

# The Discourse of World Music

*Simon Frith*

*When was the last time an ethnomusicologist went out to discover sameness rather than difference? When did we last encourage our students to go and do fieldwork not in order to come back and paint the picture of a different Africa but of an Africa that, after all the necessary adjustments have been made, is the “same” as the West?*

KOFI AGAWU

*The pioneers of [our] native rock did not step down here from a flying saucer, they emerged from the grain of the people, like the folklorists and the tangoists before them. Our rock is already part of the Argentinean musical tradition, despite those who view it solely as “foreign penetration.” The [acoustic] guitar and the bandoneon were also imported to these pampas and it occurs to nobody to consider them aliens.*

MIGUEL GRINBERG

“World music” is an unusual pop genre in that it has a precise moment of origin.<sup>1</sup> In July 1987 eleven independent record companies concerned with “international pop” began meeting at a London pub, the Empress of Russia, to discuss how best to sell “our kind of material.” As a press release issued at the end of the month explained: “The demand for recordings of non-Western artists is surely growing. This is where problems can start for the potential buyer of WORLD MUSIC albums—the High Street record shop hasn’t got the particular record, or even an identifiable section to browse through, it doesn’t show on any of the published charts, and at this point all but the most tenacious give up—and who can blame them?” The world music tag (and subsequent sales campaign) was designed “to make it easier to find that Malian Kora record, the music of Bulgaria, Zairean soukous or Indian Ghazals—the new WORLD MUSIC section will be the first place to look in the local record shop.” From the start, therefore, world music described the commercial process in which the sounds of other people (“diverse forms of music as yet unclassifiable in Western terms”) were sold to British record buyers, and the record companies involved were well aware of the descriptive problems involved: “Trying to reach a definition of WORLD MUSIC provoked much lengthy discussion and finally it was agreed that it means practically any music that isn’t at present catered for by its own category, e.g.:



Reggae, jazz, blues, folk. Perhaps the common factor unifying all these WORLD MUSIC labels is the passionate commitment of all the individuals to the music itself."<sup>2</sup>

This story has by now the status of a myth. It is told by academic analysts to show that the very idea of world music was an assertion of Western difference, with core—Anglo-American—musics being protected from the encroachment of other sounds, and peripheral—non-Western—musics being assigned to their own shop display ghetto.<sup>3</sup> But this reading of the myth is misleading. The record companies involved were in the business of persuading consumers to distinguish themselves from the mainstream of rock and pop purchasers, to be different themselves. World music wasn't a sales category like any other; these record labels claimed a particular kind of engagement with the music they traded and promised a particular kind of experience to their consumers. As Jan Fairley notes, world music records were, on the one hand, sold as individual discoveries, the record company as musical explorer bringing back a gem to share with the discriminating public; and, on the other hand, exchanged as a currency to link together a community of enthusiasts—record company bosses being at the same time promoters, journalists, deejays, musicians.<sup>4</sup>

Two aspects of this interest me. First, as an ideological category, world music can only be understood by reference to the rock world from which it emerged. The eleven independent labels at the famous meeting had histories. Hannibal Records was run by Joe Boyd, pioneer producer since the 1960s of folk rock; Globestyle Records was a subsidiary of Ace, a specialist in small label rock and roll and r&b reissues; Oval Records was co-owned by deejay Charlie Gillett, whose influential 1970s Radio London show, *Honky Tonk*, had specialized in regional American music (and its British pub rock tributes). The world music house journal, *Folk Roots*, had, as *Southern Rag*, developed an eclectic but militant line on the state of contemporary folk music. World music was launched with an anthology cassette, *The World at One* (available only through the indie-rock-oriented journal *NME*), and with live performances at such roots-rock venues as the Town and Country Club and the Mean Fiddler. As live music it was initially subsidized through the multicultural policy of the socialist Greater London Council and sustained by WOMAD festivals, outdoor musical celebrations clearly modelled on similar rock events.

World music, in short, might have come from elsewhere but it was sold in a familiar package—not as global pop but as roots rock, as music like that made by British and American bands who had remained true to rock and roll's original spirit. This was music for grown-ups not adolescents, unashamedly functional (for dancing, courting), expressive of local community, emotionally robust. It featured guitars, drums, voices, sweat. Many academic commentators have since observed that while "world music" sounds



like an inclusive term it is, in practice, systematically exclusive. Timothy Taylor, just to give one example, draws our attention to the exclusion of Cantopop and karaoke from *World Music: The Rough Guide*.<sup>5</sup> But given the rock origins of world music this is hardly surprising. Indeed, as a rock critic in the late 1980s on most world-music mailing lists, I was always more aware of the authenticity claims of the music sent to me than of its exoticism. The difference at stake wasn't between Western and non-Western music but, more familiarly, between real and artificial sounds, between the musically true and the musically false, between authentic and inauthentic musical experiences. As the back cover blurb of the book of the 1989 BBC TV series *Rhythms of the World* put it: "During the late 1980s, rock and pop have become increasingly predictable and nostalgic and an appetite has developed for stronger stuff."<sup>6</sup>

