ISRAELI MUSICIANS AS NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVES[1]

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Abstract: ***This paper researches how Israeli musicians represent their nation during performances for a foreign audience. It claims that a nation is not always portrayed as a homogenous entity; rather, the musicians relate in various ways to different "imagined communities" (Anderson 1991) through their performances. These strategies are traceable by the musicians' verbal statements, visual markers, and music. The paper proposes four such strategies.***

Keywords: ***cultural diplomacy; cultural representation; imagined community; representation strategy/strategies***

When a Czech musician travels abroad to perform in front of a foreign audience, the probability of hostile reactions to his or her nationality is close to zero.[2] The same goes for most of the (European) national cultural representatives, for example German musicians invited to perform abroad at the Goethe Institut or Spanish artists performing at the Instituto Cervantes. However, for Israeli artists, the situation is very different. They are routinely boycotted ad-hoc (demonstrations in British and Australian concert halls during performances of the Jerusalem Quartet) (Bray 2010), or systematically (the movies by Eran Riklis excluded from Arab festivals and distribution due to the author's Israeli nationality, even though content might be admissible for an Arab audience).[3] When interviewed abroad, the questions about the artists' homeland, political situation and their opinion about it are common. As a result, these artists are

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[2] As noted also by the author of this paper while working in the Czech Centres.

[3] Public talk by Eran Riklis, March 20, 2015, Prague, Febiofest.

pushed to formulate a stance – a strategy of approaching the issue of nationality and their role as its representatives.[4] Such strategies, as this paper claims, are reflected in verbal expressions of the artists, in their performance, and in visual markers.

The given strategy reflects a) the image of the community the artist intends to represent, and b) the tightness or looseness of the artist's relation to that community. Concentrating on these two aspects, the following pages aim at describing four possible ways of how Israeli musicians deal with the expectations of their counterparts (foreign audiences, journalists, etc.).

This research might have bearing for Israeli culture studies that mostly concentrate on inner-societal phenomena (e.g., Talmon and Peleg 2011), but also for cultural diplomacy. As it has been noted above, most Europeans do not have to face conflicts pertaining to their nationality. Due to the fact that the academic concept of cultural diplomacy originated in Europe (specifically in France /Roche, Pignau 1995/), it builds on the assumption of the European type of state-nation, a concept built on the assumption of homogenous nations and peaceful relations. Thus, the most widely used definitions of cultural diplomacy, stemming from historical studies or studies of diplomacy and international relations see it a) either pragmatically, as a tool of advancement of government policy (such as the notion of soft power by Joseph Nye (2004), or b) idealistically, as a way towards mutual understanding through state-orchestrated contact of different cultures (Minnaert 2014; Glade 2009). This paper will show, however, that even though these notions are relevant, they do not exhaust the reality of contemporary cultural diplomacy.

Most of the studies based on the concept of cultural diplomacy deal with the macro-level, i.e. they describe selected tools of cultural diplomacy, a target audience, and finance flows. But they do not deal with the performers of cultural diplomacy themselves, simply because in the European context, they do not dramatically alter the transmitted message as intended by the administration. Anthropological theories of interactionism (Goffman 1956) and cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 1997) allow us to bring the individual level to the picture, which is beneficial for the studies of cultural diplomacy per se, but notably becomes more important for divided societies and societies with an internationally contested image. Since cultural diplomacy – including the cultural diplomacy of

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[4] This mechanism is explained by the concept of cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 1997), which was also applied to international relations (Subotic, Zarakol 2012).

non-European countries (Asian countries, especially China) – is globally gaining prominence[5], an enhanced notion of cultural diplomacy that could apply also to non-European states would be highly beneficial.

Theoretical Background

Enacted Imagined Community

This paper works with Erwin Goffman's notion of interactionism (1956) that sees human actions and behavior as a performance, since people are in constant rituals of interaction with other human beings, their counterparts. This applies also to music-making: musicians are "active agents consciously developing the overall design of musical activities as their own self-presentation whose constitutive elements are planned in advance" (Skořepová Honzlová 2012). For musicians, the counterpart, for whom the self-presentation is designed, is the audience.

