THEORIZING DIASPORA AND MUSIC[1]

Thomas Solomon

Abstract: ***This article sketches out a synthesis of issues that have emerged in the study of diaspora and music. The author identifies two broad approaches in the literature: 1) diaspora as social formation and 2) diaspora as metaphor. By "diaspora as social formation" is meant approaches that stress a sociological definition of diaspora and that emphasize the historical facts and material conditions of diasporas, with empirical enquiry focused on the social networks that maintain diasporic communities and the role of music in articulating such networks. In contrast, approaches that evoke "diaspora as metaphor" emphasize the interpretive possibilities that the idea of diaspora enables in regard to the historical and contemporary global flows of music. The article ends with a brief discussion of the metaphor of the*** **rhizome** ***as a way of thinking about the non-hierarchical nature of diasporic networks, and of the way music may articulate the different nodes of these networks while providing a vehicle for the imagination and performance of diasporic consciousness.***

Keywords: ***diaspora; migration; transnationalism; globalization; rhizome***

The concept of *diaspora* has gained much currency in music studies over the last two decades. In this article, I sketch out some of the issues that have emerged in relation to the study of diaspora and music. I identify two broad approaches in the literature: 1) diaspora as social formation and 2) diaspora as metaphor. By "diaspora as social formation," I mean approaches that stress a sociological definition of diaspora and that emphasize the historical facts and material conditions of diasporas, with empirical enquiry focused on the social networks that maintain diasporic communities and the role of music in articulating such networks. In contrast, approaches that evoke "diaspora as metaphor" emphasize the interpretive possibilities that the idea of diaspora enables in regard to the historical and contemporary global flows of music, focusing both on the meaning of diaspora in general terms and on the multitude of meanings musically engendered within specific diasporic communities. I conclude with a brief discussion of the metaphor of the *rhizome* as a way of thinking about the non-hierarchical nature of diasporic networks, and of the way music may articulate the different nodes of these networks while providing a vehicle for the imagination and performance of diasporic consciousness.

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[1] This article is a much condensed version of a longer chapter on diaspora, hybridity and music (Solomon 2015). Thanks to the copyright holder Makerere University Klaus Wachsmann Music Archive (MAKWMA), and to Fountain Press in Kampala, Uganda for permission to adapt and to re-use material from that chapter here.

Diaspora

The amount of attention given to *diaspora* in music studies since the 1990s suggests that it is firmly established as a paradigm for music research, to the extent that Born and Hesmondhalgh could already confidently announce in 2000 that "(i)n contrast with ethnomusicology's former object of study – 'traditional musics' – it is diasporic music that has moved to the center of attention" (2000: 25). Significant publications have included programmatic or summary statements and meditations on diaspora and music (Bohlman 2001, 2002: 111–129, Slobin 1994, 2003), edited collections of papers focusing on the theme (Chaudhuri and Seeger 2010, Monson 2003a, Ramnarine 2007b, Turino and Lea 2004, Um 2005), empirical ethnographic studies in the form of full-length monographs (Kaya 2001, Myers 1998, Ramnarine 2001, 2007a, Zheng 2010), and innumerable individual short papers with brief case studies published as book chapters or journal articles.[2] The enthusiasm that has accompanied the "discovery" of diaspora by ethnomusicologists has, however, sometimes been accompanied by an uncritical application of the concept to musical communities.

Diaspora as Social Formation

The classic statement regarding diaspora as social formation is that of William Safran (1991), who rigorously defined the term in an essay in the first issue of the first academic journal dedicated to diaspora studies. Safran argues that

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[2] See Solomon (2015) for additional references to relevant literature.

> the concept of diaspora [should] be applied to expatriate minority communities whose members share several of the following characteristics: 1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original "center" to two or more "peripheral," or foreign, regions; 2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland – its physical location, history, and achievements; 3) they believe that they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return – when conditions are appropriate; 5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and 6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship (1991: 83–84, also quoted in Turino 2004: 4).