Note, secondly, the way in which world music depended from the start on a displayed expertise. This is most obvious in record sleeve notes (and WOMAD Festival program notes), in the explanations and descriptions of particular musical forms and their roots in local traditions and practices, their well-researched biographies of the artists involved. International pop as world music was thus marketed quite differently from international pop as tourist music (as was most obvious when old releases were reissued); proper appreciation of world music meant, it seemed, ethnomusicological knowledge rather than tourist memories. World music discourse drew here on the collecting ideology that had given most of these labels their original market niche. Folk song and rock record collecting, with its equation of obscurity and significance, its obsession with fact, its pursuit of the original, its hierarchy of experts, had long been a key route through which African American music, from jazz and r&b to soul and Motown, had been appropriated by Europeans. And such collectors' expertise had always involved a kind of academicism.<sup>7</sup>

The relevant academic expertise for world music marketing was ethnomusicology, and if one result was the scholar as deejay, anthologist, journalist, and writer of blurbs,<sup>8</sup> another was the record company boss as scholar, engaged in his or her own fieldwork, developing his or her own theories of musical movement and exchange. The coming together of academic and commercial concerns was reflected in the late 1980s development of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (which even recruited Peter Gabriel for a while), and can be seen in the list of contributors to *World Music: The Rough Guide*.<sup>9</sup>

If ethnomusicologists thus helped define world music, the subsequent relationship between academic and commercial expertise has not been straightforward. World music record companies may have had little difficulty justifying their activities in terms of their musical enthusiasm, but academic enthusiasts were soon anxious about the assumptions behind and ef-



fects of world music as a sales category. The very fact that ethnomusicological expertise was needed to guarantee the authenticity of what was being sold called into question the notion of authenticity itself. It was soon clear, for example, that “the authentic” worked in retail terms as a redescription of the exotic. International pop music in the 1990s may be packaged quite differently from international pop music in the 1950s, with greater respect shown to its formal qualities and local history, but what’s on offer to the consumer, the musical pleasures promised, aren’t so different: in the context of the denunciation of Western pop artifice and decadence, the authentic itself becomes the exotic (and vice versa). This move is familiar enough from the long European Romantic celebration of the native (the peasant and the African) as more real (because more natural) than the civilized Westerner. The implication is that world musicians can now give us those direct, innocent rock and roll pleasures that Western musicians are too jaded, too corrupt to provide. World music thus remains a form of tourism (as *World Music: The Rough Guide* makes clear), just as “world travellers” are still tourists, even if they use local transport and stay in local inns rather than booking package tours and rooms in the national Hilton. Indeed, this musical equation of the exotic and the authentic can be traced back at least to Capitol Records’ *Capitol of the World* series, launched in 1956: “\*Recorded in the country of the music’s origins \* Captured in flawless high fidelity \* A remarkable series of albums for world music-travellers.\*”<sup>10</sup> As Keir Keightley notes, already the search for the exotic and the authentic is going hand in hand. He cites a *Holiday* magazine ad in 1957 headlined “The Real Stuff”:

The spicier Paris haunts where tourists go, and the more genuine quarters where Frenchmen go, have now been captured in pure melody by famed French conductor-composer Andre Colbert. It’s the most authentic and lovely album of Parisian listening that’ll come your way in a month of Tuesdays . . . here is the real stuff, the real music of Paris—romantic melody that can never be copied.<sup>11</sup>

From the academic point of view this equation of the authentic with the exotic calls into question the meaning of authenticity. On the one hand it can be doubted whether there is such a thing as an “authentic”—autonomous—musical form in the first place; on the other hand it is apparent that authenticity here functions as an ideological construct—a construction of commercial (and academic) discourse. It describes a process of music appropriation rather than music-making. And this leads us to a second kind of academic anxiety: the lurking problem of cultural imperialism, the suspicion that what “world music” really describes is a double process of exploitation: Third World musicians being treated as raw materials to be processed into commodities for the West, and First World musicians (in the back cover



words of *Rhythms of the World*) putting “new life into their own music by working with artists like Ladysmith Black Mambazo, Youssou N’Dour and Celia Cruz.”

As I write, Ladysmith Black Mambazo’s *Greatest Hits* is riding high in Britain’s Top Ten Album charts, following the use of the group’s music in a Heinz TV advertisement; world musicians’ international success is clearly an effect of global capitalism, and if by the beginning of the 1990s there was general academic agreement that “cultural imperialism” was no longer a term that clarified the workings of leisure corporations, it was also agreed that these workings did need critical analysis.<sup>12</sup> World music labels are highly informative about the musical source of their releases, about local musical traditions, genres, and practices, but they are highly uninformative about their own activities—the process through which music from Mali reaches a record store in Middlesbrough is not explained. On the one hand, there is remarkably little information available about the licensing and publishing deals involved, about copyrights and contracts, about the money flow.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, world music sleeve notes systematically play down the role of record producers in shaping non-Western sounds for Western ears, in describing Western markets to non-Western artists. When the sales emphasis is on local musical authenticity, the creative role of the international record producer is best not mentioned.

