a way that accentuates the potential benefits of cultural flows and exchange and thus its cosmopolitan appeal. Music, however, like food, tourism, literature and clothing are considered to be the 'easy faces of cosmopolitanism' (Calhoun, 2002: 105), while most of the complexities associated with historical entanglements and cultural ambivalences that underpin multicultural nation states are beyond such packaging. Therefore, the tendency to reify difference to explain creativity and to justify specific musical preferences and affinities, despite the potential benefits of cultural flows and exchange, reflects an unresolved understanding of the relational and situated aspects of identities, rather than a form of having your cake and eating it too.

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## Notes

- 1 The term 'world music' was invented in 1987 by music executives and enthusiasts in order to simplify the task of finding heterogeneous forms of music produced outside of the mainstream (Anglo-American) western markets in British music outlets, such as Brazilian lambada, Zairean soukous or Cuban son music. The term 'world music', as opposed to 'ethnic', 'tribal' or 'roots', was agreed upon on the basis that it would not exclude any forms of music (Denselow, 2004) and is now typically understood as a musically inclusive term incorporating music from different geographical spaces, national contexts, local traditions and produced by a wide range of individuals and social groups. For a detailed account of the development of the term see the following website: [http://www.froots.demon.co.uk/features/world\\_music\\_history/minutes/](http://www.froots.demon.co.uk/features/world_music_history/minutes/)
- 2 The world music category also selectively incorporates forms of hip-hop that have a wide range of local musical inflections and politics. For example, the Los Angeles-based, Ozomatli is a popular Afro-Latin hip-hop outfit that combine a commitment to social justice, progressive politics, and anti-war convictions and is very well known to world music audiences.
- 3 The consumption of music refers not just to the purchase of recorded music; it also embraces attending live performances, listening to the radio, downloading music from the Internet and watching music videos/dvds (Shuker, 2001).
- 4 The contemporary theoretical analysis of world music is usually organized around a series of arguments about this tension and thus the relationship between globalization, postcolonialism and identity based on notions of hybridity, which either focus on the local contexts of musical production or on theorizing the global condition and cultural flow (Frith, 2000).
- 5 Whilst it is important to specify the role of the group under consideration here, it should also be noted that these roles are not always mutually exclusive. For example, the producers and music executives would also be consumers of world music and some would refer to themselves as musicians too. Where necessary, any qualifications will be made about roles.
- 6 Strictly speaking the term is 'new cultural intermediaries', however, like Nixon and du Gay (2002) I think that given the expansion of workers that can be classified in this way and the development of these occupations throughout the 20th-century, it is more appropriate to disregard the newness of the category.
- 7 These interviews took place between October 1999 and April 2001, along with participant observations at numerous world music events. The interviews explored a range of topics, including the relationship between music, ethnicity and politics for self and others; the cultural politics underlying cultural mixing and hybrid musical forms; and knowledge about world musical forms and reasons for its significance relative to their roles within the world music industry.
- 8 The majority also identified themselves to be world music aficionados.
- 9 The majority of people that participated in this research were white (notably English), educated to degree level and between the ages of 29 and 55, although there were seven people who identified as mixed race, African-Caribbean, Pakistani, Argentinean, and Nigerian. Their professional roles within the world music industry combined with the high level of education that the majority of participants had within the study, are typically associated

with a more affluent social class and as such, is crucial to understanding the data presented here.

- 10 Such as ‘the producers of cultural programmes on TV and radio or the critics of “quality” newspapers and magazines and all the writer-journalists and journalist-writers’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 325).
- 11 This included producers of BBC TV and BBC radio programmes about world music, writer-journalists and journalist-writers who wrote, edited or contributed to books (including *Rough Guides to World Music* as well as *Rough Guides* to various travel destinations) and world music magazines (such as *Songlines*, and *fRoots*), world music critics for national newspapers, as well as artistic directors of world music organizations and music producers for world music recording labels.
- 12 One example of this is the *Rough Guide* series of CDs that are compilations of music that retail as the ‘Music of Brazil’ or the ‘Music of Tibet’. This kind of marketing of world music begs the question as to how decisions are made to locate forms of music that are the product of migrations and cross-fertilizations or associated with ethnic groups that may be in the process of trying to gain cultural recognition as a minority within a nation-state.
- 13 Bakhtin (1981) makes a distinction between ‘organic’ and ‘intentional’ hybridity with respect to linguistics. ‘Organic’ hybridization can be used to refer to the historical evolution of a culture that involves unreflective borrowings and appropriations of other cultures, even if cultures appear as bounded and homogeneous (Werbner, 1997). Intentional hybridity is conceptualized more as a ‘collision’ of world views that are meant to shock, challenge, revitalize or disrupt (Bakhtin, 1981), and builds upon the routine ‘cross-fertilization’.

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