Space and place in world music production

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ABSTRACT

Space and place are central to understanding the conditions of world music production. This article examines how three world-music venues generate particular imaginaries, identities and expectations for those involved: performers, consumers and promoters. These venues form part of a city's nighttime economy and as such they are replete with and reenact the spatial-cultural dymanics of their location. Drawing on interview data and participant observation I show how live performances create new tensions between the global and the local, in part, through spatialized interactions among social actors, representations of world music, and constructions of place and identity through the venues themselves.

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1. Introduction

Place and space are key to understanding the conditions of production of world music and how this music contributes to the shaping of identities. Venues are anything but neutral or even passive spaces where music is simply played and enjoyed. These places are crucial in creating a particular atmosphere aimed at including segments of the population and, consciously or not, excluding others. The people who run (and shape) these venues are, accordingly, important gatekeepers and tastemakers in the field of music production and consumption. Venues facilitate the 'consumption of an ideology transmitted through culture' (Miles, 2010, p. 56) Hence, venues matter because they present a more explicit spatiality than cities; in essence they are really local. Venues matter because they are shaped by the political economy of music as a cultural industry (Hesmondhalgh & Pratt, 2005; Leyshon, Matless, & Revill, 1998; Pratt, 2007). Leyshon, Matless, and Revill (1995, p. 425) argue that space and place should not be thought of as simply 'sites where or about which music happens to be made', but rather as 'different spatialities' that are formative of the 'sounding and resounding of music'. This article focuses on three venues where the materialisation and commodification of world music has occurred and hopes to create a framework for understanding the localised and contested nature of world music production.

Watson, Hoyler, and Mager (2009, p. 873) argue that urban spaces where live music is performed are crucial to the 'creative processes' because they become (re)constituted through interactions between people and between people and the physical environment. This way of thinking about geography and music is a central category of scholarship where music is considered in the 'social and cultural construction of place, space, and identity.' Such interactions and musical practices help to define the 'particular geographical and material space within the city' (Cohen, 1995, p. 438). These interactions infuse spaces with 'meaning and a sense of identity and place' that not only transform them into sites of music production, but also produce and reify the identities of the people who interact within the spaces. The venue's location (place) also tells a story about the production going on within it. This article will show how different locations create different production conditions that require particular types of world music and artists to represent the music appropriate for the venue. Venues are not arbitrary selections but represent the deliberate efforts of cultural gatekeepers (Bourdieu, 1993) to establish 'rules aimed at maintaining' a particular social vibrancy (Gallan, 2012, p. 44). Such efforts have direct implications on how musicians emphasize and/or (re)construct aspects of their identity in order to be part of this production process.

Scholars (Barrett, 1996; Reily, 1992; Slobin, 1992) have argued that the early success of world music was based on differences situated through discourses of exoticism, discovery, authenticity, othering/difference, and a sense of place. World music, like any other genre, is governed by conventions and forms that provide legitimacy for this cultural product. The tensions between place and space in world music production reproduce and perpetuate

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these conventions and forms and the implications of this tension for how musicians (and consumers) use these spaces to construct their identities Although difference is still represented in (live) world music, it is being constructed through the tension between place location and the space in which these performances occur in the city. Miles (2010, p. 8) argues that spaces celebrate difference by imposing uniformity.

The term world music is imbued with contested and contradictory meanings, in addition to social and political connotations. Its exact definition is neither clear nor standardized across different markets (Brennan, 2001; Frith, 2000). However, the implied meaning of this term is that this music has been 'deterritorialised' (Connell & Gibson, 2004) from its original locations and purposes, usually outside of the West (i.e. Europe and North America), and reconstructed with new meanings for new audiences, usually within the West. Not only do creating and performing difference occur by and through musicians, difference is also produced through the work of a web of cultural intermediaries (Bourdieu, 1987). As such, this constellation of actors and the venues they control are central to this discussion. As such, the architecture of world music production, including its location within the city, becomes critically important to the music's continued success.

