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Explicit Identity: Church Music in the Global Age

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The article addresses various musical manifestations associated with Christianity and church music in the Global Age. The review summarizes three different case studies conducted by the author in Israel and Western Canada over the past two decades. These studies, viewed in the article through various lenses and considered as three different sociocultural narratives, tell the reader about how music, consciously or unconsciously, defines the contours of the cultural and religious identity of the groups whose members are natives or resettled residents of the Holy Land, Old and New Worlds, and China. An updated analysis of ethnographic data points to local cultures as the true indicators of global change. The dialogue between religions by means of musical composition is given as an example of the philosophical and conceptual milestone of the Global Age. A review of the problems accompanying the work of a modern ethnographer completes the range of topics.

Keywords: church music, Christianity, the Global Age, ethnography, identity, Israel, Canada

Introduction

While the Global Age as a geo-political and sociocultural process, within which we live, has recently been understood as “the emergence and slow consolidation of European and American hegemony across the planet over half a millennium” (Stokes, 2008, pp. 5-6), the response of local and religious cultures to this process has evolved as a research topic from about 1990s onward (cf. Slobin, 1993; Appadurai, 1996; Stokes, 2004; Zahra, 2016). The current essay aims to address various musical manifestations associated with Christianity and church music in the Global Age. Christianity and its institutions will be regarded as a framework within which local music, customs, and practices are addressed using various points of reference.

The review will consider several recent ethnographic studies on the music of contemporary Christian communities located in the Galilee (Northern Israel) and the Canadian West, namely British Columbia. These studies, carried out by the author over the past two decades, included the collection and processing of various ethnographic materials: audio recordings, hymnbooks, and interviews with officials and community members. The scope of each specific project has included different parts of ethnography as the primary database for a particular study, whereas “extraneous” material for comparison has been included as needed. Thus, hymnbooks of the Anglican projects in two different locations provided additional information about the local cultures outside the places in which the research was conducted. Exploration of the works of Israeli (Jewish) composers that are at the intersection of sacred and secular music, Jewish and Christian tradition gives the theme an additional layer.

Each of the three studies has identified distinctive features of the local cultures associated with their original or new location (in the case of relocated communities). Each study offers different sociocultural

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narrative, telling the reader about how important music is in the formation of the ethnic/national and religious group identity of people who are natives or resettled residents of the Holy Land, Old and New Worlds, and China. The revised examination of the three studies shows the importance of local musical cultures as indicators of the communal interpretation of such different phenomena and categories as what may be called "identity boundaries", "sound tolerance", and "dialogue between religions". Three sections below present these narratives, each of which is connected to a relevant study, with appropriate cross-references.

Identity Boundaries

Emil is a member of the Arab-Anglican community of Haifa, Israel.[1] He is an engineer who studied in Germany in the 1970s, as well as a devoted Christian who attends Mass every Sunday. According to Emil, people in the West have a rather vague idea of the Christian communities in Israel, and they cannot even imagine that the Arabic-speaking community of Haifa includes thousands of Christians who belong to various churches located in the city. While studying in Germany, when asked where he came from, Emil answered, usually repeating the following formula: "I am an Israeli". "Are you Jewish?"—"No, I am an Arab". "Are there Arabs in Israel? Are you a Muslim?"—"No, I'm a Christian". "Are there any Christians among the Arabs? Are you Orthodox?"—"No, I'm an Anglican".[2] The assumption that the Arab-Anglican identity (or, more precisely, the Israeli Arab-Anglican identity) is the "final core" for the self-determination of this group will be a mistake. Seven Arab-Anglican Churches located in the Galilee and central Israel belong, like everywhere else, to four major divisions of the modern Anglican Church, where one cleric can say of another, "he is another faith".[3] So, what actually unites people from different wings of the local Anglican Church? The field study has shown that such a means, or a medium, is nothing but music.

