

## IN THE AGE OF GLOBALISATION, CAN MUSIC ARTICULATE AND CONSOLIDATE NATIONAL IDENTITY?

**B**efore attempting to answer the question posed in the title of this paper, I will give a brief description of cultural identity as one of the most important forms of national identity. Given the theme of the conference, which is of particular interest to me, I would also like to state at the beginning what music represents for me.

I have been interested in the question of cultural identity and the role of art in articulating and shaping that identity for more than a decade, as expressed in my publications on the subject (including in English).<sup>1</sup> I mention this in order to justify, at least in part, my boldness – bordering on impudence – in preparing a paper on this subject for an international conference, given the doubts that I harbour regarding my qualifications to speak about music. I have taken an interest in music from the point of view of art philosophy, and so as one of the arts, but my knowledge of the philosophy of music is much poorer than in relation to the other arts (literature, theatre, film and the plastic arts). Neither do I feel myself to be a refined, or competent, listener to music. I am what some music theorists call an ‘innocent listener’.<sup>2</sup> Not just innocent, perhaps, but also naïve – the kind of listener who admires music, regarding it as the most powerful of the arts, distinguished by magical powers of persuasion, but admires it not as a specialist, from within, but with delight, from afar.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Bohdan Dziemidok, ‘Artistic Expression of National Cultural Identity’ (Proceedings of the XIVth International Congress of Aesthetics, Ljubljana 1998), *Filozofski Vestnik*, 1999/7, pp. 237–251; also ‘Art Cultural National Identity and Globalization’, *Dialog and Universalism*, 11–12 (2003), pp. 83–93.

<sup>2</sup> See Anna Chęćka-Gotkiewicz, *Ucho i umysł. Szkice o doświadczeniu muzyki* [The ear and the mind. Sketches on experience of music] (Gdańsk, 2012), pp. 8–12.

It is on account of its persuasive force that music is so often used instrumentally not just in other artistic disciplines (particularly in film and theatre), but also in other areas of human life, both the collective (religion, politics) and the individual (family, social, erotic). Music has also played an important role, of course, in integrating people, in forming family, neighbourhood, religious and ethnic communities, and much later also national communities. It is characterised on one hand by an extraordinary universality, but on the other by a remarkable diversity, although the latter feature does not diminish the former.

One can speak of the diversity of music in various aspects and contexts. There is generic diversity (instrumental, vocal, dance music, classical and popular music, and so on), historical diversity, and also, of most interest to us here, ethnic-national diversity. People's contact with music and the way in which they use it can also be diverse. Listening to it can be an aim in itself. Yet that listening can also serve a purpose and be treated instrumentally as an effective means of intensifying desired experiences (emotions or moods), of forging a particular atmosphere or of increasing the effectiveness of specific activities (at work, in battle, during rest and repose), in various rites or rituals (e.g. political or religious) and in such forms of activeness as dance or erotic contacts.

I have experienced music's almost magical powers of persuasion first hand on more than one occasion. I will allow myself to describe two such 'autobiographic' instances here for two fundamental and sufficient – as I see it – reasons. First and foremost, they are empirical facts. Furthermore, they confirm, in my opinion, that the ethnic peculiarity and otherness which is proper to music does not deprive it of universality and of the capacity to act persuasively on listeners who are representative of other ethnic-national cultures.

The first of those instances concerns my contact with African music that occurred in Berkeley (California) in 1967. Thirty-four years old at the time, on a Ford Foundation scholarship, I was walking through the student village of Berkeley University when I heard the sounds of African percussion instruments. I then noticed a quite large group of people, at the centre of which were my black brothers, tapping out exotic rhythms on various drums and tam-tams. The listeners around them were jiggling to the beat. With an indulgent smile, I stopped – just for a moment, because I was in a hurry. I 'came to' after several minutes and

realised with surprise that I had forgotten about my urgent business and was standing there jiggling to the beat of the tam-tams.

The other incident is linked to my stay on a research grant in Moscow during the nineties (I was about fifty at the time). As an aesthete, although I had travelled to Moscow for research purposes, also incredibly important to me was direct contact with Russian art, so I went to museums, theatres, cinemas and concerts. One day, quite by chance, I entered one of the Orthodox churches. A service was underway and the congregation was singing. As I was not of the Orthodox faith, I wanted to quickly withdraw, so as not to disturb the Mass with my aesthetic curiosity. Yet fate decreed otherwise. Captivated by the beauty of the singing, I spent around an hour in the church in a state of aesthetic-mystical intoxication. God, how beautifully they sang! I have never heard such beautiful singing in a Catholic church. It was all I could do to refrain from falling down with my arms outstretched in a cross and kissing the floor, as some of the congregation were doing.

In both instances, I was bewitched by the music of a different culture – different to that which I had been accustomed to since childhood. Yet that otherness did not weaken its power of persuasion. Quite clearly, it had a universal charm not only for Africans and Orthodox Russians. Although the experiences were of a different sort in the two cases (in the former, sensory-emotional, acting not just on my psyche, but also on my body; in the latter, atmospheric-mystical), they were both sufficiently intense that I have remembered them all my life.