In academic popular music studies the suggestion that the producer somehow interferes (whether for commercial or colonialist reasons) with the free flow of sounds from artist to audience has by now been challenged by a more sophisticated reading in which popular music is an effect of the relationship between musician and producer, between musical and market considerations.<sup>14</sup> This is, again, to challenge the concept of authenticity, and by the early 1990s academic discussions of world music were being organized around a different term, the hybrid. Hyunju Park summarizes current academic thinking:

Musicians are blending together musical elements from everywhere and adding to them the musical possibilities afforded by new technologies. This process of global bricolage is still intertwined with, but no longer entirely dependent on, the core industry. In observation of this new eclecticism, the core industry itself has begun to look to all cultures for potential raw materials and consequently its former rock centre has splintered into many subgenre fragments. Even if centre dominance diminishes, however, local musicians will not work in a less commercialized environment. The process of hybridity is not one of absolute free choice but one of constant compromise between what might be desired creatively and what will be accepted commercially.<sup>15</sup>

In introducing the concept of hybridity into the discussion ethnomusicologists were not simply pointing at the value of detailed local work on music-



making processes, or trying to follow the movement of particular musics through the international trade in sounds and symbols; they were also drawing on broader academic concerns about globalization, concerns inflected by postmodern theory. On the one hand, then, world music could be seen as a site on which new sorts of (hybrid) identity are being performed.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, world music could be seen as a site on which new sorts of cultural theory could be developed, new futures glimpsed. The academic concern is no longer to apply some general theory of development (the cultural imperialism thesis, say) to music as an example, but, rather, to read the meaning of globalization through world music. Jocelyne Guilbault thus claims that “world music seems far ahead of other fields of activity in its use of active social forces that are diverse and contradictory as agents of change and in its reliance on both local and international forces in the shaping of individual and social identities.”<sup>17</sup> Edwin Seroussi writes, about popular music studies in Israel:

The study of the forces that shaped Israel’s popular music industry or the description and classification of Israeli music according to genres is certainly not the ultimate goal of this field of research. Although interpretative analysis of social and musical processes from the past will continue to guide much future research, it is also necessary to pay attention to the power of popular music to predict. Just as the emergence of *musikah mizrahit* predicted the rise of political consciousness among the second generation of North African and Middle Eastern Jewish immigrants in the early 1970s, the rich palette of popular music expression in Israel today may forecast new social configurations still in their formative stages.<sup>18</sup>

If for world music record companies the concept of authenticity was a way of condensing a series of arguments about how music works and why it matters, drawing on potential listeners’ understandings of rock and folk, so for world music scholars hybridity has become a way of condensing a number of arguments about globalization and identity, drawing on potential readers’ understandings of postmodern theory. For Seroussi, for instance, to study popular music in Israel is to study “the struggle to create a new, local culture,” to examine the dialectical relationships between past Jewish cultures and present Middle Eastern cultures, between Israeli national identity and the “threatening influence” of global, Americanized dreams. And it is this sense of struggle to which the concept of hybridity draws our attention.

In using this term scholars have adopted two different analytic approaches—detailed studies of local practice on the one hand, grand theories of the global condition on the other. Local studies start from established accounts of musical syncretism, of the ways in which musical styles develop through a constant process of borrowing and quotation. As Nancy Morris suggests in a review of recent work on Latin American and Caribbean music, ethno-



musicologists have long assumed that “neither identities nor traditions are static; both change with changing circumstances, and with the continuous interaction of peoples.”<sup>19</sup> From this perspective, hybridity is a new name for a familiar process: local musics are rarely culturally pure (a genre as nationally distinct as Dominican *bachata* can thus be shown to draw on Mexican, Colombian-Ecuadorian, and Puerto Rican as well as Dominican sources). As Morris suggests such music is made in local contexts of mobility, migration, the constant writing out and blurring of class and ethnic difference; tradition is always a matter of invention and reinvention, and what’s at issue here is not simply commercialization (rural music becoming urban commodity, say) but also legitimation, as styles initially despised for their association with the lower classes become nationally and internationally popular. This is not a process without tensions—it is still difficult for the Jamaican cultural establishment, for example, to come to terms with the fact that reggae is the country’s most successful cultural export—but the point is that world music is shaped by responses to national/political as well to commercial/global conditions.<sup>20</sup>

In local studies the most important conclusion to draw from this is that musical traditions are only preserved by constant innovation. In his study of Peruvian panpipe music, Thomas Turino quotes the charter of the Federation of Puno Musicians in Lima. These musicians, children of urban immigrants, started out by asserting that their music was “the creation of our ancestors. It is a free and natural manifestation of community that expresses the living history of our Quechua and Symara nations.”<sup>21</sup> This sense of tradition inspired these students to teach themselves to play a music that articulated an imagined regional identity even as their urban experience shaped the way in which they conceived and played that music, and it can be contrasted to the artificial preservation of tradition by state edict, exercised through the control of radio outlets, local recording studios, education, and performance. The impact of international pop, in other words, may be as important for the preservation of music traditions as for their destruction. In the books Morris discusses, this is probably best brought out by Deborah Pacini Hernandez’s study of *bachata* in the Dominican Republic. Local musicians there are clear that traditional Dominican sounds have only developed freely since the end of the thirty-year Trujillo dictatorship in 1961: “We can’t forget how significant it has been to merengue as a popular music to have come into contact with the popular music of other countries.”<sup>22</sup>

The fieldwork of Turino, Hernandez, and many other contemporary ethnomusicologists makes clear, in Morris’s words, that “urbanization, modern transportation, and electronic media” have speeded up “the age-old process of musical mixing” and “with fewer intermediaries than ever before,” but it does not suggest that the underlying dynamic of musical change has become qualitatively different. Today Peruvian *chicha* combines electric rock instru-



ments, highland-mestizo *wayno* melodies and phrasings, and the rhythms of Colombian *cumbia*, musical elements absorbed by the Lima-born children of rural-born parents as much from radio, records, and *MTV Internacional* as from neighborhood performers, tutors, and rituals. In the early 1960s Jamaican popular musicians brought together the musical resources of African drumming, Afro-Protestant Revivalist hymns, European ballroom dance, Caribbean calypso and rumba, and United States rhythm and blues, pilfering from local musical events and internationally distributed and broadcast records alike. The media of global musical communication may change; the ways in which music is a mobile life form do not.