On the one hand, traditional missionary hymnody accompanied by the organ is a common musical experience of Anglicans in Israel. Many respondents stress the importance of this traditional part of the church ministry, including Samuel, an amateur organist who joined the Anglican community of Haifa (and became an organist for Sunday services there) after the revolutionary changes in the musical policy of the Pentecostal church to which he originally belonged.[4] Contemporary Christian songs in Arabic are an additional "musical bridge" for uniting local Anglicans of different doctrinal affiliations within the church. On the other hand, the tunes borrowed from various local churches and adopted by the local Anglicans over the past decades define the doctrinal distinctions through music. Several such tunes have become a kind of liturgical codes, thus using a local motive to indicate the originally Western divide. Local tunes may possess additional functions in a dialogue between the churches. Thus, Orthodox-like reciting during Anglican sermon is aimed at highlighting differences in approach to the same subject between the two denominations.[5] Another example is welcoming guests from other churches by singing a setting to a tune characteristic of the guest's church.[6]

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[1] The Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem dates back to the early 1840s when the joint Anglo-Lutheran Bishopric was established and the first regional Anglican Church—Christ church near the Jaffa gate in the old city of Jerusalem—was built. St. John's Anglican church in Haifa was built in the late 1890s (Perry, 2003).

[2] Interview with Emil D., April 22, 2007. (Here and below, the informant's surname is abbreviated to an initial, as is customary in an ethnographic study—A.R.)

[3] It was literally the response of a priest who was asked about the doctrinal position of another minister (of the same denomination).

[4] Interview with Samuel S., April 22, 2007.

[5] Interview with Rev. Bilal H., June 26, 2007.

[6] Interview with Rev. Samuel F., April 14, 2010.

The music of the modern Arab-Anglican Churches in Israel is a symbolic example of the intersection between West and East in religious music. It should be borne in mind that the practices of the local Anglican Churches are conducted within a post-missionary framework. Such practices must demonstrate a delicate balance between the preservation of the musical and textual legacy of the Mother Church (following its development over time) and the local culture. It is also worth mentioning that these practices are formed in a rather unique geopolitical situation: the Holy Land and the Jewish nation-state. Navigating between global and local church practices creates certain difficulties for the local Anglican clergy. Some clerics believe that the religious experience should be formed only in accordance with local culture, i.e., Arabic music and language.[7] The ongoing shift of subaltern identities (that is, the growing doctrinal divide and affiliation with a particular sub-division of the Church) intersects with an opposite trend—the ecumenical tendency—that is manifested in shared summer camps for teens, as well as family events for the wider community of Arabic-speaking Christians. Music still plays a vital role in such events, for it is played and performed by participants as a common emotional experience.

Sensitivity to indigenous customs and practices is also typical of the Anglican Churches in British Columbia. Thus, during the mass in Christ Church cathedral, Vancouver, the priest invites the audience to stand up and turn to the east (and then in other directions), explaining the meaning of such gestures in the historical beliefs of the indigenous parishioners. The tunes originating in Chinese and First Nations' musical traditions are part of the *Mass for Many Nations* composed by Rupert Lang, an organist and choirmaster of the cathedral.[8] The traditional "healing circle" is maintained on a weekly base in a small parish of New Westminster (BC). The Anglican community of Greater Vancouver is, however, extremely diverse, for the traditional doctrinal divide has been multiplied here by the recent breakup caused by the clergy's disagreement on a number of issues, primarily same-sex marriages, and forms of worship and music. Yet the churches that recognize same-sex marriages have remained very conservative in matters of traditional service, and vice versa: In the breakaway parishes, where same-sex couples have not received the church's blessing, both the clothing of the clergy and the music are in tune with the expectations of the younger members. The churches that have broken away do not use any of the hymnbooks issued by the official Anglican Church of Canada. Instead, they use different ones, most of which are published in Kenya or Rwanda whose Anglican communities support the rebels' struggle for traditional values.[9]

Sonic Tolerance

This section will discuss four national hymnbooks (aka hymnals, that is, national collections of church hymns) released in the 1990s. The author collected these books in the course of two projects in Israel and Canada, since they are used by various Anglican communities in the Galilee, Jerusalem, and Greater Vancouver. In line with missionary work and the post-missionary reconfiguration of churches and local parishes, the non-dogmatic nature of the hymns has allowed the joint committees to abstain from doctrinal or theological differences between churches and create hymnbooks shared by several denominations and therefore perceived rather as national collections of church music[10].

