Entangled Histories and Voices: An Introduction

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The concept of 'entangled history,' coined by Shalini Randeria and Sebastian Conrad in the 1990s, has become more and more important in historical and cultural studies over the last two decades. 'Entanglement' is one of the concepts which try to overcome the partition of historical and cultural research along national lines and to take into account phenomena that occur across state borders and can only be analyzed from a transnational perspective. In the words of Conrad and Randeria (2002, 17): 'history' is a "complex network of shared histories," which can only be investigated by transnational and relational perspectives (cf. Conrad/Randeria 2002, 14). As the authors stress, these new perspectives of the interconnectedness of the world and of processes of interaction and transfer do not tell us anything about the *modalities* of those interactions. Furthermore, they should not hide the fact that inequalities, relations of power and violence have always been and still are part of those processes.

'Entanglement' is not a recent phenomenon, a specificity of the modern era, but characterizes 'history' since its earliest days. There have always existed different forms of contacts, interconnections and circulations between regions, empires or cultural areas of the world. However, as Ottmar Ette (2012) argues in his book *TransArea Studies*, there are at least four periods of, what he calls, "accelerated globalization": first, the European (especially Spanish and Portuguese) expansion to the New World in the 15th and 16th centuries; second, the discovery journeys of the late 18th and 19th centuries (e.g. James Cook); third, European (especially French) colonialism in the 19th century and the US imperialism at the beginning of the 20th century; and finally, the past three decades characterized by the expansion of financial markets and new world wide communication technologies. Those intense phases of globalization, which lead to a high degree of connectedness of the world, very often go hand in hand with ambitions of demarcation and particularization, as Conrad and Randeria (2002, 13-14) observe. Roland Robertson tried to conceptualize this phenomenon by the term of 'glocalization' which "means the simultaneity – the co-presence – of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies" (Robertson 1995, 25).

In our view, 'entanglement' is close to the concept of cultural encounters but also differs from it. Whereas 'cultural encounters' seem to rely on a more binary perception of cultures which can meet in a contact zone, 'entanglement' suggests a network-based vision of cultures "which are never unitary in themselves nor simply dualistic in relation of Self to Other," to put it with Homi K. Bhabha (2006, 155). From this point of view, 'entanglement' is closer

to Édouard Glissant's reflections on rhizomorphic cultural relations or Bhabha's idea of a never-ending process of cultural translations and transcultural appropriations.

The conference *Entangled Histories and Voices. Popular Music & approcci postcoloniali / approches postcoloniales / acercamientos postcoloniales*, organized at the University of Innsbruck and held online in April 2021, provided the papers and the discussions that are presented in the nine contributions of this special issue. An Italianist focus emerged from the proposals collected for the conference, so that now five of the nine contributions deal with Italian popular music. Following the themes of the articles, the issue is organized in two chapters and an outro. In the first chapter, there are four contributions dealing with 'postcolonial routes and entangled histories,' most of them emerging from colonization and decolonization (Abbonizio, Baratti, Chiriacò, Nhaueleque/Bussotti). The articles of the second chapter (Attolino, Ridani, Steinbrecher, Tomei) approach hip hop and reggae from a transcultural perspective, and some of them ask whether – in analogy to the 'Black Atlantic' – one can speak of a 'Black Mediterranean.' The special issue concludes with a contribution that discusses three artistic interventions dealing with 'entanglement' (Mertz-Baumgartner).

Colonial Histories as Entangled Histories: The Case of Italy

The history of colonization and decolonization is a prototypical example of 'entangled histories' and can only be discussed from a transnational perspective. When one looks at the cultural production that addresses these entangled histories, the erasure of colonial experiences from the public discourse might look as a significant obstacle. This is particularly relevant in the Italian context, where the role of colonial history has been negated or minimized for a long time – Gaia Giuliani and Cristina Lombardi-Diop elaborate on the concept of "evaporation of race" as a result of the removal of the colonial experience from the public discourse after World War II (Giuliani/Lombardi-Diop 2013, 123).