This is the optimistic view of world music: musical creativity always involves cultural borrowing; changes in musical tradition don't mean the loss of cultural identity but articulate the way it changes with circumstance. The fact that such hybrid forms become popular internationally, are traded in the global marketplace, is analytically irrelevant; the meaning of local musics must be referred to local conditions of production. This is the academic argument that best suits (and is most used by) world music companies; it defines hybridity as authenticity and implies that musical creativity depends on a free trade in sounds; "uncorrupted" music can now be seen as stagnant music, music constrained by reactionary political and cultural forces.

This argument is developed most systematically and critically in Jocelyne Guilbault's study of *zouk*. Guilbault describes the local effect in the Antilles of the international success of the *zouk* group Kassav:

As it has acquired power through fame, Kassav has contributed to some significant changes: a revolution in local show business practices and in record production in the French Antilles; the development of ties for the first time with international markets; new collaboration between local and commercial entrepreneurs and music groups; and a transformation of social consciousness. . . . Kassav's financial success has led to the recognition that cultural changes brought about through popular music can bring economic changes, that the process of cultural identification awakened by mass-distributed music in general and *zouk* in particular informs new attitudes, which in turn affect the economy through consumer choices and production methods.<sup>23</sup>

But Guilbault also makes clear the difficulty of confining "local conditions of production" to a locality. As live music-making in the Antilles was replaced by the use of records, by mobile discos and deregulated radio stations, "Antillean music groups of the early eighties were forced to develop a 'sound' that could compete with imported foreign music," and such competition in itself transformed the frame of musical expectations. If local ethnomusical studies tend to see the dynamics of musical change as somehow organic, Guilbault argues that once musicians enter the international music market their music is shaped by new kinds of nonlocal forces:



Popular local dance musics that reach the international market are subject to the paradox inherent in the transnational recording industry. They must comply with what is often referred to as the "international sound," that is, the use of preponderant Euro-American scales and tunings, harmony, electronic instruments now seen as standards, accessible dance rhythms, and a Euro-American-based intonation. They are also obliged to deal with subjects that are accessible to a wide audience. . . . But in contrast to the standardization of the songs' sounds and content, these musics must, at the same time, distinguish themselves from the others by featuring elements unique to their cultural elements. They must utilize in a specific way their dependence on the international markets by and through a continual process of creation/adaptation.<sup>24</sup>

And this has its own local effects. Kassav's choice to sing in Creole rather than French "was certainly and unapologetically a marketing device to attract attention and to be clearly identified [in the international French music market] as *Antillais*," but "it was also unmistakably a way to show solidarity with compatriots at home and in exile," and therefore both to nurture a sense of collectivity among all Creole speakers in the Islands and to legitimate the use of Creole in public Antillean institutions.<sup>25</sup> Guilbault concludes,

As do all other world musics, zouk creates much stress in its countries of origin by underscoring how its relation with the international market reformulates local traditions and creative processes. As it emphasises the workings of world political economy at the local level, zouk renders more problematic for Antilleans the definition of the "we" as a site of difference. It challenges in fact the traditional way of thinking about the "we" as a self-enclosed unit by highlighting its relational character.<sup>26</sup>

A similar argument has been proposed by cultural sociologists writing from the opposite direction, studying not world music as the other of Western culture but rock music as the other of non-Western cultures. Motti Regev thus argues that for many musicians and fans in the last twenty-five years,

the presence of rock music in their own local cultures and its influence on local music is hardly seen as a form of cultural imperialism. On the contrary, they perceive rock as an important tool for strengthening their contemporary sense of local identity and autonomy. Anglo-American sub-styles of rock as they are, imitations that put local-language lyrics to the same styles, or hybrids that mix rock elements with local music traditions, proliferate in countries around the world. Italian hip hop, Polish reggae, Chinese *xibei-feng*, Algerian *pop-raï*, Israeli *musica mizrahkit*, Argentinian *rock nacional*, Zimbabwean *chimurenga* or *jit*, are a few of these sub-styles. Producers of and listeners to these types of music feel, at one and the same time, participants in a specific contemporary global-universal form of expression and innovators of local, national, ethnic and other identities. A cultural form, associated with American (US) culture and with the powerful commercial interests of the international



music industry, is being used in order to construct a sense of local difference and authenticity.<sup>27</sup>

Regev is partly arguing here that rock, as a “local authentic” music, is important for resolving the postmodern condition of occupying global/mediated and local/immediate space simultaneously. But his more specific point is that rock is a modern rather than postmodern form. Rock, that is, stands for a certain kind of self-consciousness, a particular mode of individual expressivity. “Rock music,” in his words, “is used to declare a ‘new’—modern, contemporary, young, often critical-oppositional—sense of local identity, as opposed to older, traditional, conservative forms of that identity.”<sup>28</sup> Rock, to put this another way, can be seen as the authentic articulation of a local identity in its very recognition of the complexity of that identity, of the global in the local and the local in the global.