Now I will give a brief description of national identity. For every nation, the sense of collective national identity is of huge importance, integrating the members of that community, favouring the forming of bonds of solidarity and mutual assistance. It enables people to survive in a situation of national or social peril (extermination, discrimination or attempts at depriving people of national identity). National identity is forged by both a sense of belonging to that community and also a sense of its difference from other communities. One of the most important factors shaping a community and ensuring it of continuity is national culture, which comprises language, myths, collective memory, customs and artistic creation, in the form of both folklore (present rather in popular art) and also official 'high' art. The Polish national community, deprived of independent statehood for more than one hundred years, survived



to a large extent thanks to the vitality of Polish national art, not just literature and painting, but also music, both folk and patriotic music, as well as the music of Chopin, Szymanowski and Moniuszko – to name but the most widely recognised figures.

No one is surprised at the role of literature in shaping, articulating and perpetuating national culture and identity, since literature employs the native language and can eulogise both the heroic past of a nation and the beauty of native landscapes.

Music, meanwhile, which is not a representative art, may look rather odd in this context. It turns out, however, that music can also be inspired by national mythology and history, by the beauty of native landscapes and motifs from folk songs and dances. The determinants and influences have been and still are mutual. On one hand, music expresses national sentiment and strengthens national identity; on the other, those phenomena lend it originality and strong emotional impact, which have made it interesting not just for the national public, but also for representatives of other – at times very different – cultures. That is clearly evidenced by the music of Chopin and Szymanowski, Liszt and Bartók, Glinka and Tchaikovsky, Dvořák and Smetana, Grieg, Sibelius, Wagner and many other composers. Yet is it present now as it once was, or has not the age of globalisation and conscious economic, political and cultural integration, not just in Europe, but also in the Pacific region, brought about a radical change in that regard? After all, an important element in those processes is also cultural globalisation and universalisation, visible above all in global and commercialised mass culture (mass media, show business, fashion and tourism). Some contemporary authors writing about national identity and culture consider that globalising tendencies and the liberalisation of social life, increasing the mobility of people to an unprecedented extent, diminish the significance of inherited national identity, which can now be the subject of conscious choice. They invoke examples of individuals with a cosmopolitan outlook who are happy, among other things, because they function between different cultures, whilst at the same time benefitting from their different values. Those individuals feel no need for roots and can even alter their national and cultural identity many times.

Some authors also proclaim the current or imminent end to national art, which is supposedly of no need to anyone and cannot compete on

the art market with cosmopolitan art. That view is expressed most powerfully, most succinctly and most strikingly by the Slovenian aesthetician and cultural philosopher Lev Kreft, who considers that ‘art as a national institution is constituted by dead authors of living works and living authors of dead works’.<sup>3</sup> In my opinion, that formulation is as debatable as it is striking. It may be partially justified in relation to the plastic arts. Yet does it apply in equal measure to music or film, for example? The ‘commoditisation’ of art is a fact, but does art have to shed its national character in order to sell well? I would regard that as a risky generalisation. Chopin’s music is very Polish, yet it still functions well on the international market. Among contemporary Polish composers, national music has been best composed by Henryk Mikołaj Górecki, who achieved international success. The best known Polish film director in the world is still Andrzej Wajda, who ‘suffers’ from an acute sense of Polishness. From the countries of the former Yugoslavia, the artists best known in Poland are the film director Emir Kusturica and the creator of popular music Goran Bregovič. They too enjoy international success even though their output is seen not just by Poles as very ‘Balkan’ or ‘Yugoslavian’. Of course, it is difficult to predict what the future holds for national identity and culture. At present, however, individuals with a cosmopolitan outlook represent, in my opinion, a distinct minority.

It turns out that neither international trade nor the expansion of communication systems give people a sense of community or a sense of identity and rootedness, yet those needs have certainly not ceased to exist. As a result, people are again finding or creating new communities and collective identities, since they feel deracinated. The prophets’ predictions of the end of an era or the end of nations have not come true.

The strength of national sentiment – writes the sociologist Jerzy Szacki – admittedly differs over time and is hugely diversified over space, but there is nothing to suggest that we are dealing with a clear downward trend. Only the forms in

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<sup>3</sup> Lev Kreft, ‘Kultura, nacjonalizm, naród oraz widmo nieudanej modernizacji w Słowenii’ [Culture, nationalism, nation and the spectre of failed modernisation in Slovenia], in Bohdan Dziemidok (ed.), *Integracyjna i dezintegracyjna rola artystycznych środków przekazu w kształtowaniu tożsamości narodowej i jednoczeniu Europy* [The integrative and disintegrative role of artistic means of communication in shaping national identity and unifying Europe] (Gdańsk, 2001), p. 8.

which that sentiment is made manifest are changing (and not everywhere) [...]; the age of nations lives on, and nothing suggests that it is coming to an end.<sup>4</sup>

It is not just scholars studying the nation, national identity and nationalism who consider that the *need to belong* to some enduring community is a very important need of man, since satisfying that need enables people to eliminate or minimise the need for solitude; that opinion is shared by other writers, as well (e.g. Erich Fromm, Peter Drucker<sup>5</sup> and Leszek Kołakowski). Simone Weil, speaking of the need to belong to some group, uses the notion of rootedness.