The dispersal of the Jews from Palestine in the year 70 C.E. during the Roman era has become the ur-diaspora, providing a model and precedent for understanding other, later diasporas (Vertovec 1997: 278). Diaspora is thus one specific manifestation of the more general phenomenon of *displacement* (Levi and Scheding 2010), conceptually distinct from – but in practice often overlapping with – other terms such as *exile* or *refugee* (Baily 2005, Diehl 2002, Reyes 1999). Contemporary diasporas are often considered in relation to postcolonialism and patterns of migration between postcolonial states and their former imperial centers (Solomon 2012).

Perhaps the most rigorous, sustained published theoretical discussion of diaspora by an ethnomusicologist can be found in the work of Thomas Turino, in his article "Are We Global Yet?" (2003) and in his introduction (2004) to the edited volume *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities*. Drawing on some of the "classic" early programmatic statements of diaspora studies such as that of Safran (1991) quoted above, and also especially the work of Khachig Tölölyan (1991, 1996), Turino emphasizes a sociological definition of diaspora through an examination of the historical facts, material conditions, and (especially) social organization of diasporas. Turino is specifically concerned with making logical, analytic typological distinctions between different kinds of transnational social formations, specifically immigrant communities, diasporas and cosmopolitans. For example, Turino contrasts immigrant communities and diasporas by saying that immigrant communities span connections between only two specific places – the homeland and the host society – while diasporas are characterized by connections between multiple sites (2004: 5–6, see also Turino 2003: 59–60). And "(w)hereas immigrant communities tend to assimilate and fade away within a few generations, diasporic cultural formations tend towards longevity and recognition of social continuities across space and time" (Turino 2003: 60, see also Turino 2004: 6).

"Law and order" approaches such as Turino's play an important role in intellectual discourse by arguing for precision in our use of theoretical terms. But such approaches also run the risk of over-emphasizing reified models of (social) structure and privileging the researcher's historical facts and objective typologies over the messy realities of everyday practice – the complex subjectivities and arrays of practices on the ground of real people. In the same way that diasporas themselves overflow and thus problematize and de-naturalize national boundaries (see discussion below), the complexities of how the diasporic experience is lived out in people's daily lives may overflow the analytical boundaries that researchers construct around them. There may not always be a neat one-to-one correspondence between a strict definition of diaspora as a historical event and as social formation, an explicit consciousness of a diasporic identity, and *de facto* participation in diasporic networks.

The recognition of the complexities of social relationships and cultural affiliations between dispersed diasporic populations has played an important role in the critique of the older anthropological notion of *Culture* as being essentially grounded in place, and of *cultures* as spatially coherent, geographically bounded entities (Abu-Lughod 1991: 149, Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 9–10). As Tina Ramnarine has noted, "(a)lthough tradition is often perceived as stemming from and having close ties to particular localities, the relationship between tradition and place is questioned when a single tradition is maintained, developed and changed by people in several different geographic contexts" (1996: 133). An outgrowth of this decoupling of culture from place is a further "subversion of naturalized forms of identity centred on the nation" (Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk 2005: 2). This development challenges the very paradigm of the nation-state as a supposedly natural, bounded "container" for a unique and coherent "national culture" distinct from that of other comparable nation-states.

The study of diasporas has highlighted how people, as well as things, are constantly on the move around the globe, creating the transient populations Arjun Appadurai (1991, 1996) has famously termed "ethnoscapes." While populations have, of course, been on the move since the dawn of the human race, continuous large-scale movement back and forth between widely dispersed locales on a global basis intensified beginning in the twentieth century. Since the 1970s, the introduction of relatively inexpensive air travel has enabled the increased mobility of people. And since the turn of the millennium, the improvement of telecommunications networks, including aspects as apparently as mundane as the ability to make inexpensive international phone calls using pre-paid phone cards, has played a crucial role in enabling the communication that keeps the members of dispersed social formations connected with each other so that they maintain a sense of immediate community (Vertovec 2004). These developments have also enabled the movement of creative and performing artists, so that they can travel to the places where diasporic populations have settled. For example, Albanians living in Switzerland can attend frequent concerts by artists residing in homeland areas in the Balkans and who regularly fly in to Zurich for weekend shows (Sugarman 2006). Access to relatively inexpensive transportation can also mean that *identity* itself is imagined not just in terms of rootedness in place, but as constituted through motion (Solomon 2009).