On the one hand, then, rock is a vernacular lower class version of the expressive modernity that has always “transcended” local conditions (not least in the spread of Western classical music); on the other hand, it exemplifies, in Regev’s words, “one of the cultural logics of globalization”—“instead of being disparate, relatively independent musical languages, local styles of music become part of one history, variations of one cultural form—without necessarily losing a sense of difference.”<sup>29</sup> From this postmodern perspective hybrid music is the necessary expression of a hybrid condition. This condition is partly technological. David Toop thus concludes an essay on “Exotica and World Music Fusions” with the observation:

It is all too probable that one of the endearing, perhaps enduring, clichés of the end of the twentieth century will be the postmodern/electronic age concept of image chaos: the progressively unshocking shocks of overloaded layers, bizarre juxtapositions and oppositions, forgeries and thefts, wrenches of time and location, and dislocations of function and meaning. There are tangible models everywhere: the streetsounds of a modern Fourth World, *retronuevo* city like Miami; the recording studios of the Bombay film industry with its indiscriminate pile-ups of world music bites; the traverse of historical and religious divides and levels of technology in the music of Mali and Senegal. . . . Music history has become, to a remarkable extent, a record and tape collection. Music is composed or performed with knowledge gleaned from recordings; records are made with fragments of music lifted from other records. Unnecessary, at the end of the twentieth century, to bring forty marines and a brass band [as the Prussian ambassador brought to Japan in 1860]; a single cassette, arriving in a new geographical location, can upturn musical traditions for good.<sup>30</sup>

And Peter Manuel argues, also with reference to the cassette, that “the lower costs of production enable small-scale producers to emerge around the world, recording and marketing music aimed at specialized, local grassroots audiences rather than at a homogenous mass market. The net result is a re-



markable decentralization, democratization, and dispersal of the music industry at the expense of multinational and national oligopolies.”<sup>31</sup> Either way, technology makes for a new music culture, organized around neither local traditions nor global corporate trends. In Manuel’s words about India, “while obscure, specialized traditional genres have come to be marketed on cassette, new syncretic styles have also emerged in close association with cassette dissemination. Such genres have been able to bypass the disapproving or indifferent control of state bureaucracies and/or formerly dominating majors.”<sup>32</sup>

The postmodern condition is reflected both in the collapse of grand musical narratives and authorities and in the blurring of musical borders and histories. World music can thus be treated as the sound of postmodern experience, following Stuart Hall’s suggestion that “the aesthetics of modern popular music is the aesthetics of the hybrid, the aesthetics of the crossover, the aesthetics of the diaspora, the aesthetics of creolization.”<sup>33</sup> Timothy Taylor analyzes the way the British musician Apache Indian exploits “free-floating signifiers,” and suggests that if Apache Indian is, as Peter Manuel suggests, “a quintessential postmodern musician,” this is not just a matter of style or irony but articulates, rather, a particular experience of—and emotional response to—what Taylor calls (following Hall) “the global postmodern.” In Taylor’s words, “new technologies and modes of musical production allow musicians to occupy different subject positions in a kind of simultaneity never before possible; they don’t move from one to the next but rather employ and deploy several at once.”<sup>34</sup> Or as Veit Erlmann argues more abstractly:

For the contradiction that characterizes our historical moment is this: if the truth of an individual or collective identity, the experience of an authentic rooting in a time and a place, is now inextricably bound up with the truths of other places and times, then the desire to account truthfully for this very fact in some kind of macro model amounts to missing the individual experience. But if the systemic notion of a cultural totality is to be of any value and if it is to avoid the dangers of Eurocentric monolithic representations, it must precisely capture this dilemma as one of the deepest motivating forces for a global aesthetic production.<sup>35</sup>

Erlmann’s interest is the “wholesale disappearance of the social and of difference as such” and “the rapid loss of referentiality.” World music thus “does away with time and space altogether.” Developing Fredric Jameson’s concept of pastiche, Erlmann suggests that in world music “difference itself becomes the signified,” while global music pastiche describes the “attempt at coating the sounds of a commodified present with the patina of use value in some other time and place.”<sup>36</sup>

The contrast between these positions is clear enough: Erlmann is considering the weight world music has to carry for its listeners in the West, Taylor the meaning it has for the musicians themselves. Either way, the differ-



ence between the West and its other is preserved: Erlmann sees it in the constantly reinstated nostalgia of the world music consumer; Taylor suggests that only world musicians express the postmodern condition authentically. Their music is, paradoxically, a critique of Erlmann's postmodern despair: "Just as the subordinate groups in US culture have always done more than the dominant groups to make radical positions available through new sounds, new forms, new styles, it looks as though it is the subordinate groups around the world who are doing the same, perhaps even showing us how to get along on this planet. If we would only listen."<sup>37</sup> Taylor's argument draws here from cultural, or rather subcultural, studies of "resistance," of the ways in which "subordinate" consumers turn commodities back on themselves, and marginalized communities define their own social spaces, their own centers and peripheries, in the process of stylization.<sup>38</sup> The problem here (as in the original youth subcultural studies) is that "resistance" describes such a variety of activities, from day-to-day communal sociability to full scale political mobilization. In his study of a typical hybrid youth form, German hip hop, Dietmar Elflein distinguishes between the music made by "Krauts with attitudes," German rappers using the German language to express (however ironically) a nationalist resistance to U.S. leisure culture, and the music made by the children of "guest workers," rap used to explore critically the complexities of German immigrant experience. But he also cautions against reducing either kind of rap simply to an ideological or ethnic position (a position of more interest to the record companies marketing the music than to the musicians making it):