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[7] Ibid.

[8] The Chinese community is one of the largest Anglican congregations in Greater Vancouver—A.R.

[9] All information regarding the Anglican Churches in Vancouver was collected by the author in situ (in 2013) and later checked with clergy and parishioners of both wings of the breakup. For ethical reasons, the author will not give the names of people who shared opinions on contentious and painful issues with him.

[10] Thus, the Preface to *The Hymnal Book* (1971), a joint publication of the two Protestant Churches, clearly states that "nothing in this Hymn Book is of any authority on matters relating to faith or doctrine in the Anglican Church of Canada or the United Church of Canada" (p. iv).

The comparison of hymnbooks will be carried out with an emphasis on the representation of various musical cultures in each particular book. Since many of the national hymnbooks of the 1990s include musical material, some of which are seemingly unrelated to the musical traditions of the target audience, the most likely reasons for going beyond the national/confessional borders in musical choices for these books will be discussed. This will serve as a kind of lens for examining the cultural content of group identity, namely the "religious" part of national identity and the "national" part of religious identity. The boundaries and indices of sonic tolerance, characteristic of a particular society, complement the range of issues discussed in the section. The following hymnbooks will be compared:

Book of Spiritual Hymns (in Arabic). Nicosia: Zavallis Litho, 1990.

(Hereafter: The Arabic book)

Common Praise. Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1998.

(Hereafter: The Canadian book)

Hymns of Universal Praise. Hong Kong: Chinese Christian Literature Council, 1996.

(Hereafter: The Chinese book)

The New English Hymnal. Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1994.

(Hereafter: The English book)[11]

Attribution of the melodies appears in each of the above hymnals but follows slightly different terminology and methods of distinction. While the earliest melodies, whose origin is not completely clear, appear everywhere under the name "plainsong" or "Gregorian chant", national melodies, in addition to the heading denoting nationality, usually receive an extension with further information, such as traditional, folk, hymn, or church melody. Although information about authors and sources is usually presented in different lists for texts and music, the Canadian book offers a unified index of authors and sources for both texts and music. Whatever the nuances in terminology and methods of indexation, the very tendency for accuracy in attribution points to the intention of the compilers to highlight the historical scale of a particular collection and its cultural diversity (or, conversely, cultural unity if one culture is represented in many varieties). Figure 1 below is a comparative chart showing the total number of early tunes and folk melodies in each of the four hymnals discussed.

As for the number of national cultures represented, the Chinese book occupies a leading position—32 geographical locations, for both traditional and sacred national melodies. The English book, with 64 plainsongs, contains only three traditional melodies representing cultures outside the UK. In the Canadian book, special attention is paid to the languages of the indigenous peoples of the country—12 of the 19 languages presented in the book.

What actually determines the musical choice for the hymnals? What are the reasons for this or that expansion of either historical scale or geographic scope, or both? In addition to the original value as the sole source for congregational singing, hymnbooks of the 1990s perform additional functions, such as the unification of an ethnic group or even a nation, especially when the self-identification of a group or person is based on the native language and cultural traditions rather than on the place of birth. Musical choice can also seem a kind of political gesture. For example, the inclusion of two folk melodies from Taiwan in the Chinese

[11] Complete bibliographic data for these four books, as well as other hymnbooks, quoted or mentioned in the article, may be found in the section "Hymnbooks", after "References".

collection of hymns might sound like a musical reminder of the tragic pages in the relationship between the Republic of China and Taiwan. Another example of this kind is the aforementioned hymns representing the languages of the native inhabitants of Canada in the Canadian book. The openness of the editors of these two books to Hebrew and Byzantine (Orthodox) melodies testifies to the ecumenical tendency typical of post-missionary churches in the global era.