To adopt a perspective of 'entanglement' means to look at the different ways in which sounds and words build memories that collide and conflict with the narratives of nation-states and with nostalgic memorizing. It also means to analyze the role of sonic memories in re-mapping, to quote a recent book by Gavin Steingo and Jim Sykes (2019), the discourse of musicology and of other disciplines that deal with music. The ongoing discussion on decolonizing musicology and ethnomusicology is in fact an unstoppable flow that will dramatically change the ways in which we talk about music, as well as the ways in which we acknowledge and adopt indigenous conceptions of sounds and music (Robinson 2020). This special issue aims, among other things, at contributing to such discussion.

In the context of 'entangled histories,' the example of the song "Asmarina" is particularly illuminating. The song was created in Asmara, Eritrea, for the local music festival in 1956, among the local Italian community founded by settlers during colonial times. In its original form, the song resembled both the approach of Italian popular music of the fascist years and

the arrangement of the Sanremo Music Festival, the famous Italian competition that was the model for the smaller festival in Asmara. The song was later adopted as a sort of hymn by the community of the Eritrean diaspora in Italy, a community mainly composed of children of mixed relationships and refugees. A few years later, the same song was also translated into Tigrinya, with lyrics that celebrate the beauty of the city of Asmara, and developed into a protest song as it was endorsed by the Eritrean Liberation Front, as well as by its supporters around the world, fighting against the military dictatorship. It is also relevant that "Asmarina" re-emerged in all its complexity from the work of two artists, Medhin Paolos and Alan Maglio, who created a fascinating documentary with the same title. The song "Asmarina" shows that the entanglement is not only to be seen as the complex network that the linear narrative of nation-states cannot describe, but also as the impossibility to understand cultural products if such entanglement is not taken into account.

The entanglement emerges from national and international connections that are often overlooked when it comes to colonial history, as it is not only the history of the colonizer and the colonized, but also the history of how that colonial endeavor resounds all over the world. One example of such entanglement from a musical perspective emerges in the 1930s, when jazz was both used to shape an exotic and racialized image of Ethiopia and to express critical positions against the invasion of the country in the Horn of Africa. Jazz was in fact among the main musical references for composers and producers of the Italian popular music that was released to support the fascist colonial project. At the same time, a critical position against the invasion was expressed and shared within jazz scenes in cities such as Chicago and New York, as shown in works like "Ethiopia" presented in Harlem in 1935 (Clò 2006).

"Ethiopia" can also be considered as an example of what Neelam Srivastava (2018, 233) defines as "resistance aesthetic." Srivastava uses the definition to describe a connection that she sees between anti-colonial Italian discourse, the black international resistance against fascism and the solidarity with anti-colonial international movements in the 1960s and 1970s. Probably many of the works that are analyzed in this volume can be seen – in one way or another – as cultural products with results that are similar to those of the resistance aesthetic.

From the Black Atlantic to the Black Mediterranean?

'Black Atlantic,' a concept forged by Paul Gilroy in 1993, describes cultural entanglements which are the evidence of a long and painful history of transatlantic slave trade from Central Africa to Central America, the Maghreb and Europe. In his homonymous book, Gilroy addresses the Atlantic as a "system of cultural exchanges" (Gilroy 1993, 14), which is characterized by its "rhizomorphic, fractal structure" (Gilroy 1993, 4) and which can only be discussed from a transnational and intercultural perspective. This perspective, Gilroy argues, is condensed in the metaphor of the ship in motion, symbolizing the middle passage,

the circulation of ideas and the movement of key cultural artefacts such as books, records and choral performances (cf. Gilroy 1993, 4, 16). Within the field of *Black Atlantic Studies*, music plays an important role, as the slaves' access to literacy was limited or denied so that music became a vital form of expression and communication. Music, gesture, dance, body performance, in this context, have to be considered as forms of communication just as important as linguistic speech.