"Self-presentation", however, is not a purely individual enterprise – each person's identity is tied to different collectives that he/she is a part of or relates to. While there are different types of such collectives ranking differently on a personal hierarchy of identity layers (Chang 2008), this paper is especially interested in *national* identity, as we are analyzing representatives of a specific nation (Israel), defined by an allegiance to it.[6]

However, research has shown that various artists represent their nation in different manners. In fact, they choose such diverse tools for the enactment of the same nation that different musicians seem to be standing for different communities. Anderson's (1991) concept of a nation as an "imagined community" is helpful: a nation is defined as an entity whose members feel a "deep horizontal comradeship" towards the other members of the community despite the lack of a personal familiarity with them.[7] This feeling of affinity is conditioned, however, by the fact that there are other people that are not subject to it and

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[5] In post-industrial society, branding – including place branding – gains significance (Uldemolins, Zamorano 2015) because of growing importance of symbolic capital due to the globalized market of material products and intangible goods. Cultural diplomacy is among the popular tools of state branding.

[6] We define nation as a human community with mutual bonds of which it is aware, and with claims to political sovereignty (Badie, Smouts 1999).

[7] Among other traits of Aderson's imagined community, we can also mention the "claim to sovereignty", which is less relevant for our purpose.

who do not belong to the community: the imagined community is thus limited. Typically, the imagined community is a nation. But the meaning of one's own community becomes less apparent in divided societies or societies in conflict, such as Israel, where various groups identify themselves as antagonistic or in opposition to other segments of the same nation (Lederach 2008).

This paper thus argues that various musicians relate through their music to different imagined communities, making cultural diplomacy heavily dependent on individuals for its results.

Music and Its Role in Delineating a Community

Kaufman Shelemay (2011) describes the collective dimension of music by pointing to its function in descent communities,[8] where music is crucial for sustaining the community over time "through the catalyzing impact of musical performance" (Shelemay 2011: 368). What does a musical performance catalyze though? As other authors emphasize, music can both either establish/cement or penetrate the social boundaries of a community. As O'Connell (2010: 7) writes in *Music and Conflict*, "…music is thought by some to present a neutral space for fostering intergroup dialogue,"[9] but it can be used also to strengthen opposition when it becomes a sign of nationalist or ethnic group identity. The individual dimension of music-making is related to its social function: through the musical structure, the performer models his or her relationship to a society (Small 1998). Through Anderson's optics: while making music, musicians refer to their imagined communities, and through their performances, they present it to the foreign audience. The notion of their own (imagined) community is enacted (Reyes 2013). Therefore, music can help cast light on societal dynamics (which it is also co-creating).

Music as a symbolic system unites in itself the expression system as well as the content system (i.e., the sounds and the meanings) (Reyes 2013), unlike the visual arts that usually encompass only the expression system (without verbal explanation), and literature that works only (or mostly) with the content system. Therefore, music allows a more multifaceted analysis – while visual arts are open to many interpretations, and literature tends to be too explicit and self-explanatory, music contains a message of what it represents as well as the means of representation.

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[8] Described as communities united through shared identities (Kaufman Shelemay 2011: 364).

[9] These postulates show how the notion of cultural diplomacy, as a way towards mutual understanding, narrows our understanding.

The research for this paper was based on observation of performances of Israeli musicians and their media coverage in the period from autumn 2013 to spring 2015, with a focus on the verbal expressions (communication with audiences, press releases, media interviews), visual markers (attire, CD covers, posters, political symbols such as flags displayed in the venue) and the music (music themes and their national or ethnic connotations, lyrics, titles of songs and albums), as well as the relations between all of these factors. The performances were personally attended by the researcher or watched on the internet (YouTube, etc.).