Research on music in diasporic communities has demonstrated how music can function as a sort of social “glue” connecting diasporic communities widely dispersed around the globe. Highly mediated popular music genres such as *bhangra* among South Asians in Europe and North America or *raï* among Algerians in Europe have served not only to connect diasporic communities to their homelands, but also to each other.[3] There are at least two aspects of music that make it a particularly powerful tool for imagining and living out diasporic identities (as music does, of course, for other kinds of identities, as well).

First, the portability of recorded sound has, especially since the introduction of relatively inexpensive means of sound reproduction beginning with the cassette revolution in the 1970s, enabled sounds to travel far and wide. Diasporas thus provide a compelling example of the *deterritorialization* of culture – the disconnection of culture from the territorially discrete, geographically bounded sites of its purported origin (Lull 1995: 150–153, Connell and Gibson 2004). Members of diasporic communities, even when spread over many parts of the globe, use the possibilities of contemporary communications media to coordinate expressive practices and to engage in the same musical consumption habits. For example, South Asian fans of *bhangra* who live in various cities in the UK, other European countries, Canada, and the USA have had access to the latest *bhangra* hits emanating from UK recording studios since the 1980s (see again references in footnote 3). The subsequent miniaturization and digitalization of sound recording technology, as well as the transmission of musical sounds through digital physical carriers (CDs, DVDs) and through the Internet (mp3 files, videos on YouTube, streaming services, etc.), have further sped up this process.

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[3] For studies of *bhangra*, see Baumann 1990, Gopinath 1995, Huq 2006, Leante 2004, Roy 2010. For research on *raï* see Daoudi and Miliani 1996, Gross, McMurray and Swedenburg 2001, Langlois 1996a, 1996b, Marranci 2000, 2003, 2005, Schade-Poulson 1999, Virolle 1995, 1999, 2003.

Secondly, music's invitation to pleasurable embodied experience and to communal sociability, especially through dance, make the experience of diasporic belonging one that is deeply pleasurable in itself and socially reassuring. *It feels good* to be part of a dancing, globalized community; and there is both pleasure and a certain reassurance or validation of ones own sense of self in knowing that people on the other side of the world whom one identifies with in terms of ethnicity and culture are grooving and dancing to the same sounds. The shared affinity for musics associated with the homeland (even if the existence of those musics, such as *bhangra*, actually depends on transnational infrastructures for its production and dissemination) becomes the basis for an *affective community* – a community based on emotional attachment to cultural practices and products – that is mapped onto (and partially constitutes and maintains) the diasporic social formation. Such expressive cultural ties across national boundaries are potentially even stronger than ties based on membership in nation-states (Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk 2005: 35).

These two special aspects of music – its portability as recorded sound and its enabling of pleasurable embodied experience – make it especially powerful as a vehicle for creating a *diasporic consciousness*, or a sense of belonging to the same *transnation*, which unites dispersed peoples into a single social group (Sugarman 2004). Musical practices thus provide frameworks for organizing the diasporic experience, including the historical consciousness of having come from somewhere else, and identifying with other people in other places who also share this origin. The complex relationship between a sense of origin *in* another place, and the awareness of being displaced *from* that place, is frequently encapsulated in the homophonous pair of terms *roots* and *routes* (Gilroy 1993, Clifford 1997, Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk 2005: 29, Negus 1996: 106–107).