Gilroy detects two oppositional standpoints from which black culture is looked at: While the ontologically-based essentialist position complains about the 'contaminated' contemporary black culture and seeks to define a universal, authentic blackness (Pan-Africanism), the pluralist standpoint refuses any unitary idea of blackness. Gilroy suggests considering the pre-eminence of music within the black communities as an element of essential connectedness but not to reduce it to an everlasting black authenticity. Contemporary cultural expressions always reveal histories of borrowing, displacement, transformation and continual re-inscription (Gilroy 1993, 102). A very powerful example of such histories is given by Jason Toynbee and Byron Dueck in the introduction to their book *Migrating Music* (2011). They relate that a founding member of the Senegalese group Daara J Family, Faada Freddy, made the following statement about American rap:

> The first time we heard American rap, it sounded no different from *tassou* [a traditional genre practiced in Senegal]. Our theory is that it traveled to America during the slave era. It was slumbering in the deepest part of their souls, and then one day it was awakened. It reminded them of their roots. Then it conquered the world. And now it's back home. (quoted in Toynbee/Dueck 2011, 3)

As Toynbee and Dueck conclude:

> Faada Freddy's account undertakes multiple crossings of the Black Atlantic, binding the music of Senegal and America together in a shared history. Certainly his rhetorical work […] contributes to the growing storehouse of discourses, performances and recordings that move between black populations on either side of the Atlantic, helping to constitute an international network of diverse, circulating black expressive practices. (Toynbee/Dueck 2011, 3)

Quite similar to Paul Gilroy, who defines the Atlantic as a system of cultural exchanges, scholars such as Fernand Braudel, John Davis or Henk Driessen understand the Mediterranean as an ancient crossroads. As Goffredo Plastino sums it up in his introduction to *Mediterranean Mosaic*, the Mediterranean can be understood as "an ancient crossroads," in which "for millennia all has coalesced […], complicating and enriching its history," as a "melting pot," "an area of overlapping civilizations, of cultures that each speak with their own voice" (Plastino 2003, 7-8). However, as Plastino also points out, the Mediterranean can also be

seen as a "cultural construct" (Plastino 2003, 8), just as the concept of a Mediterranean music can be thought of as the sum of discourses on this very concept.

It can be seen in numerous publications, not least by Iain Chambers, that the discourse on Mediterranean music or musics intensified from the 1990s onward. With a view to those past three decades, Franco Cassano recalls in a 2017 publication that the 1990s represented years of hope with respect to a new role for the Mediterranean. Far from being the place of backwardness to be brought back to the dominant economic order or abandoned to decay, the Mediterranean became something like the center of an alternative worldview, capable of beating fundamentalisms, including that of uninterrupted growth and competitive individualism. The central idea was to initiate the construction of a cultural and political *koinè*, that associates the peoples aligned with that sea (Cassano 2017, 15), and to face all those different 'cultures' with equality. But these hopes vanished rapidly. According to Cassano, 9/11 terrorism nourished positions of conflictual and radical differences, which we thought to have left behind us (cf. Cassano 2017, 17). For the Mediterranean, the 'Arab Spring' and the European Union's attitude, both reticent and intrusive, were even more important, as they revealed all the weaknesses of the European vision of the Mediterranean. In this way, Cassano argues, a real regressive spiral has been affirmed: on the southern shore, military leaders and fundamentalists seem to have become the protagonists, on the northern shore the exodus of numerous migrants, mixing with the fears triggered by the crisis, has produced hostility towards those fleeing from other worlds (cf. Cassano 2017, 18).

It is therefore no coincidence that in the 1990s a very active sector of postcolonial studies, while partly drawing on Said's theorizations on orientalism (such as Schneider 1998), proposes to replace the rigid opposition of East and West with the more nuanced one between North and South, making it possible to study phenomena of internal colonialism or in any case geopolitical realities that do not fit into Said's schemes. This is noted by Martine Bovo Romœuf and Franco Manai (2015, 27) in their introduction to the volume *Memoria storica e postcolonialismo. Il caso italiano,* where they engage with studies dealing with internal colonialism. From the Italian perspective, when we speak of colonialism or postcolonialism, we can think, on the one hand, of the Italian colonial interventions carried out in Africa and the multiple histories that begin with them and continue into the present, and on the other hand, of the internal unbalanced power relations between the centers and the peripheries (Bovo Romœuf/Manai 2015, 28).

