

Guest Editor's Column

Reflections on Music and Minorities

Owe Ronström

The theme of this issue of *Puls* is music and minorities. Three words, a perspective, and a field of research. The first word states the field's *raison d'être*, its empirical research focus, aim and objective. The last sets the starting point that serves to place the field within specific social and cultural geographies and to populate it with a certain kind of research objects. And in the middle that little connecting word that establishes the productive intersection that makes the field meaningful. It is this 'and' that sets up and signals a relation to be explored, about expressive forms and certain types of groups, about power, visibility, recognition, cultural complexity and more.

The articles are based on presentations at the 11th Symposium of the ICTM Study Group of Music and Minorities, held in Uppsala, Sweden, 25–29 October 2021. After being postponed due to the Covid pandemic some 50 ethnomusicologists from 19 countries in four continents gathered, onsite and online, to discuss themes like music of minorities as national cultural heritage, ecological issues on music and minorities, new research, theory and method. All the articles discuss the roles and functions of music for groups that position themselves or are positioned as minorities in some respect, either the emphasis is on how music helps to establish, shape and gather, or to express, manifest, symbolise and represent such groups.

Since a couple of decades, music and minorities is an internationally established ethnomusicological research field in its own right. Based on their presentation at the symposium, Ursula Hemetek and Marko Kölbl in this volume give an account of the steps that led to the founding of the ICTM Study Group on Music and Minorities in 1999, and of the discussions that followed on definitions, demarcations, and research objectives. Since 2000, the ICTM Study Group has organised biannual international symposia and published symposia proceedings, articles, anthologies and books.¹ The markedly increased activities among researchers within the field that followed from these symposia and publications have recently led to further institutional anchoring of the field, through the establishment in 2019 of the Music and Minorities Research Center (MMRC), at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna (mdw).

Music and minorities in Sweden

That the 11th symposium of the study group took place in Sweden, is no mere coincidence. Rather, it is an outcome of a markedly growing interest in the musics of immigrants and minorities among young Swedish ethnologists, musicologists and ethnomusicologists in the mid-1980s, an interest sparked by the 28th ICTM world conference in Stockholm and Helsinki 1985.

1. The 12th symposium takes place in Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, 5–8 December 2023, in collaboration with the ICTM Study group on indigenous music and dance. For a list of publications, see <http://ictmusic.org/studygroup/minorities>. (Accessed 31 January 2023)

An obvious reason why much ethnomusicological research in Sweden and other Nordic countries came to focus on ethnic minorities and migrants is the extensive population movements in post-war Europe, of which especially Sweden have received a fair share. Migration produces minorities – no wonder then that with increasing immigration to the Nordic countries followed an increase of recognised ethnic minority groups. Among the first to arrive in the mid-1960s were labor immigrants from South-Eastern Europe and the Middle East. In the following decades followed refugees and asylum seekers also from Chile, Iran, Horn of Africa, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and most recently, Ukraine.

There are, however, also other reasons behind the focus on migrants and ethnic minorities. One is the cultural policies concerning immigrants that were introduced in Sweden, Norway and Denmark in the 1970s, which replaced the earlier assimilationist attitudes with an ideology that advocated integration and inclusion. This required extended studies of immigrants, both as individuals and groups, and of the more general processes tied to immigration. To meet this demand, new research funds were set up that in short time spent relatively large sums on what were then new, small and hitherto more or less insignificant fields of research. One of these was ethnomusicology. With the increased availability of research funding in the 1980s, a small but steadily increasing number of studies of musics among minorities and immigrants to the Nordic countries were published: on Sami, Sweden-Finns, Finno-Swedes, Assyrians, Turks, Chileans, Greeks, Yugoslavs and others.²

A third reason for ethnomusicologists to focus specifically on ethnic minority groups was the strong influence from a long-standing and well-established practice among ethnomusicologists worldwide to study music as culture/culture as music through the lens of a bounded and territorially defined ethnic group. After all, mainstream ethnomusicology has long been what it names, an 'ethno-musicology'. Without much difficulty – and, it must be emphasised, often with good results – this conventional ethnomusicological standard research practice was applied also to the newly arrived immigrants to the North.