The music these bands produce is hip hop and nothing more. There is no need to propose different ethnically defined subgenres on the basis of the origin of particular musical samples. . . . In the end, the issue is this: anyone who wants to gather up musicians under an ethnically defined flag (as did *Cartel* and *Krauts with Attitude*) is, in practice, trying to become the dominant musical, political and commercial power in a scene which is, by its nature, various and pluralistic.<sup>39</sup>

To treat world music as postmodern resistance is to beg questions about music's significance for identities and social mobilization, questions that are better answered in the particular than the general.<sup>40</sup> A rich source of such particular discussion can be found in *Retuning Culture*, a collection of essays on "musical changes in Central and Eastern Europe" edited by Mark Slobin.<sup>41</sup> What concern these authors are the ways in which "music shapes politics and economics and social life as well as being shaped by them."<sup>42</sup> The question is how does such shaping work?

Effectively, according to these studies, through processes of social identity formation. On the one hand, music plays a role in turning a class-in-itself into a class-for-itself. Vague feelings of ethnic affiliation become a self-



conscious ethnic identity, as shared myths and memories are articulated musically, given instrumental, rhythmic and lyric form. On the other hand, people are mobilized by music materially, as crowds brought together to make events; concerts offer, in themselves, the experience of collective power. Under certain circumstances, then, music becomes a source of collective consciousness which promotes group cohesion and social activities that in turn have political consequences.

These Eastern European studies suggest first (unsurprisingly) that music is particularly significant for the politics of national and ethnic identity; music becomes politically significant, that is, when issues of national and ethnic identity are the prime sites and sources of political dispute—whether at moments in the creation and dissolution of states or in terms of diasporic mobilization around the rights of minorities and migrants. Secondly (and more tellingly), these studies suggest that the music at issue in these situations is “folk” music, music precisely defined in terms of collective identities. It is when the validity of a social group is in dispute that music becomes politically important, as a way of authenticating it. It follows that aesthetic arguments—what makes for good music?—are ethical arguments—what makes for the good life? In this context, music articulates a way of being-in-society both representationally (in its subject matter) and materially (in its lived-out relationships between musicians and between musicians and audience). This is a process of idealization both in formal terms (the way in which music provides a narrative, an experience of wholeness and completion) and as a matter of staging, in events in which solidarity is made physical.

Catherine Wanner thus describes a Ukrainian nationalist song festival which took place (shortly before the collapse of the Soviet empire) in a football stadium in Zaporizhzhia. This was a rock concert that began with a religious procession (“A stream of priests solemnly entered the stadium walking along the track in long black robes carrying candles and crosses. In this way, twenty chanting priests introduced, so to speak, the first rock band”) and mixed the lineup of rock bands with folk singers. If the (local) rock bands indicated that Ukrainian culture was contemporary, and not confined to officially sanctioned folklore, the folk singers (groups from the Ukrainian communities of Canada, the U.S.A., France, and Australia) suggested that the Ukraine’s authentic cultural tradition had been protected from Soviet incursions.

During the third song of the opening ceremony of the festival, as the feeling of solidarity and euphoria accelerated, most of the audience poured down from the bleachers onto the soccer field to dance. They broke the traditional segregation of performer and audience and joined hands or elbows in a human chain, encircling the singers on stage and each other. . . . The soccer stadium became the central town square as the “imagined community” of Ukrainians, at least for one night, was reified and celebrated in music and dance.



“Why,” asks Wanner, “did advocates of Ukrainian independence turn to music to recast the critical relationship between Russia and Ukraine?”

The demarcations between musical styles, genres, and performances, while nonetheless reflective of a cultural tradition, are infinitely more porous than other avenues of culture that also inform identity. Other cultural elements . . . such as religious affiliation, historical memories and myths, and language, do not command the immediate acceptance and visceral reactions that music has the power to trigger.<sup>43</sup>

The importance of Eastern European studies for accounts of world music is that they address questions of identity and musical change in a situation in which identity is the central political issue. In doing so they make clear that the way we feel music—respond to it emotionally and viscerally—must be analyzed as a grounded experience, grounded in a particular time and place, grounded in a particular form. Musical response involves recognition, sympathy, and commitment; it is at once free and necessary. Following a stay in Bulgaria, Tim Rice writes:

Studying music as social life and symbolic system would have taken more time than I had, but I did observe the extraordinary staying power of tradition, which speaks if not to the autonomy of music, then to its power to make claim on us—to force us to engage with its rules—even as social, economic, and political conditions change. . . . Musicians were undoubtedly using music to construct notions of ethnic and national identity, but precisely how that is working itself out in the details of musical style will have to be studied in more careful future analyses.<sup>44</sup>

Meanwhile, Rice notes three developments: Gypsy musicians appropriating African American rap in the Romany language; radio programs mixing the previously segregated genres of “authentic folklore,” “arranged folklore,” and “wedding music”; and a new folk radio station “broadcasting a large amount of Macedonian music, along with a fair dose of Bulgarian *narodna*, *svatbarska* and *starogradska* (“old city”) *muzika*, and Gypsy, Greek, Serbian and even Latin American music.”<sup>45</sup> Whatever new forms of Bulgarian identity are being constructed musically, then, they are being constructed through a series of explorations of the non-Bulgarian, and to describe the resulting sounds (Romany rap, for example) as hybrid may be to miss the point: what’s involved here is less a sense of subjective instability than the negotiation of new cultural alliances.