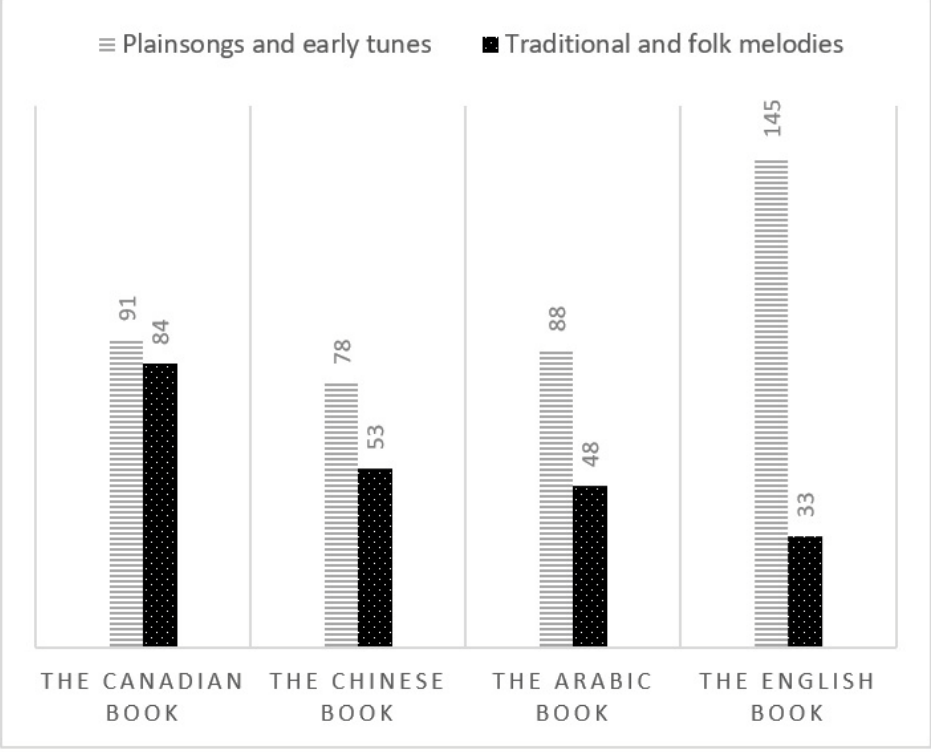

Figure 1. The number of early tunes and folk melodies in four hymnbooks.

Yet, as Rosenblatt (2018) argues, openness to other cultures sometimes depends on sonic tolerance and its actual limits in a particular society.

> Sonic acceptance should not be taken for granted in the societies whose various audiences were educated in different musical systems, which differ, for example, in interpreting the semitone scales as equally tempered vs. microtone modified, as in the case of Middle-Eastern *maqamat*. While the Western-trained ear easily accepts pentatonic scales, defining them as "ancient" or "naïve," the maqam-based tunes may be perceived as "inconvenient" for those who are not familiar with them from childhood. (Rosenblatt, 2018, p. 32)

The issue of sonic acceptance was perhaps on the agenda of Western missionaries in the Middle East. It should be explained that singing a church tune in a minor scale by the congregation of converted believers might have caused some discomfort to the missionary's ear, since it would have been sung in one of the traditional local scales with which the audience grew up. This was probably the main (if not the only) reason for choosing, almost exclusively, the major-scaled hymns for the early editions of the Arabic book: The major scale is quite close to one of the Middle-Eastern scales (namely, *ajam*), so there is no sonic conflict. Being a means of intercultural communication, national hymnbooks can thus serve as indicators of the cultural lability of the societies in which they were issued.

Dialogue Between Religions

Dialogue with the Western musical tradition has actually been on the agenda of Ashkenazi synagogue (Jewish) music in European countries (and vice versa—the dialogue of Christian music with Jewish heritage) since the late Renaissance. Thus, Salamone Rossi (1570-1630), an Italian-Jewish composer, wrote several choral works on Hebrew texts in a style appropriate to the place and time. Jacobs (2016), discussing the origin and multiple appearances of the Hebrew Hanukkah song *Maoz Tzur* in European music, including Handel's oratorio *Judas Maccabaeus*, writes:

> We should be grateful to George Frederic Handel, who thoughtfully supplied us with several Old Testament oratorios as every bit as resplendent as "Messiah," including a few tailor-made for specific holidays: "Israel in Egypt" for Passover, "Esther" for Purim, and "Judas Maccabaeus" for Hanukkah. In composing the last one, Handel seemed to have been deliberately trying to replicate the structure and feel of "Messiah," perhaps consciously trying to please the Jewish merchants who made up a large part of his London audience. It worked: While it's less well known today, it was one of Handel's most popular works in his lifetime. (Jacobs, 2016)