The key requirement was that the musicians were aware of performing for a foreign audience, and not for compatriots or the diaspora.[10]

Four Strategies of Representation

The observation of Israeli musicians' performances in front of foreign audiences revealed four distinct strategies of representation of the imagined community: 1) the denial of the nationality's major impact on their music, 2) the imagined community defined ethnically (in this case Jewish, the majority one), 3) the imagined community represented through positive characteristics, and 4) the imagined community represented through ethnic characteristics, with music-making serving as a bridge towards the Other[11]. Let us elaborate on each of these categories, with the use of specific examples.

Denial of Nationality's Major Impact on Music

A certain – and probably a growing (Isikovich, Ashkenzai, Naveh 2015) – number of Israeli musicians abroad do not manifest their nationality in any well-marked way. They have either absorbed global influences, are living outside of Israel, and perform a particularly globalized genre (such as jazz or classical music)[12], or they have more intentionally decided not to emphasize their nationality, often due to reasons such as disaccord with their state's policies or

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[10] Performances for diaspora members might differ significantly from others – for instance, they might be more militant (Sugarman 2010).

[11] Individuals outside of one's own imagined community.

[12] We could, indeed, say "Westernized" instead of "globalized", as both jazz and classical music scenes are genres characteristic for Western music making. However, we use the term "globalization" not as a geographical denominator, but as a notion of blurring state borders – in favor of a broader significance.

discomfort posed to them by sanctions, demonstrations, and the reactions of foreign audiences and media.

As an example, we will use the performance of Avishai Cohen[13] during the International Jazz and World Music Exposures in Jerusalem in November 2013.[14] Avishai Cohen played a repertoire that could be heard in any French or American jazz bar (at least to a non-expert listener).[15] Also, the instruments of his band players were typical of a jazz ensemble (trumpet, double-bass, drums), just as their "New Yorker" attire. Avishai typically does not introduce himself or the band as Israeli (not even during concerts outside of Israel), and when asked about his Israeliness, he answers that he does not feel the need to be distinguished as an Israeli musician. According to him, music is a universal language; it should not have national or ethnic connotations.[16]

A similar approach could be seen during the Prague performances of the Israeli musicians Dida Pelled[17] and Daniel Jakubovič, and several others. Daniel even presents himself in all accessible PR materials as an artist from the US.[18] Both of these artists, similarly to Avishai Cohen, present globalized repertoire, not bearing any visual markers of Israeli identity, and not expressing themselves verbally in this way, either.

A prominent Israeli musician, Asaf Avidan, took the same stance and was willing to elaborate it for the media: he distinguishes himself "not as an Israeli artist, but an artist from Israel". "I don't show up to represent Israel. I'm not a politician. I'm not a diplomat," he says (Isikovich, Ashkenzai, Naveh 2015).

Sometimes, artists identify themselves for the audience as coming from Tel Aviv, but they do not use the word "Israel". At times, it is related to the fact that the band does not play almost any songs in Hebrew, even though their CDs contain substantial parts in this language.[19] The hypothesis is that this

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[13] The trumpet player, not to be confused with the better known double-bass player of the same name.

[14] International Exposures are showcases of different genres of Israeli art (music, dance, theatre...) co-organized by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Even though it takes place in Israel, the audience is almost exclusively foreign, as its aim is to present the Israeli art scene to important stakeholders (promoters, journalists) from abroad – the performers are well aware of it.

[15] Avishai Cohen is based in New York.

[16] Interview with Avishai Cohen by Dubi Lenz, International Jazz and World Music Exposures 2013, Jerusalem.

[17] Concert of Dida Pelled Trio, Reduta, Prague, on February 15, 2015.

[18] Concert of Against the Wall, Rock Café, Prague, on February 25, 2015.