Yet another reason is the legacy of a strongly established older research tradition in Nordic ethnology and musicology focusing on bounded rural groups, "folk", with their own distinctive musical traditions, "folk music". The many studies of local Nordic folk music traditions that had been published from the late 19th century and on, together with the substantially fewer studies of the musics of indigenous minorities, stood as more or less obvious models for studies also of the musical traditions of the newly arrived migrants.

As a consequence of these influences, the newly arrived immigrants came to be formatted and presented as "ethnics" belonging to a specific "ethnic minority group" with their own distinctive "ethnic music", in line with the international ethnomusicological standard practices of the time. And to that also as a kind of "folk" with their own "folk music" in line with the older Nordic standard research practices. And in line with both of these practices, the majority of the studies was clearly anchored in what Sverker Hyltén-Cavallius (2014) has named "retrology", a perspective that turns the researchers gaze backwards, emphasises the *theres-and-thens*, as in things past, places left, worlds lost, and brings a number of re-words to the fore: recreation, renewal, revival etc. (Ronström 2014).

2. See the bibliography in Ronström & Lundberg 2021.

One of these early works of importance is Karl Tirén's extensive collection of Sami music published in 1942. This is one of the earliest and most complete collections of music recordings on phonograph in Sweden. It is unique in many ways, not least in that it presents joking by Sami aged from nine to 77, and from roughly as many women as men. In his presentation at the Uppsala symposium, Dan Lundberg underscored the significance of this collection not only for the survival and development of the Sami joik, but also for the public image of the Sami in post-war Sweden, and, not least, for the image the Sami hold of themselves. In 2023, Tirén's work will be suggested for nomination to the UNESCO Memory of the World Register by the Swedish government, supported by the Sami parliament in Sweden.³

From mosaic to diversity

Taken together, the steady stream of studies of the immigrants' lives, traditions and cultures that were published in Sweden during the 1970s and 80's, were assembled into a 'mosaic', the dominant metaphor for the emerging new Swedish society. The metaphor presented an image of society as constituted by a number of distinctive ethnic minority groups, each with their own cultures, living together side by side. What was simultaneously effectively concealed was the Swedish society's role as producer, not only of the mosaic's individual parts, but also of its framework and the glue that holds the parts together (Lundberg, Malm & Ronström 2003:37ff.)

In the 1990s the many different research initiatives, and the reports and dissertations that became the results, had laid the ground for a decisive shift in perspective, from the study of individual ethnic groups and minorities to the nationally institutionalised system that produces, orchestrates and controls the various minorities. Now the dominant metaphor changed from mosaic to diversity, from Sweden as an "immigrant society" to Sweden as a "multicultural society".

A large number of studies in the humanities and social studies now shifted from ethnic groups to ethnic relations, the social organisation of cultural diversity and multiculturalism, and, not least, to studies of state bodies as active agents in production of ethnic minorities and their cultures. A result of these initially quite disparate initiatives was the emergence of the new multi-disciplinary research field IMER, International Migration and Ethnic Relations, in which also a number of Nordic ethnomusicologists took an active part. In his feature essay for this issue of *Puls*, Mark Slobin recalls his meetings with Swedish ethnomusicologists during this period, and the discussions around multiculturalism "as a way a nation-state could control the definition of a swelling group of newcomers from other countries who came with very un-Scandinavian backgrounds and sensibilities", and the invention and design of a "minority-music establishment" that might "have little to do with what the recent arrivals themselves thought of as their own intimate music" (Slobin, this issue, p 13).

Through studies on music, dance and cultural diversity, and on revivals, aging, heritage, media and more, in relatively short time, ethnomusicology became recognised as an important albeit small research field in the Nordic countries. Although it had (and still has) difficulties in establishing itself

3. Lundberg 2021. Tirén's work was recently published in Swedish by Gunnar Ternhag from a manuscript in the collections of Svenskt visarkiv (Tirén 2023).

as an independent academic discipline, the number of active ethnomusicologists has continued to grow. From the 2000s, we have seen a small but steady stream of Nordic studies of music, migrants and minorities, diversity and multiculturalism. Taken together, these studies have significantly expanded, renewed and strengthened ethnomusicological research in the Nordic countries, in terms of perspectives, issues, theories and methods, and also provided important knowledge about social change and development in the increasingly culturally diverse Nordic societies (Ronström & Ternhag 2017).