Cristiano Giuseppe Lidarti (1730-1793), an Austrian composer of Italian descent, wrote several works based on Hebrew texts, commissioned by the Jewish community of Amsterdam. These works, the most famous of which is the oratorio *Esther*, combine the Italian style with the Judeo-Spanish (Sephardic) musical tradition, since the target audience of the work were the descendants of Jewish families expelled from Spain at the end of the 15th century.

The 19th century was especially prolific in shaping the new musical style of the Jewish synagogue service in the countries of Central Europe, compatible with the European musical tradition. Among the notable musicians who contributed to the Ashkenazi Jewish liturgy of that period were Salomon Sulzer (1804-1890) and Louis Lewandowski (1821-1894). Sulzer was an Austrian *hazzan* (cantor) and composer who "established models for the various sections of the musical service" in synagogues, and was recognized as "the father of the modern cantorate".[12] Lewandowski, in turn, wrote liturgical music for choir, soloists, and organ, being an adherent of congregational singing in synagogues. His music combines the strict four-part technique of church music with ancient cantorial modal melodies and, at the same time, introduces "a new romantic style heavily influenced by the music of Felix Mendelssohn".[13] To this very day, it is part of the repertoire in both the Reform and the Orthodox Jewish communities across the world.

The musical elements of the synagogue service in the countries of Central Europe by the beginning of the 20th century were thus quite reminiscent of the Christian ministry of the not-so-distant past: A soloist-cantor, choir, and organ were its integral components. Yet, the *bel canto* style of cantorial singing was as "operatic" as paraliturgical Christian music of the period. The Holocaust, however, substantially reduced, and in most places terminated, the musical tradition of European Jewry in European countries. The humble attempts in Israeli music to connect between Jewish history, the Israeli present, Ashkenazi cantorial tradition (which, due to historical circumstances, is not part of Israeli religious experience), and Christian legacy began only in the 1960s, on a basis of both the liturgical and the paraliturgical compositions.

In 1964, Yehezkel Braun (1922-2014), an Israeli composer, was commissioned to write a Shabbat Evening Prayer for the centennial of the Cleveland Jewish community (Ohio, USA). The piece, written for a male soloist

[12] Retrieved March 28, 2019, from http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/14109-sulzer-salomon.
[13] Retrieved March 28, 2019, from https://www.jewish-music.huji.ac.il/content/louis-lewandowski.

(cantor), a choir, and a small organ, was first performed in Cleveland at a festive Shabbat service in 1966. The composer's interest in Gregorian chant helped him establish in this work a true bridge between the old Jewish musical tradition and its later development following its contact and dialogue with the Western tradition of church music and *bel canto*. The Shabbat Evening Prayer remains "the only liturgical-functional piece written by Braun, and its choral-responsorial style, is an exception among his other choral works" (Hirshberg, 2017, p. 231). The premiere of the composition in Israel took place only in 2003, during the "Days of Music in the Upper Galilee" festival, where some details of this work were discussed in the author's conversation with the composer. As Rosenblatt (2019) states,

> [t]here are only few works, written by Israeli (Jewish) composers that directly follow the liturgical genres of Christian music. One of these compositions is Requiem (2006) by Gil Shohat. […] The work, which employs the techniques of modern classical music, was first performed at Capella Amsterdam on 18 March 2006 and was later recorded for CD release. […] Another work of this genre, Requiem (2017) by Aaron Harlap (b. 1941) is written in a quite traditional way on Latin texts of non-canonical content, although parts of the composition are assigned Latin names that are traditional to this genre. It is rather the composer's contemplations on life and death, dictated by the bitterness of the loss of his colleagues in recent years. (Rosenblatt, 2019, p. 80)