Rice concludes his essay on Bulgaria with the observation that “when viewed from the point of view of the individual practitioners, music can be understood as economic practice, as social behavior, and as a symbolic system with the powerful ability to make aesthetic sense while hiding meaning; to reference existing worlds; and to imagine new, utopian worlds.”<sup>46</sup> When world music is viewed from this perspective the most commonly imagined



utopia seems to be one in which issues of identity do not even arise. “Stick to African music!” writes Manu Dibango. “How many times have I heard this *diklat*, from critics as much as musicians from the continent. I have found myself stuck, labeled, locked in behind prison bars. . . .” Dibango accepts that “Weight comes from tradition. . . . But you need rhythm to move forward. . . . Talent has no race; there simply exists a race of musicians. To be part of it, you have to have knowledge. Musicians—and composers even more so—perceive pleasant sounds around them and digest them. They like the sounds; the sounds become part of them.”<sup>47</sup>

But such a view—commonly expressed by world musicians—is not simply utopian. It reflects too the realities of the world musical life.<sup>48</sup> Jocelyne Guilbault has analyzed in detail how the Caribbean superstars of Calypso and Soca live as “transnationals.”

In this respect, the production of a typical album by the calypsonian Arrow offers a telling example. Arrow is a calypsonian from Montserrat, who does most of his recordings in New York City, often at the recording studio owned by Frankie McIntosh, a musician from St. Vincent. For each track, Arrow often uses two arrangers who do not necessarily originate from the same country—one for the brass parts and another for the rhythm and brass arrangements. Regularly, Arrow asks Trinidadian Leston Paul, one of the most sought-after arrangers in the English Caribbean, to fly to New York to write and direct horn parts for his songs. Arrow always uses a mix of musicians from the United States and the Caribbean to produce a special sound in the horn section. . . . The production of Caribbean recordings typically involves musicians from different nationalities and territories, and various stages of the recordings often take place in different locales.<sup>49</sup>

The recording process described here is familiar enough in other musical worlds, whether rock or classical, but the juxtapositions of friendship and influence seem more accidental in international pop. Take, for example, the musical background of the Ethiopian musician Mulatu Astatqé. As a teenager he studied clarinet, piano, and harmony at London’s Trinity School of Music and music theory at Berklee College of Music in Boston. In London he played with the calypso musician Frank Holder and in Edmundo Ros’s Latino big band; in New York he founded the Ethiopian Quintet to record an album of “Afro-Latin Soul” (the other group members were Puerto Rican); back in Ethiopia, as band leader, arranger, and teacher of “Ethio-jazz,” he remains after thirty years the country’s only vibraphone player, a musician regarded simultaneously as a guru and a novelty.<sup>50</sup>

Such lives are the stuff of world music biographies and suggest, finally, that the concept of globalization, with its intimations of the inexorable forces of history and/or capital, should be replaced in the discussion of world music by an understanding of networks—globalization from below, as it were. And this is where we came in. Those record company bosses who



originally met in a pub to define world music were, self-consciously, networking; world music promoters (European radio deejays, for example), continue to pass sounds around semiformal organizations of knowledge and friendship; the World Circuit (the name of an influential world music label) is, it is implied, different from the global pop market because it is a community, its authenticity guaranteed less by the music circulated than by the relationship between the people (including the musicians) doing the circulating. And here we have the final irony: academic music studies look to world music for clues about the postmodern condition, for examples of hybridity and lived subjective instability, but to understand this phenomenon we also have to recognize the ways in which world music has itself been constructed as a kind of tribute to and a parody of the community of scholars.

## NOTES

1. I'm referring here to the British music market term. In the U.S.A. the retail label is "world beat," first used by the musician Dan Del Santo as the title for an album released in 1982—see Andrew Goodwin and Joe Gore, "World Beat and the Cultural Imperialism Debate" *Socialist Review* 20, no. 3 (July–September 1990): 65.

The epigraphs to this chapter are from Kofi Agawu, "The Invention of 'African Rhythm'" *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 48, no. 3 (1995): 389–90, and Motti Regev, "Rock Aesthetics and the Musics of the World," *Theory Culture and Society* 14, no. 3 (1997): 131.

2. Quotes taken from the first WORLD MUSIC press release (n.d.).

3. See, for example, Jocelyne Guilbault: "On Redefining the 'Local' through World Music," *The World of Music* 35, no. 2 (1993): 36; Timothy D. Taylor, *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets* (London: Routledge, 1997), 2–3.

4. Jan Fairley, "The 'Local' and the 'Global' in Popular Music," in *The Cambridge Companion to Rock and Pop*, ed. Simon Frith, Will Straw, and John Street (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming). Fairley is commenting in particular here on Ian Anderson's editorial arguments about world music in *Folk Roots* magazine—Anderson had been involved in the original world music discussions in his capacity as boss of Rogue Records. And see Peter Jowers, "Beating New Tracks: WOMAD and the British World Music Movement" in *The Last Post: Music after Modernism*, ed. Simon Miller (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 71.

5. Taylor, *Global Pop*, 16–17.

6. Francis Hanly and Tim May, eds., *Rhythms of the World* (London: BBC Books, 1989).

7. Charlie Gillett's classic *Sound of the City*, the first systematic account of the 1950s emergence of rock and roll, which put in place the ideology of rock as roots music, locally based, the product of independent rather than major record companies, was originally written as a master's thesis at Columbia University.