From this brief overview, it is clear that in practice 'music and minorities' even long before its emergence as an internationally established research field in its own right a few decades ago has been a central area of ethnomusicological research in Sweden and the other Nordic countries. Although the term 'minority' itself may not have been used until recently, there is a long-standing tradition of research that establishes bounded, territorially defined groups, whether in terms of "folk" or "ethnic", positions them as 'minorities' in relation to mainstream society, and endows them with their own distinct cultures, including music and dance.

Three strands of research

A preoccupation with ethnic groups has from the start been a characteristic of the 'music and minorities' field not only in the Nordic countries, but also internationally. As was evident in Uppsala, in practice 'music and minorities' is understood first and foremost as "music of ethnic minority groups": out of the 33 presentations at the symposium, 22 dealt in one way or the other with music of ethnic minorities, from Zhuang in China, Albanians in Germany and Austria, Roma in Finland, to Syrians in Europe and Vedda in Sri Lanka.

Beside this major strand there are a number of other and less prevalent strands.⁴ One concerns the musics of other kinds of minorities than ethnic. In the symposium, a handful of contributions presented works on music among religious minorities, such as Christians in Bali, and Greek orthodox in Israel, and to that one on music among sexual minorities. In his presentation, Jakub Kopaniecki focused on the music of the LGBT+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) communities in Poland, as manifested during the "Equality March" in Wrocław 2018. "Is there a queer music?" Kopaniecki asks and points to 'disco', a constellation of music, dances and a culturally specific sensitivity associated with queer culture over the Western world since the early 1970s. In the Wrocław Equality March disco played a key role to set up a specific "queer" sonic enclave. By transferring the sonic space of nightclubs and LGBT+ events to the streets, Kopaniecki concludes, the marchers were able to symbolically represent their identity in the city's public space. An extended version of his presentation appears in this issue of *Puls*.

Another and different approach to music and minorities is to take off from how interest in certain music and dance genres can forge people together in esthetically defined affinity groups. In the symposium this strand of research was represented by papers on the institutionalisation of tango as a 'minority' dance music genre in postwar Japan, the elevation of the steel pan from outcast to national instrument in Trinidad, and by Bożena Muszkalska's paper on music as an expression of "virtual Jewishness" in contemporary Poland.

4. For a survey of research models within the field see Pettan 2019.

In the version prepared for this issue of *Puls*, Muszkalska notes how music perceived as Jewish has become a significant form to express 'Jewishness', by Jews, but to a large extent also by non-Jews in Poland today. She underscores that "the participation of non-Jews in restoring lost ties to Jewish heritage seems inevitable and necessary given the small number of Jews remaining in Poland" and points to the new hybrid musical forms that this cross-cultural dialogue has led to in a wide variety of styles, from classical music to jazz and klezmer. As a conclusion, she argues that this music has provided "a space for mutual contact, facilitating the empathetic engagement of Poles in understanding the Other and making us remember Jews not only as victims, but also as people who created a rich culture and art through which they express their emotions".

Minorities and the organisation of diversity

Already from these short summaries, it is clear that 'minority' is a notoriously difficult and elusive concept. In ordinary terms the English Wikipedia minority-entry gives part of the explanation:

According to its common usage, a minority group can simply be understood in terms of demographic sizes within a population: i.e. a group in society with the least number of individuals is therefore the 'minority'. However, in terms of sociology, economics, and politics; a demographic which takes up the smallest fraction of the population is not necessarily the 'minority'. In the academic context, 'minority' and 'majority' groups are more appropriately understood in terms of hierarchical power structures.⁵

As is emphasised by Ursula Hemetek, the starting point for the ICTM Study Group on Music and Minorities was precisely such hierarchical power structures and their consequences: imbalances, discrimination, subordination. The common understanding in the field, and throughout all the contributions here, is that minorities are not "natural", not there to be discovered, but produced within specific political entities (regions, kingdoms, nations etc.), either top-down by government policies, bottom-up by voluntary organisation, or both. The result is specific, context-dependent "ethno-scapes" (Appadurai 1990), that can include minorities of many kinds and on several levels.