The ecumenical approach to religious texts in concert music is clearly traced in the works of Josef Bardanashvili (b. 1946), an Israeli composer of Georgian-Jewish origin. Before his arrival in Israel, he was probably "the only [Soviet] professional composer who was seriously engaged in Jewish synagogue music" (Ritzarev, 2016, p. 99). Bardanashvili wrote three works at the crossroads of religious traditions: "Children of God" on texts from the Talmud, the New Testament, the Psalms, and the Quran (1997); "Haleluyah-Magnificat" on Hebrew, Yiddish, and traditional Latin texts (2014); and "The Passion of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai" (2016) on texts from the Zohar (the major work on Kabbalah). The composer himself considers these works to be a triptych.[14] Indeed, in all these works, the approach to sacred subjects is quite similar. However, the perspective of the topic varies subtly from work to work. Thus, the first part of the triptych has a wide range of musical styles and a selection of texts. The second part is an attempt to follow the musical style of the Baroque, weaving into it the features of the composer's own language, while the traditional Latin texts of the Magnificat coexist with religious Hebrew texts and the lyrics of traditional Yiddish songs. The third part is written solely on sacred Jewish texts, and its musical style is far more minimalist and closer to early Christian modality.

Another fresh view of Christian subjects in music from an Israeli perspective was offered by Aviya Kopelman (b. 1978) in a Hebrew Magnificat (2005). Originally performed by the Tel Aviv Chamber Choir, and later edited and re-orchestrated for symphonic orchestra (2017), the piece, 37-minutes long, is set to Latin, German, and Hebrew texts and presents various aspects of maternity. Expanding the classical form of the Magnificat (as a praise to motherhood) to a wider perspective of the theme, dealing with "the sorrow of bringing forth children, the tragedy of child loss",[15] etc., using a multicultural view through texts from the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, along with verses by Rainer Maria Rilke and the Israeli poetesses Rachel and Yona Wollach, this work is a philosophical and conceptual milestone in rethinking the common pasts of Judaism and Christianity in the Global Age by means of music.

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[14] Interview with composer Josef Bardanashvili, 27 March 2019.

[15] This is how the composer explains the emotional content of her work. Retrieved January 27, 2019, from https://soundcloud.com/aviya-kopelman/sets/hebrew-magnificat.

Conclusion

The scope of the three case studies summarized in this essay was music as ritual, tradition, and dialogue between religions in the Global Age. Reading this text against various backgrounds enabled the author to reveal the dynamics of ethno-religious identity and sociocultural changes experienced by various local communities in recent decades. The place of "religious" in national identity and the place of "national" in religious identity were among the lenses through which the artifacts and events were examined. National hymnals were considered a documentary, reliable enough to outline the limits of national cultural tolerance. The ecumenical tendency and the continuing shift of subaltern identities were recognized as the hallmarks of local Christian communities in our day.

Local cultures and their relations with global institutions do not stand still, but move in the stream of time, consonant with its signs: being able to reach any location in the planet within hours, communication with everybody via mobile phones or Internet social groups, etc. The language barrier is no longer an obstacle, since the Google translation services are universally available and useful. It seems that globalization takes a different dimension when the world community accepts useful innovations. All this seemingly contributes to the work of an ethnographer wishing to explore a particular culture but here, as Rosenblatt (2021) argues, is another side of the coin, which is nothing but

> […] research ethics, a set of rules inherent in medical research, which in recent years have spread to anthropology and its derivatives, primarily ethnography, including ethnomusicology. Beginning with the standardization of communication rules with the human factor, inherent in many branches of human-oriented studies, research ethics quickly became overly bureaucratic and shifted to the formal way of all sorts of barriers and obstacles in the ethnographer's path to the target community. (Rosenblatt, 2021, p. 218)

It is sometimes impossible to get around such barriers, except for the use of digital ethnography posted on web resources and platforms of social groups by the bearers of this culture themselves, and not through direct contact with them. This is one and not the same thing, but it is the responsibility of the researcher to the world as an object of study in our day.

Plato mentions the statement of his contemporary: "[W]hen modes of music change, the fundamental laws of the state always change with them" (Plato, 2008, p. 93). Summarizing the above, may we assume that in the 21st century the world order will grant each local culture, including its music and religion, the opportunity to enter the treasury of world culture, and not be forced out and forgotten? Only the future will answer this question.

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