Diaspora as Metaphor

Contrasting with the more materially-grounded approach to diaspora as social and cultural formation is an approach which I would call “diaspora as metaphor.” Perhaps because of music’s fertile multivocality, allowing people to embody a wide range of subjective metaphorical meanings in musical objects and experiences, this approach is very common in the literature on music and diaspora. Slobin (2003) critiques a few examples of metaphorical uses of diaspora, noting how they stretch the concept to near breaking point. Noting Appadurai’s (1996: 36) use of expressions like “diaspora of terms and images across the world” and “diaspora of keywords,” Slobin laments how the “anthropomorphization of bodies of information and concepts might lead us away from the physically dispersed bodies that need our attention so badly” (2003: 287). The metaphoric potential of diaspora is compelling, however, and many writers make evocative use of it.

In a series of essays on the musics of sacred journeys through the spaces of Europe and the Mediterranean, Philip Bohlman (1996a, 1996b, 1997, 2003a, 2003b, most of these also collected in revised form in Bohlman 2013) explores the potential of diaspora as an ur-metaphor for other kinds of movements through space such as pilgrimages. Bohlman’s essay “Music, Myth, and History in the Mediterranean: Diaspora and the Return to Modernity” (1997), for example, is a wide-ranging and evocative consideration of “diaspora as a myth of modernity” and diaspora as “a root metaphor for the imagination of Mediterranean history”; Throughout the essay, Bohlman explores “the complex ways in which diaspora has recharted the course of Mediterranean music history.” Here *diaspora* serves as a trope for all kinds of movement through space, especially for “sacred journeys that promise no end,” such as the wanderings of Moses and the Jews in the desert after leaving Egypt, which Bohlman sees as a sort of archetype for later sacred journeys in the circum-Mediterranean and beyond. In the fifth section of the essay, Bohlman compares how three different diasporas (English Protestants [“the Pilgrims”] who settled in North America in the seventeenth century, Jesuit missions during the colonial period in South America, and the African diaspora) may serve as different metaphors for modern history. The African diaspora, for example, “reveals a metonymic transformation of the Atlantic Ocean into the diasporic functions of the Mediterranean.” While Bohlman impressively explores the richly evocative metaphoric possibilities of diaspora in grand humanistic tradition, I find this essay extremely frustrating in the way *diaspora* ends up standing for nearly any kind of movement through space, whether it actually entails a semi-permanent displacement of a large number of people from a homeland (imagined or real), as in the African case, or not, as in the case of the Jesuit missionaries in South America that Bohlman also discusses. Here *diaspora* becomes so general that it ceases to refer to any kind of specific, recognizable social formation.

Other prominent theorizers of music and modernity/postmodernity also engage in the discourse of diaspora-as-metaphor in ways that take them far from the "physically dispersed bodies" Slobin is looking for. For example, Veit Erlmann's (2003, 2004) discussion of South African musician Solomon Linda's "Mbube" and cover versions of it by the Weavers and The Tokens, despite appearing in two different books with the word "diaspora" prominently appearing in their titles (Monson 2003a, Turino and Lea 2004), is really only peripherally about diaspora, and more about, as Erlmann describes it, "mass-mediated cultural capital between Africa and the West" and "the music industry's racialization of musical form" (2004: 89). Even Slobin, after his thoughtful critique of (mis-)applications of diaspora in music studies, ends his overview with what seems to me an ill-chosen example, taken not from an ethnography of music in the life of physically dispersed real people, but from a 1986 Tamil film portraying a Tamil couple who relocate from Chennai to New Delhi, which Slobin discusses in terms of an internal diaspora within India (2003: 292–294). In Slobin's reading of the film-as-text, the different kinds of Western, Indian, and other musics that the film's music producer makes use of symbolize multiple diasporic trajectories. Here I think Slobin falls into the same trap he criticizes earlier in the essay: a too-loose application of diaspora-as-metaphor to cultural analysis.