[19] Concert of Fast Food Orchestra, Smola a Hrušky, and Los Caparos in Prague, November 13, 2014.

occurs when the musicians are required by a sponsor (Israeli Embassy, Israeli Chambers of Commerce, Israeli companies or donors) to identify where are they from, but do not feel comfortable with the word 'Israel'.

Music-making as the Representation of an Ethnically-defined Imagined Community

The second group of Israeli artists enacts through music an ethnically defined group, in this case the Jewish majority.[20] Daniel Zamir, a renowned jazz saxophonist, can serve as an example. Being an ultra-orthodox Jew, he performs dressed in a characteristic way (wearing a yarmulke, tzitit,[21] and a long beard). His music stems from Jewish melodies (it is sometimes referred to as "Jewish jazz"),[22] and he sings in Hebrew. Also, his CDs' covers are decorated with the Hebrew alphabet and the names of his songs oftentimes relate to Judaism ("Echad", meaning "One," which stands for the name of God). Among others, he claims that by his music, he aims at the "exposure of Jewish culture abroad"[23].

The reader may ask if the Jewishness is necessarily meant to represent Israeliness. This is indeed a valid question. Another of Zamir's songs provides us with an answer: Daniel Zamir created a jazz version of Hatikvah,[24] the anthem of the State of Israel, and plays it extensively. Also, one of his albums is called "The Children of Israel", and he often performs at events clearly aiming at representing Israel abroad ("Israeli Night" at JazzAhead! 2013, Jazz and World Music Exposures 2013, etc.). In sum, Zamir's performances enact Israel as a Jewish community.

There are other examples of this strategy; for instance, Alex Bershadsky and Liron Meyuhas, special guests of the Gathering of Drummers in the Czech Republic in 2014, introduced themselves to the audience of the event as Israelis, continuing by a song of their own, clearly drawing from traditional Sephardic Jewish melodies and based on the Song of the Songs from the Bible.[25]

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[20] The Israeli-Arab ethnic identity and its role in cultural representation abroad is addressed below.

[21] Ritually knitted fringes of a prayer shawl.

[22] CultureBuzzIsrael converses with Daniel Zamir, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=at0AGMTTi_c (August 20, 2014).

[23] Interview with Daniel Zamir, International Jazz and World Music Exposures 2013, Jerusalem.

[24] https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=daniel+zamir+hatikvah; August 8, 2014.

[25] Slet bubeníků (Gathering of Drummers), October 22, 2014, Lucerna Music Bar, Prague.

Music-making as the Enactment of the Imagined Community's Positive Traits

The third set of artists, including some prominent names, uses certain positive characteristics to enact the imagined community, which is not defined as ethnic ("ethnic" meaning composed of people of the same ethnicity). The most representative example is Idan Raichel, a real star of Israeli world music, who, from the beginning, has built his music on the inclusion of the ethnic minorities of Israel by performing the music of the marginalized Ethiopian population. He performs with a range of musicians of different ethnic backgrounds (according to his own words, he has performed with more than 150),[26] adopting melodies from various Israeli cultural groups, and arranges them, preserving the original language (Hebrew, Amharic, Ladino, Spanish, Arabic...). During the concerts, he calls on to the audience to remember the music "as the soundtrack of Israel"; sometimes, he even carries the Israeli flag.[27] Also, in media interviews, Idan Raichel tirelessly explains that "Israel is a very multicultural country", a "melting pot"[28]. He also noted: "Mostly when we perform out of Israel, people find it interesting to know about Israeli society; people are fascinated by how people that came from such diversity are singing side by side." (Berrin 2007).

Idan Raichel obviously perceives the promotional dimension of his music making as an important part of his mission, since he even lowers his fee requirements in order to be able to access new audiences.[29]

Another example is DJ Skazi. This producer of trance music, with a Star of David tattooed on his shoulder, claims that "the audience in Israel is unique, because it is very free" and that his "unique style could come out only of the energy and passion that Israel produces".[30] He said to the major Israeli newspaper Haaretz: "I'm proud of my Israeliness. I feel that through my music I'm another ambassador for us around the world. I pass on to all electronic-music lovers around the world that good things come from Israel." DJ Skazi sometimes even performs with an Israeli flag on the stage. According to his own

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[26] Interview with Idan Raichel in Prague, February 26, 2015.