A third strand in music and minority research concerns these ethno-scapes, the overall organisation of diversity, and more specifically, the roles, positions and functions of minority musicians and musics in the staging and displaying of cultural diversity and "multiculture" in late modern societies. Several presenters in the symposium addressed this theme, in papers on models and spaces for the survival of music cultures of refugees in Germany, the digitalisation of musical pathways among Swedish-speaking Finns, and on Jewish music in Central Europe. Zuzana Jurková's contribution here concerns memory politics: how the memory of the exceptional musical activity that took place under terrible conditions in the Jewish ghetto and concentration camp in Terezín (Theresienstadt) during the Nazi era was handled in the post-war Czech Republic. She asks why Terezín up to the 1990s was more or less absent from Czech music history, and why, how and by whom it thereafter became "a component of national remembrance". Her answer points to the

5. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minority_group

changing dynamic between minority and majority in relation to the traumatic memories of World War II, an intricate dynamic that moved the narratives of Terezín from “community remembrance of the survivors” to Czech national memory and cultural heritage.

Minorities and “super-minorities”

In a series of works over more than four decades, our feature essayist Mark Slobin has discussed issues around music, diversity, multiculturalism and minorities. In a conference paper from 1995 he asks why the term minority is “oddly positioned” in discourses about the United States. He finds that in the US minorities exist for at least three reasons: racism, immigration, and a policy among various groups to maintain boundaries through expressive cultural forms. There are, however, certain social structures or factors that tend to relegate the idea of minority, and particularly musical minority, to the background despite its apparent importance in American consciousness and politics. One of these is “the racial polarity of a black and white nation” that “makes all other groups onlookers to the main black-white action, hence erasing the notion of “minority musics” (Slobin 2002:31). This is an important observation that can easily be generalised. In Northern Europe, as in many other parts around the world, there are similar social structures or factors at work that tend to make the term minority less relevant, and instead bring together various ethnic, racial, sexual or religious groups into large, heterogeneous “super minorities”, under labels such as “immigrants”, “foreigners”, “Blacks”, “Africans”, “Muslims”, “BIPOC”, or “LGBT+ people”, as discussed by Jakub Kopaniecki in this issue.

In Sweden a common term for such a “super minority” is *invandrare*, immigrant/s. It was introduced on government initiative in the mid-1960s to replace the derogatory *utlänning*, (‘outlander’, foreigner). Up to then *invandrare* had mostly referred to Swedes moving to the USA or moving from rural areas to the big cities. The idea was to upgrade the image of the many newcomers to Sweden by shifting from an excluding and negatively charged term denoting “them”, to a more positive and inclusive term denoting “us” (Ronström 1989). In the years to come a whole series of new words and expressions were coined, *Invandrarverket* (The Swedish Immigrant Agency), immigrant policy, immigrant culture, immigrant food and immigrant music. Soon enough, however, along with stricter immigration policies also the new term became increasingly derogatory. Although there have been attempts to introduce new and less negatively charged terms (such as “New-Swedes”), and although the Immigrant Agency has been renamed “the Swedish Migration Agency”, the term *invandrare* is still firmly cemented as a “super-minority” in today’s Sweden, through top-down policies and through organisation from bottom-up (as in the Immigrants’ Culture Center, founded 1971, and the National Association of Immigrants, founded in 1973).

For immigrant musicians, maneuvering these levels and positions is often difficult. In his contribution to this issue, Jonas Ålander addresses the effects of being positioned as an “immigrant” or “Black” musician in Sweden: how the positioning relates to other ethnic minority positions, how it affects the musicians’ access to gigs, stages and audiences as well as how they are presented and represented on stage and in media. As *invandrare*, or “Blacks”,

they can get access to certain types of contexts, stages and audiences, while at the same time they are excluded from others. Similarly, they can get the media attention they need to be able to work as musicians, but they also become marginalised as performers of an “immigrant music” or “black music” specifically designed for immigrants or black people. Ålander concludes that the conditions for immigrant musicians in Sweden are difficult. Even if there is some resistance among the musicians, their overall situation, Ålander finds, “leaves artists in a hegemonised position where exits are blocked, and change seems distant”. In the end, to be an immigrant musician “is to submit to discrimination and not be listened to”.