Maybe, like Turino, I've got a bit of the "law and order man" in me, as well. I want to reserve *diaspora* specifically for the movement of people. I'm wary of the use of concepts like "musical diasporas" to refer to the ways musical objects and styles themselves move around the globe, independent of the movements of people. To put it bluntly, musics aren't diasporic – *people* are – and the phrase "diasporic musics" can never be more than a metaphor, even if a very evocative one. Like Slobin, I'm wary of metaphors that attribute agency to *music* itself. To say that musical instruments, genres, repertories, etc. are "diasporic" is to reify the thing-ness of music and focus on products rather than processes, and to remove these products from the actions of real people, who are not just passive carriers of musical "things," but actors who make choices to use or not to use a given musical form, and who constantly re-make, re-invent, and re-invest with meaning their own and others' musical practices (Clausen, Hemetek and Sæther 2009). I think we have other concepts, such as "regimes of circulation" (Grenier and Guilbault 1997: 230) or "music scenes" (Bennett 2004, Bennett and Peterson 2004, Harris 2000), that work better for talking about the movements of genres and discourses through time and space, and I want to reserve the term *diaspora* for the movements, actions, and consciousness of real people as actors. Concepts such as "regimes of circulation" are useful precisely because, when necessary, they can refer to the circulation of disembodied musical objects through transnational space, or they can share space comfortably, in a complimentary fashion, with more people-centered approaches to transnational musical networks. In the end, I think a path somewhere between overly material and overly metaphorical approaches to diaspora will serve us best.

The Rhizomatic Network and Diasporic Consciousness

A possible way of navigating this path is by focusing study on *diasporic networks* (cf. Slobin 1993: 64–65, Turino 2004: 7). The metaphor of the *rhizome* – plants with roots (technically, underground stems) branching off in multiple directions in complex networks – associated with Deleuze and Guattari's book *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988) is apt for describing the complex networks of horizontal (i.e., non-hierarchical) connections between various nodes in diasporic networks. To account for the rhizomatic diasporic network, the researcher must follow the multiple, complexly interconnected strands of the network to wherever it leads, and this will usually entail multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995). As Slobin notes, "diasporic networks are very distinctive and have a complex internal structure. While they may make a point-to-point connection with a homeland population and style, they might also conjure new networks abroad" (1993: 64–65). It is important here, however, to explore such networks not just in terms of their abstract structure, but also for how they are created and maintained through human agency. Diasporic networks don't just happen – they have to be actively created by people who invest time, money, and other resources into them.

The concept of diasporic networks also suggests a rethinking of the relationships between the "originating" sites of diasporas and the dispersed sites their diasporic peoples have moved to. If we take seriously the non-hierarchical aspect of the rhizome metaphor as elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari, it challenges the privileged status of the "homeland" (cf. Clifford 1994), making it just one more node in a complex network. A specific homeland may well loom large in the diasporic imagination, but the many actual ways in which people move through, and send information and objects through, diasporic networks, as well as the discursive ways in which they plot those movements, do not necessarily pass through the homeland as a sort of central node or hub. A Jewish klezmer musician from New York going to Berlin to play in a concert does not have to pass through Jerusalem, and an East Indian from the Caribbean living in Toronto would find it quite out of the way to pass through Bombay or Delhi on the way "home" to Trinidad. Guilbault thus encourages us to view diasporas as "a network of alliances that 'displaces the "home" country from its privileged position as the originary site'" (Guilbault 2005: 59, quoting Gopinath 1995: 304). This enables "a far more complicated understanding of diaspora, in that it demands a radical reworking of the hierarchical relation between diaspora and the [homeland] nation" (Gopinath 1995: 304, quoted in Guilbault 2005: 59).

Perhaps another way to steer a path between the material and the metaphorical is to, as already alluded to above, focus on the formation and performance of *diasporic consciousness*. Here, there may well be an abundance of metaphors in deployment, but they are the metaphors of the diasporic subjects themselves, not of the outside academic observer. Diasporic consciousness entails a state of mind or sense of identity – a sense of awareness of being and belonging both "here" – in the host country – and "there" – in the "home" country (Clifford 1994, Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk 2005: 17–20, Vertovec 1997). The paradigmatic statement regarding diasporic consciousness is Paul Gilroy's (1993) analysis of the "double consciousness" of the African diaspora in what he has famously called "the black Atlantic." Gilroy's work emphatically shows how diasporas are not just the results of historical events, rather they are made and discovered through the reflective and creative practices of memory. A history of "diaspora" may be (perhaps always is) discovered after the fact, as Stuart Hall (1990: 231) describes in his account of the creation of an Afro-Caribbean historical consciousness in during the 1970s.