[27] For example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=axZzxXobRQo; March 27, 2015 – note that the video is a live stream for a Dutch TV.

[28] Na Plovárně with Marek Eben, forthcoming.

[29] Interview with Idan Raichel, Jerusalem, November 2013.

[30] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ne5UAImFun4; March 31, 2015.

words, "being an Israeli comes first, being a musician comes later" (Isikovich, Ashkenzai, Naveh 2015).

This strategy is in stark contrast to the first one outlined in this paper (the denial of nationality's major impact on music-making), as some artists see their national identity as paramount to the activity of music-making. This strategy fits in well with the pragmatic concept of cultural diplomacy as an "advancement of foreign policy goals through art", aiming at the betterment of the national image abroad.[31]

Music-making as a Bridge between Conflicting Cultures

The fourth strategy of representation complies with the idealistic/normative notion of cultural diplomacy as a "way towards mutual understanding" (Minnaert 2014).

It is based on the enactment of the imagined community as rooted in a certain culture (in this case Jewish) while aiming at reaching out through the arts to a supposedly antagonistic culture. An example of such a strategy was demonstrated at the Prague concert of the heavy metal band *Orphaned Land*.[32]

Visual markers show a strong identification with Jewish culture – band members have tattoos in Hebrew, their music videos use stylization of biblical characters, and the song lyrics say "we are the orphans from the Holy Land, the tears of Jerusalem" and "we're...the keepers of Or-Shalem", i.e., one of the names of Jerusalem. However, the same text claims: "All is one" and "Who cares if you're a Muslim or a Jew"[33] – the proclamation of one's ethnicity serves as an initial position for a dialogue with the Other.

Orphaned Land always goes on tours with either a Palestinian or a Jordanian band, and the Prague performance was no exception – the group was joined by the Jordanian band Bilocate. Communicating extensively with the heavy metal audience at the venue, they proclaimed several times that their mission is to let the world know that they love Arabs.[34] Their playlist included one of the band's greatest hits called "Brother", introducing to the audience the

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[31] The sentiment that Israel is misperceived abroad is common among the Israelis, as well as the urge to contribute to the betterment of the image of Israel (Attias 2012).

[32] Concert of Orphaned Land and Bilocate in US-Exit, Prague, October 11, 2013.

[33] Lyrics of the "All is One" song.

[34] As all Israeli artists, Orphaned Land are not allowed to perform in Arab countries, but they often tour throughout Turkey, attracting a large Muslim fan-base and even Arabic fans, travelling to see them from Arab countries.

biblical story of Abraham's sons Isaac and Ishmael, the mythological forefathers of the Jews (Isaac) and the Arabs (Ishmael), who, even though separated by the course of events, are still brothers. This fact was also verbally emphasized. Among the other songs of the band are pieces with very telling names: "All is One", "Let the Truce be Known", etc.

Another example of such an approach is the *Kedem Ensemble*, a music group, which performs abroad (mostly in Europe) under the name *Kol Kedem Ensemble* together with musicians from other countries, including Iran. As a central piece of their repertory, they feature the song "Shnei Shoshanim", a traditional Jewish song, which is a "metaphor for a profound connection and love as an unbreakable bond"[35].