From Minority-Majority to Residual, Dominant and Emergent

In the feature essay for this issue Mark Slobin again returns to minority musics, power relations and the social organisation of diversity. He sets off by turning the question of what a minority is somewhat upside-down by introducing the term “Minority”. He notes how the ruling class, “whether slave-owners, serf-owners, privileged politicians, or populist demagogues”, has traditionally invented and managed the “public category of ‘minority’ as a defined subgroup”. Although this domineering class, the Minority with capital M, is always outnumbered by those controlled and defined, it has nevertheless been able to take control over and “speak for a demographic majority that they themselves defined in order to identify subcultures that could be eventually termed “minority groups”.

Through a series of examples from different parts of the world, Slobin goes on to show how the musics of minorities are shaped and formatted by a Minority in the name of a majority. To end, he finds that the minority-majority dichotomy might not be of much relevance anymore, at least in relation to music. An exception is the unexpected and extraordinary development in parts of the world, when the Minority that earlier used to claim to be representing a self-defined majority now instead has begun to portray itself as a threatened minority, “doomed to replacement by the rising masses in its midst”. As an alternative to the majority-minority dichotomy, Slobin suggests a set of productive terms from Raymond Williams: Residual, Dominant and Emergent. These could take the discussion of music and power relations further and open for new perspectives on the role of music in the social organisation of cultural diversity. ■

Bibliography

- Appadurai, Arjun 1990. “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy”. *Theory Culture Society*, vol. 7 (1990): 295–310.
- Hyltén-Cavallius, Sverker 2014. *Retrologier. Musik, nätverk och tidrum*. Hör: Symposium.
- Lundberg, Dan 2021. “Jojk as a Unesco Memory of the World”. Paper presented at the 11th symposium of the ICTM Study Group of Music and Minorities, Uppsala, Sweden, 25–29 October 2021.
- Lundberg, Dan, Krister Malm, & Owe Ronström 2003. *Music, Media, Multiculture. Changing Musicscapes*. Stockholm: Svenskt visarkiv. https://carkiv.musikverk.se/www/epublikationer/Lundberg_Malm_Ronstrom_Music_Media_Multiculture.pdf

- Pettan, Svanibor 2019. *Sounds of Minorities in National Contexts: Ten Research Models*. Ljubljana: Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana.
- Ronström, Owe & Gunnar Ternhag (eds.) 2017. *Musiketnologi: elva repliker om en vetenskap*. Uppsala: Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akademien.
- Ronström, Owe & Dan Lundberg (eds.) 2021. *Sounds of Migration: Music and migration in the Nordic countries*. Uppsala/Stockholm: Eddys AB.
- Ronström, Owe 1989. "De nya svenskarna". *Invandrare och minoriteter no. 1* (1989): 23–29.
- Ronström, Owe 2014. "Traditional music, heritage music". In: *The Oxford handbook of music revival*. Eds. Caroline Bithell & Juniper Hill. New York: Oxford University Press, pp 43–59.
- Slobin, Mark 2002. "Four reasons why we have no musical minorities in the United States". *Aspects on Music and Multiculturalism. Report from a European Music Council Conference 9–11 July 1995 in Falun, Sweden*. Music in the Year 2002: Report No. 15. The Royal Swedish Academy of Music, in collaboration with The Swedish National Committee of the International Music Council, pp 31–40.
- Tirén, Karl 1942. *Die lappische Volksmusik: Aufzeichnungen von Juoikos-Melodien bei den schwedischen Lappen*. Stockholm: Geber.
- Tirén, Karl 2023. *Den samiska folkmusiken. Utgiven av Gunnar Ternhag*. Uppsala, Umeå & Stockholm: Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akademien, Kungl. Skytteanska samfundet & Svenskt visarkiv.