Diasporic consciousness may also be invented and performed through interventions in the cultural field, including the use of invented traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), and specifically musical invented traditions. For example, in her work on the revival of Afro-Peruvian music, Feldman (2005, 2006) uses Gilroy's concept of the "black Atlantic" as a starting point to develop her own concept of the "black Pacific" as "a newly imagined diasporic community" (2005: 206). Feldman analyses how "the leaders of the Afro-Peruvian revival appropriated as 'African' heritage cultural traditions born, creolized, or syncretized in the black Atlantic" (2005: 208). "Confronted with scant documentation or cultural memory of the historical practices of enslaved Africans in Peru, Afro-Peruvian artists relied in part upon transplanted versions of Afro-Cuban or Afro-Brazilian cultural expressions to imaginatively recreate the forgotten music and dance of their ancestors and reproduce their past" (2005: 207). The Afro-Peruvian revival thus "changed the history and public depiction of blackness in Peru, mobilizing Afro-Peruvians to reconnect with their diasporic identity" (2005: 222).

Sarkissian (1995, 2000, 2002) similarly discusses how the mixed Eurasian population of the Portuguese Settlement in Malacca, Malaysia has since the 1950s collected "Portuguese" songs and dances from various sources in order to create a show for tourists in which they re-imagine themselves as descendants of sixteenth-century Portuguese colonizers. Sarkissian uses the phrase "domesticating a diaspora" (2000: 86) to describe the ways in which the occupants of the Portuguese Settlement rewrite their history emphasizing Portuguese roots while erasing a recent, more hybrid past.

If one can speak of a "will to hybridity" (Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000: 19), then the cases discussed by Feldman and Sarkissian suggest that in some places, a "will to diaspora" may also be emerging, in which older transnational connections are re-imagined as diasporas. Bohlman notes that

> there are more groups who consciously give unity to otherwise barely related patterns of immigration by remapping them as diasporas. Ethnic Irish abroad, for example, have increasingly begun to refer to themselves as an Irish diaspora. Some of the new diasporas may well be inventions, for example the Celtic diaspora, but they nonetheless bespeak a deep concern about the recognition of double and multiple consciousnesses (2002: 117–118).

This trend may eventually lead to such a generalized, clichéd view of diaspora – "we're all diasporic in one way or another" – that the term may in the end lose its analytic usefulness. Besides the vague uses of diaspora as metaphor discussed above, there are other indicators that a kind of "watering down" of the diaspora concept is already occurring in academic scholarship. Because diaspora has become intellectually fashionable, some writers seem to feel compelled to invoke it, even when they are not really engaging with the issues the term is meant to evoke. For example, wa Mukuna (1997) titles his article "Creative Practice in African Music: New Perspectives in the Scrutiny of Africanisms in Diaspora." On closer inspection, however, the article does not live up to the suggested promise of a consideration of diasporic theory and music, but is rather a summary of wa Mukuna's linguistic approach to so-called Africanisms in African music in the New World. The article's intellectual genealogy is thus not in diaspora studies; its intellectual ancestors can rather be found in the hoary and well-tred ethnomusicological study of musical Africanisms in the Americas, begun with work in the 1940s by Melville Herskovits (1941) and Richard Waterman (1948, 1952, 1963). Here "diaspora" seems to be tacked on as an afterthought simply because the term is trendy. In contrast, for example, Monson's (2003b) chapter on jazz musician Art Blakey deals explicitly with issues of the development of a diasporic consciousness among African-American musicians, as they musically negotiate their relationship to Africa.