I studied twelve music venues over the course of two years. The study was limited to performance of African forms of world music. The particular nights' performances analyzed here were chosen because they typified the experience at each venue. In addition, advertising materials and interview data[1] were analysed using semiotics and narrative analyses. Here I focus on three venues in order to show the diverse narratives produced within them and the repercussions that this process has for the production of space. These small venues run live world music performances year-round and draw crowds of 50–200 people. Grazian (2004, p. 39) argues that venues are sought out by consumers as a result of 'internalizing myths that celebrate clubs as bastions of community and solidarity in contrast to the asphalt jungle of the city at large'; particularly as consumers seek alternative forms of entertainment. These venues also highlight the complexity of live performances, which are commodified in ways that draw on interactions between musicians and audiences.

The following section looks at how live world music venues contribute to our understanding of the construction of spaces. Conceptually, it builds on work developed by Cohen (1995) and Valentine (1995), among others. Next is a discussion of the three venues and the themes that are commodified within them: resistance, nostalgia, and peace and reconciliation; followed by a discussion and conclusion.

2. Small venues—big lessons

Some currency in world music has necessarily been shifted from artists onto venues in order to compete with other leisure activities, particularly as European or non-African artists increasingly perform this music. Van Klyton (2014) argues that the reduction in distance between the spaces of production and consumption necessitates that new forms of symbolic difference, such as venues, play an ever increasing role in this music's authentication. Hence, the spaces themselves create value above the production activity (Ley, 1982, p. 220). Music offers associations of place that serve to cross boundaries and create multiple and overlapping spaces;

which are brought to life through performances (Butler, 1999; Thrift, 2006).

London has many small world music venues heavily reliant on informal networks for advertising, such as Facebook. Promoters also rely on advertisement through specialist magazines, fRoots and Songlines, and the more mainstream magazine, Timeout London. Small venues are often themed with particular aesthetics and afford close contact between musicians and the audiences as unique selling points. However, London also hosts many African music clubs, including at least six Ugandan clubs in North London, and several West African clubs in South East London. Club Afrique, in Canning Town, East London, caters to Francophone Africans. These clubs are located in areas that have high concentrations of working class whites and ethnic minorities, specifically Black Africans. By contrast, world music venues are located in areas that are predominantly white and middle-class in Central London neighborhoods such as Notting Hill and Clerkenwell.

With similar cover charges, all venues attempt to showcase some form of deterritorialised music (Connell & Gibson, 2004); however, the key distinction between world music and 'African' music venues appears to be what Troy (1996) calls 'locational disadvantage'; meaning that outlying venues have difficulty in accessing the benefits of a central London location. Mainstream media outlets rarely advertise African clubs, which in itself revalorizes discourses of class, race and identity. In some ways, this is an 'odd' result. Brandellero (2011) points out that 'African' clubs would reflect tastes and preferences strongly linked to diasporic/transnational communities with a particular cultural capital not readily found in world music venues. World music venues offer a contemporary world music; which is marked by 'traditional to hybrid sounds' and 'a quest for the exotic' (Brandellero, 2011, p. 110). These audiences tend to be 'global audiences'; whereas community-based music is performed for audiences that are 'locally-based communities/transnational/ diasporic'.

In any case, these spaces draw upon the different cultural systems views of participants to re-produce spaces of oneness, resistance, and/or counterculture—in addition to art production and consumption for 'communities of world music enthusiasts' (Frith, 2000). In these ways, small venues are able to continue to operate in London.

2.1. Resistance and Passing Clouds

Resistance can take many forms, particularly through third space or conceptual spaces (Bhabha, 1990; hooksbell, 1990; Soja, 1996). Art and music offer particular moments of resistance against the mainstream and Passing Clouds in Dalston, East London offers an interesting place to observe this. The owner, born in Knightsbridge, Central London, lived in the Congo before returning to London. He moved into a bedsit in the gentrifying east London community of Dalston.

The venue website mentions that they hope to bring West End Londoners to East London to experience 'what life was really like'. Furthermore, the owner refused help from his wealthy family and successfully sought a 'sizeable grant' from the very tight budgets of the Arts Council.[2] Passing Clouds promotes itself in the following way:

> Our musicians are a family of revolutionary-minded people that spreads its wings across London as part of a growing movement seeking an alternative to commercially- and individually-

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[1] Interviews were conducted with the promoters of two of the three venues. Secondary data was used to understand the vision of the third venue as expressed by the venue's founder. Twelve venues throughout London were analysed through more than 70 visits where participant observation was conducted.

[2] www.passingclouds.org.