To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul. It is one of the hardest to define. A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active and natural participation in the life of a community which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations for the future.<sup>6</sup>

Belonging to a community is ascribed similarly great importance by Leszek Kołakowski.

Belonging to a particular cultural, historical and linguistic community is indisputably a natural human need. We want to be with those who are like us, we want to feel at home; there is nothing unseemly or pitiful in the fact that we feel solidarity first and foremost with our cultural community, that we see an intrinsic value in it and that we seek to ensure its survival and vitality. There are aspirations to complete cosmopolitanism perhaps in relation to the individual, but not to the overwhelming majority of people.<sup>7</sup>

One may query, of course, whether the need to belong to a larger group than a family is a universal need. Yet if that is the case, then why should belonging to a national community be the optimal solution for satisfying that need? Can it not be satisfied by belonging to some other, smaller (e.g. ethnic group) or larger (e.g. humanity), social group?

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<sup>4</sup> Jerzy Szacki, 'O narodzie i nacjonalizmie' [On the nation and nationalism], *Znak*, 502 (1997), p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Drucker, *Post-Capitalist Society* (Oxford, 1993), p. 140.

<sup>6</sup> Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots*, tr. Arthur Wills (London and New York, 2002), p. 43.

<sup>7</sup> Leszek Kołakowski, *Niepewność epoki demokracji* [The uncertainty of the age of democracy] (Cracow, 2014). Quoted in the article 'Czy ludzkość może jeszcze ocalić swoje człowieczeństwo?' [Can mankind still save its humanity?], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 4–6 April 2015, p. 35.

The need to belong can also be satisfied to a large extent by belonging to a regional ethnic group or a religious community, which by no means precludes the need to belong to a national community. Some contemporary authors writing about national identity consider that the ineluctable processes of modernisation, the globalising and liberalising tendencies in the life of societies, are diminishing the significance of inherited national identity, which can now be the object of free choice. Individuals who do not feel the need for rootedness and who change their national identity (or actually strive to change it, because that is a difficult and lengthy process) are in a clear minority.<sup>8</sup> In other words, although cosmopolitanism may appeal to some people, it is the privilege of a minority.

There is no doubt that this is a genuine problem, one which cannot be ignored. However, I agree with those who defend the conviction of the value and durability of national identity, which, save for a few exceptions concerning representatives of an elite, by no means has to be, at least at the present time, the object of free choice.

Neither do I think that the modernisation of the world, the globalisation of culture and the liberalisation of social life always represent a threat to national identity. Will Kymlicka rightly points out that in some western countries (e.g. Canada, Belgium and the United Kingdom) liberalisation actually favours a growth in the sense of national belonging. That is attested by the autonomous aspirations of the Flemish, Scots, Welsh and Québécois. The fact that 'culture has become tolerant and pluralistic has in no way diminished the pervasiveness or intensity of people's desire to live and work in their own culture'.<sup>9</sup>

Even a strong sense of ethnic or national identity need not lead to isolationism, ethnocentrism, radical nationalism and xenophobia, since ethnocentrism means concentrating on one's own ethnic group and enclosing oneself within its bounds. This is often linked to a conviction of the special importance and value of one's own group and culture.

Sociological research conducted by Antonina Kłoskowska and her collaborators has shown that in many individual cases there is no necessary link between strong assertive national identification and ethnocentric

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<sup>8</sup> See what Ian Burum, an American scholar of Dutch origins, writes on this subject in the article 'Kosmopolici' [Cosmopolitans], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 20–21 December 2008, pp. 18–19.

<sup>9</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford, 1989), p. 89.

nationalism. A radical ethnocentrism, glorifying one's own culture and contrasting it with others, is usually accompanied by xenophobia, and so fear, distrust and even hatred towards strangers.<sup>10</sup> A care for one's (ethnic and national) cultural identity, meanwhile, is justified and necessary, including in the age of globalisation, as long as it does not lead to a diminishing of openness to other cultures or even a complete closure towards them. Openness is essential to the development of one's own cultural identity, since in isolation, as the authors of the Mexico Declaration rightly assert, culture withers and dies.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See Antonina Kłoskowska, 'Kultura narodowa' [National culture], in *Encyklopedia kultury polskiej XX w.* [Encyclopaedia of twentieth-century Polish culture] (Wrocław, 1991), p. 58.

<sup>11</sup> The Mexico Declaration on Cultural Policy was adopted at a UNESCO conference held in Mexico from 26 July to 6 August 1982 by representatives of 130 states.