Another area that sorely needs development in music-centered studies of diaspora is the study of music *consumption*, as opposed to *production*. Perhaps because of the long-standing interest of ethnomusicologists in the practices of music-makers, they have largely neglected the practices of music *listeners*, paying much less attention to what people who are not necessarily musicians themselves listen to, and how they listen. We need thorough ethnographic studies of the consumption practices of real people.[4] Ethnomusicologist Hae-kyung Um has studied the listening habits of Koreans in diaspora in Russia and the Central Asian states of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan (2000). While the quantitative methods for data collection and analysis used in her article mean we do not learn much about *how* her research subjects use the different kinds of music they listen to, the article provides a start. Um's work on the Korean diaspora in Central Asia (see also Um 1996) also reminds us that not all diasporas are from the "periphery" or "the South" to "the West," or are even routed through "the West." This may seem like an obvious point, but a quick look through the literature shows that the bulk of research on music and diaspora involves movements between developing countries and the big cities of "the West." Ethnomusicologists have largely yet to consider the worlds of diasporas that never pass through London, Paris, New York or Miami.

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[4] An example of a lost opportunity for exploring consumption practices can be found in an anecdote Helen Myers includes in her 1998 study of music in the South Asian diasporic community on the Caribbean island of Trinidad. Tantalizingly, we learn that the LP record collection of one of Myers' Indo-Trinidadian consultants in the late 1970s included albums by ABBA and Olivia Newton-John, as well as "Lata Mangeshkar Recites the Bhagwad Gita" and an album of Hindu devotional songs (1998: 108–109). But the list of records is simply presented without comment, and without any exploration of the record owner's listening practices – how this person actually used these LPs, both as sound carriers and as objects in their own right.

Finally, it is worth noting that the very concept of diaspora itself has come under serious critique. Ien Ang (2003) has argued that the diaspora concept paradoxically maintains the very logic of the state which the concept is meant to critique:

> While the transnationalism of diasporas is often taken as an implicit point of critique of the territorial boundedness and internally homogenizing perspective of the nation-state, the limits of diaspora lie precisely in its own assumed boundedness, its inevitable tendency to stress its internal coherence and unity, logically set apart from "others." Diaspora formations transgress the boundaries of the nation-state on behalf of a globally dispersed "people" ... but paradoxically this transgression can only be achieved by drawing a boundary around the diaspora (2003: 142).

Ang argues that "the transnationalism of diaspora is actually proto-nationalist in its outlook," and that "the politics of diaspora is exclusionary as much as it is inclusionary, just like that of the nation" (2003: 144):

> [T]he language of diaspora is fundamentally proto-nationalist: it feeds into a *transnational nationalism* based on the presumption of internal ethnic sameness and external ethnic distinctiveness. Unlike the nationalism of the nation-state, which premises itself on a national community which is territorially bound, diasporic nationalism produces an imagined community that is deterritorialised, but that is symbolically bounded nevertheless. Its borders are clearly defined, at least in the imagination, and its actual and potential membership is finite: only certain people, notionally "Chinese people," can belong to the "Chinese diaspora" (2003: 145, italics in original).

A focus on musical production and consumption can provide an inroad to understanding the actually diverse identities and allegiances found within diasporic communities, which may turn out to be not as homogenous as they first seem (Solomon 2008).

Conclusion

In this article, I have been able to provide only a very general overview of issues related to diaspora and music. Because of its portability and the way it affords deeply felt, embodied experiences, music is an especially powerful tool for articulating diasporic consciousness. To conclude, I suggest that it is best to consider diasporas not as "things" out in the real world, but as provisional critical categories for the understanding of complex and variegated social and cultural processes. Like all such critical categories, the concept of diaspora has its own history and shifting applications in critical cultural study. And as a critical category, it may eventually outlive its usefulness, at which point it will simply be necessary to find new categories for understanding the constantly evolving roles and uses of music in contemporary social life.

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