8. I'm thinking here of people in Britain like Latin music expert Jan Fairley and African music expert Lucy Duran.



9. Simon Broughton et al., eds., *World Music: The Rough Guide* (London: Rough Guides Ltd, 1994).
10. Cited in Keir Keightley, "Around the World: Musical Tourism and the Globalization of the Record Industry, 1946–66," unpublished paper (1998).
11. Keightley, "Around the World."
12. See Goodwin and Gore, "World Beat and the Cultural Imperialism Debate," and Reebee Garofalo, "Whose World, What Beat: The Transnational Music Industry, Identity, and Cultural Imperialism," *World of Music* 35 (1993): 16–32.
13. One of the few detailed accounts of world music as trade, Rick Glanvill's "World Music Mining—The International Trade in New Music" was removed from the BBC book of *Rhythms of the World* following threats of libel action.
14. Roger Wallis and Krister Malm's concept of "transculturation" has thus been more influential on studies of world music than those models in which indigenous local music cultures are celebrated for "resisting" international cultural forces. Compare Roger Wallis and Krister Malm, *Big Sounds from Small Peoples: The Music Industry in Small Countries* (London: Constable, 1984) with Deanna Robinson et al., eds., *Music at the Margins* (London: Sage, 1991).
15. Hyunju Park, *Globalization, Local Identity and World Music: The Case of Korean Popular Music* (M.Litt thesis, John Logie Baird Centre, Strathclyde University, 1998).
16. See, for example, Jocelyne Guilbault, "Interpreting World Music: A Challenge in Theory and Practice," *Popular Music* 16, no. 1 (1997): 31–44.
17. Jocelyne Guilbault, *Zouk: World Music in the West Indies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 210.
18. Edwin Seroussi, *Popular Music in Israel: The First Fifty Years* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard College Library, 1996), 25–26.
19. Nancy Morris, "Cultural Interaction in Latin American and Caribbean Music," *Latin American Research Review* 34, no. 1 (1999): 187–200. And see also Jorge Duany, "Rethinking the Popular: Caribbean Music and Identity," *Latin American Research Review* 17, no. 2 (1996): 176–92.
20. See Kiki Marriott, *Communications Policy and Language in Jamaica* (Ph.D. thesis, John Logie Baird Centre, Strathclyde University, 1998).
21. Thomas Turino, *Moving Away from Silence: Music of the Peruvian Altiplano and the Experience of Urban Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 188.
22. Deborah Pacini Hernandez, *Bachata: A Social History of a Dominican Popular Music* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 78–79.
23. Guilbault, *Zouk*, 30.
24. *Ibid.*, 37, 150.
25. *Ibid.*, 166. Compare Kiki Marriott's discussion of reggae's impact on the use of patois in Jamaica—Marriott, *Communications Policy and Language in Jamaica*.
26. Guilbault, *Zouk*, 209–10.
27. Regev, "Rock Aesthetics and Musics of the World," 125–26.
28. *Ibid.*, 131.
29. *Ibid.*, 139.
30. David Toop, "Into the Hot—Exotica and World Music Fusions," in Hanly and May, *Rhythms of the World*, 126.
31. Peter Manuel, *Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in North India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), xiv.



32. Ibid., 33.
33. Quoted in Taylor, *Global Pop*, xxi.
34. Ibid., 155–65, 203, 94.
35. Veit Erlmann, “The Politics and Aesthetics of Transnational Musics,” *The World of Music* 35, no. 2 (1993): 7.
36. Ibid. 8, 11, 13.
37. Taylor, *Global Pop*, 204.
38. See, for example, Sanjay Sharma et al., eds., *Dis-Orienting Rhythms: The Politics of the New Asian Dance Music* (London: Zed Books, 1996); Tony Mitchell, *Popular Music and Local Identity: Rock, Pop and Rap in Europe and Oceania* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996).
39. Dietmar Elflein, “From Krauts with Attitudes to Turks with Attitudes: Some Aspects of the German Hip Hop History” *Popular Music* 17, no. 3 (1998), 255–65.
40. For a good survey of the issues involved here see Martin Stokes, ed., *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place* (Oxford: Berg, 1994).
41. Mark Slobin, ed., *Retuning Culture* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996).
42. Carol Silverman, “Music and Marginality: Roma (Gypsies) of Bulgaria and Macedonia” in Slobin, *Retuning Culture*, 231.
43. Catherine Wanner, “Nationalism on Stage: Music and Change in Soviet Ukraine,” in Slobin, *Retuning Culture*, 139–44, 148.
44. Timothy Rice, “The Dialectic of Economics and Aesthetics in Bulgarian Music,” in Slobin, *Retuning Culture*, 195–96.
45. Ibid., 196.
46. Ibid., 198.
47. Manu Dibango, *Three Kilos of Coffee* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 125–26.
48. Compare the musicians’ views recorded in Rehan Hyder, *Indie Bands and Asian Identity: Negotiating Ethnicity in the UK Music Industry* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Staffordshire, 1998), with the arguments made on their behalf in Sharma, *Dis-Orienting Rhythms*.
49. Jocelyne Guilbault, “World Music,” *The Cambridge Companion to Rock and Pop*, ed. Frith, Straw, and Street.
50. Information taken from Francis Falceto’s sleeve notes for *Ethiopiques 4: Ethio Jazz & Musique Instrumentale 1969–1974*.