What do these reflections mean for music? Is it possible to think a 'Black Mediterranean'? Since Alessandra Di Maio (2011) used the term 'Black Mediterranean' to describe the change in perception and representation of the Mediterranean Sea, following the latest stream of migration from Africa, that was, not surprisingly, portrayed as an emergency by European media, 'Black Mediterranean' has been used in scientific works as well as artistic festivals. However, as Ida Danewid effectively points out, it is important to avoid the framing of questions of African diaspora and migration as ontological condition of vulnerability to which the 'good' artist or researcher proves his sympathy again and again. To quote Danewid *verbatim*:

> [...] the focus on vulnerability leads to an erasure of history, as it substitutes abstract humanity for historical humanity. In the context of the European migrant crisis, such a framing has led to an ethics based on mourning and welcoming migrants as universal humans – rather than as victims of a shared, global present built on colonialism, racism and white supremacy. (Danewid 2017, 1683)

To avoid such abstract access, it might be useful to focus, for a moment, on the second part of our title, on 'voices.' The physical and political presence of the human voice should not be understood as nonhistorical. To borrow Nina Eidsheim's words, "voice is not innate, it is cultural. Voice is not unique, it is collective" (Eidsheim 2019, 40). The scene of Italian popular music is one in which a new representation of the 'Black' Mediterranean is emerging. In an illuminating essay on "Whiteness and the Blackening of Italy," Joseph Pugliese depicts it as follows:

> Through the interlacing of African American rap with the folk music traditions of the South, southern rap articulates transoceanic connections between the black Atlantic and the black Mediterranean. [...] Musically, the folk traditions of the South are inscribed with the legacies of North African, Middle Eastern and Arab crosscultural exchanges. In other words, southern rap confirms both a transatlantic connection with African American culture and a transmediterranean reconnection with African and Arab culture. (Pugliese 2008, 19)

In this sense, popular music, and the different versions of hip hop specifically, might be seen as Black spaces, quoting the powerful notion created by Heather Merrill, who identifies Black spaces, with capitol B, as spaces in which African individuals in Italy "exercise some degree of control over their individual lives and those of their families [...] and where they build communities that crisscross established ethnic, racial, and sometimes class divisions" (Merrill 2018, 59).

All articles gathered in this special issue discuss pieces of music that ask us to think ceaselessly about entangled histories and sonic memories of colonialism. They ask us how these memories travel across time and across space, generating new entanglements that this special issue tries to disentangle. The work of Iain Chambers invites us to understand sounds as "a narrative force that draws us towards what survives and lives on, as a cultural and historical resource able to resist, disturb, interrogate and fracture the presumed 'unity' of the present" (Chambers 2017, 111-112). Simultaneously, he warns us not to indulge in representations of the 'Black Mediterranean' as a new middle passage, but rather as an overlapping of musical tracks, to embrace the ambivalent but meaningful concept developed by Ismaiel-Wendt (2013), that transforms the Mediterranean from an apparently well-known image into a conceptual novelty (cf. Chambers 2020, 71).

The Articles. A Short Presentation

The first chapter brings together four contributions that focus on diverse "Postcolonial Routes and Entangled Histories," partly from a musicological, ethnomusicological or ethnological perspective, partly from a cultural studies point of view. Through the 'entanglements' examined, historical interconnections, especially those going back to colonial times, become just as tangible as those between geo-cultural spaces, from Libya or Ethiopia to Italy, from Angola to Brazil, or from Mozambique to Portugal.

In her analysis of Raffaele Viviani's "O' Tripulino Napolitano," **Isabella Abbonizio** highlights the role of music in articulating the perception of Libyans during the colonial period in Italy. Simultaneously, she demonstrates how Viviani anticipated themes and representations that can be tracked down in the popular music of the decades that followed the end of World War II.

Dom Caetano's song "Semba Dilema" stresses the connections between Angola and Brazil which are the results of the dramatic experiences of slave trade. Based on this song, on historical resources and ethnographic materials, **Nina Baratti** analyzes the real and imagined, historical and contemporary affinities between Angolan *semba* and Brazilian *samba* in order to open new research avenues on the study of music in the Atlantic Lusophone world.