However, even though this strategy complies with the view of cultural diplomacy as a bridge towards other cultures, it also shows the limits of such a view, which is the political reality. Because Israel does not have diplomatic relations with most Arab countries and Israeli artists are not allowed to enter them physically or participate through recordings at art competitions there, such efforts have a limited impact. As other studies have confirmed, cultural diplomacy cannot go where the political borders do not allow it to.[36]

Israeli Arabs and the Cultural Representation of Israel

By now, the reader might have asked him/herself about the imagined community of an Israeli Arab musician. There are examples of artists who take part in activities representing Israel abroad (such as the famous singer Mira Awad performing with Idan Raichel for Dutch TV[37] or with the Jewish singer Noa at Eurovision 2009[38]), but the majority of Israeli Arabs refuse to be associated with Israel,[39] identifying themselves culturally as Palestinians.[40] Even if they do participate at Israeli cultural enterprises, as Mira Awad does, they are strongly criticized by their own community (Sherwood 2010).

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[35] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ek2pDcZO6KE ; September 3, 2014.

[36] Ginenow-Hecht, Donfried 2010.

[37] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZT0nKzzem7Q ; September 3, 2014.

[38] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RN8B1xvCxI0 ; August 20, 2014.

[39] With the exception of Israeli Druze community, which identifies with the State of Israel, even representing it abroad (an example being the performance of Israeli Druze debke group at the festival of folklore dances in Pisek in August 2014, where they enthusiastically introduced themselves as representatives of Israel).

[40] Katz, Sella 1999.

As Reyes writes, if the sides of the conflict are asymmetrical (which is the case of Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs), the weaker side avoids the conflict-generating issues and the "interaction is restricted to what is mandatory" (Reyes 2010).

This might help us answer the question whether cultural diplomacy can ever be just, adequately representing all ethnic groups encompassed by the given state. Probably not – and this is not only due to the fact that one party might try to monopolize the representation (as described on the example of Spain, whose cultural diplomacy entirely omits the minorities of Catalunya, Pays Basques, etc. /Uldemolins, Zamorano 2015/), but also because the marginalized group possibly does not want to be represented.

Changes and Instrumentalism in Representation Strategies

The examples above were deliberately selected for being especially pronounced. Nevertheless, not all of the artists perfectly fit the outlined strategies. The most common strategy is the first one – a significant portion of artists do not demonstrate their national affiliation strongly or maneuver around the nationality issues, refraining from the word "Israel". Some artists over time shift from one strategy to another – as did Idan Raichel during his last tour with the Muslim musician from Mali, Vieux Farka Touré, framing and defining the tour as a "bridge between Bamako and Tel Aviv," and thus getting closer to the fourth strategy (art aiming at transgressing barriers).[41] Furthermore, the frequency of different types of identification changes over time; the current generation of artists is more internationalized than the preceding ones (Times of Israel staff 2014). It also changes with the political situation (for instance, during the Operation Protective Edge[42], Israeli artists were confronted with their nationality with more urgency), and – finally – with different audiences (some audiences, such as the British, are more likely to demonstrate negative reactions to the presence of artists from Israel, compared to the Czechs). All of these factors influence the artists' strategies of representation.

The strategy of representation is often influenced by pragmatic considerations, aiming either at avoiding a conflict, and thus concealing the Israeli

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[41] A similar case is the Repertory Theater, whose members during a theatre competition in Scandinavia were first aiming at concealing their Israeli identity, but later exposed it, claiming that they "are Israeli and their art comes from Israel" (Isikovich, Ashkenzai, Naveh 2015).

[42] Military operation in Gaza in summer 2014.

identity, or emphasizing the multicultural or dialectic aspects that are especially appealing to sponsors and the media, and possibly also to the audience.[43]

Conclusion

This paper has proven using specific cases that 1) cultural representatives of a divided nation with a contested image are pushed to select a strategy of representation of such a society, 2) following from that, there is a range of possibilities of undertaking a strategy, using differently imagined communities, and ascribing various importance to the representation of the imagined community, and 3) individuals play a major role in portraying a society to a foreign audience.

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43 Which, for instance, criticized Days of Jerusalem in Prague 2014 for not representing Arabs enough, as testfied by an informant from the audience. It should be noted, though, that in countries with a strong Jewish diaspora, performances with strong ethnic (Jewish) connotations might be favored.

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