Gianpaolo Chiriacò's work focuses on the memory of the colonial project as it remained, intertwined with other elements, within musical traditions in Italian regions. Here, the investigation into historical entanglements deals with an additional layer, that has to do with the non-linear relation between the media-dominated space of popular music and the field of oral tradition. The distinction between the two areas of investigation is often the result of a rigid separation among academic disciplines, even though such separation is rarely reflected in the reality of musical practices.

In their collective exploration of the expressions of the *makhuwa* culture both in music and dance, **Laura António Nhaueleque** and **Luca Bussotti** take into consideration the overlapping of traditions and cultural values in contemporary Mozambique. While focusing on the style named *Tufo*, the two authors show the number of musical and cultural interconnections that can be tracked down in the work of some representatives of this style.

In chapter two, "Transcultural Perspectives on Hip Hop and Reggae" range from contemporary representatives of the Italian rap and trap scene, especially those referred to as 'second generation migrants' or G2 (Attolini and Ridani), to the 'entanglements' present on various levels in chart songs of *Deutschrap* in the late 2010s (Steinbrecher), and finally to international as well as Italian reggae songs that critically refer to the historical events related to the Italian invasion and occupation of Ethiopia (Tomei).

In her paper on hip hop, G2, and diasporic sensibilities in Italy, **Paola Attolino** applies tools from Critical Discourse Analysis to a corpus of rap texts published over the past two decades, featuring G2 representatives such as Amir, Tommy Kuti, Ghali, Karima 2G, Rancore or Zanko El Arabe Blanco. In doing so, she manages to demonstrate a number of phenomena

and strategies that are recurrent in the production by these artists: from 'hybridization' and 'indigenization' to various forms of 'reappropriation' and 'translanguaging.'

Cecilia Ridani delves into imaginaries and representations of transculturality through the rap/trap voices of 'new Italians.' She based her research partly on the same representatives as Attolino (namely Ghali and Tommy Kuti), but due to her focus on the particular variant of trap music, she also includes others like Maruego and The RRR Mob. Ridani investigates the ways in which the production of such rappers/trappers expresses the tension between center and periphery, between domination and resistance, between uprooting and a sense of belonging, focusing on issues such as the experience of migration and diaspora, or of finding oneself poised between Africa and Europe.

Renato Tomei, in his paper on the counter-narratives about the colonial history in Ethiopia in international and Italian reggae songs, also deals with the Italian – especially southern Italian – tendency of a transcultural popular music that is geographically and historically 'entangled.' However, in his study, in which he also considers songs by international Rastafari artists, it is reggae that is at the center, as the only genre that has paid attention to the Italian colonial experience in the Horn of Africa. Tomei's song analyses look at central aspects and figures of this specific period of Italian history: Mussolini, the Italian invasion, the victory, or Haile Selassie I.

While Attolino, Ridani, and Tomei draw their approaches mainly from literary and linguistic studies, **Bernhard Steinbrecher**'s work on the entanglements in German Mainstream Rap between 2018 and 2019 is a musicological contribution – that is nevertheless linked to the other three by some central concerns. The author examines 25 chart songs by post-migrant rap artists in Germany and in Austria in terms of a wide variety of forms of 'entanglement,' ranging from commercial issues to relationships to French rap, and from thematic linkages of race, class, and gender, to beats that travel internationally and are implemented in several different musical styles.

The last contribution by **Birgit Mertz-Baumgartner**, dedicated to artistic reflections on the concept of entanglement, focuses, in an exemplary manner, on three artists – Napoleon Maddox, Lino and Rocé – who take up the theme of entangled histories in different ways in their creative works, questioning history and historiography through an artistic perspective and by aesthetic strategies. The positioning of this paper as an 'outro' of the publication is motivated by the fact that it brings up various forms of historical as well as artistic entanglement, which are also discussed in the other contributions.

The perspective presented in this special issue is not unheard of. We developed it at a moment in which conversations regarding the heritage of colonial history and the concept of decoloniality permeate several disciplines, both within music studies and outside its boundaries. However, the broad spectrum of the themes presented here and the prevalent, albeit not exclusive, focus on entangled histories of popular music in romance languages make these contributions particularly significant for the ongoing discussion on social issues and transnational connections, as well as for the understanding of the role of music in shaping and documenting cultural encounters.

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