

AfroAsian Musical Imaginaries: Of Circulations and Interconnections. Sumangala Damodaran (ed.). 2024. Tulika Books. 3 b/w illustrations, bibliography, index, 112 pages.

AfroAsian Musical Imaginaries: Of Circulations and Interconnections, emerges from a colloquium on “AfroAsian Musical Imaginaries” that was organised by the India International Centre International Research Division (IIC-IRD) in collaboration with the multi-institutional project, “Recentring AfroAsia: Musical and Human Migrations, 700–1500 AD.” The book includes seven chapters from diverse experts, which include historians, anthropologists, composers, musicologists, and music therapists.

The book’s foreword by Sudha Gopalakrishnan effectively introduced the title and set the stage for this volume. Gopalakrishnan described music as a shared cultural phenomenon that transcends geographical boundaries and transforms as practices evolve. She uses the Indian philosopher D.P Chattopadhyay’s term, “sideways and by-ways”, as a connecting thread between the essays in the book and across the territories studied.

Sumangala Damodaran’s introduction begins with a detailed description of the book’s organisation. Damodaran uses Ben Okri’s reflections to emphasise the fragile yet essential process of exploring historical Afro-Asian connections. Damodaran elegantly draws parallels and contrasts between trans-Atlantic and Indian Ocean musical exchanges by using Lorca’s work on flamenco as an inspiration for the kind of work presented in this volume, which aims to explore the emotional and cultural depths of musical forms and how they link across time and space. However, it reproduces the limitations in Lorca’s search for Flamenco music’s ‘duende’ in what he called the “primitive musical systems of India.” Damodaran states that the main question in this book is how music can be an important yet unusual lens through which *longue duree* connections between the continents can be unravelled through the methodological tool “sounds like” to compare and connect the musical forms and its elements to trace historical links.

Damodaran argues that such uncanny resemblances among melodic patterns and lyrics help trace migrations and connections dating back to pre-colonial and pre-modern eras. Such as the connection between ragas in Indian classical music and similar melodic structures and ballad families around the world, for example, the *Bhairavi-Bhairav* family of ragas, the Hijaz maqam, the Phrygian dominant mode and the *Heer-Ranjha* ballad as examples of how stories and melodies circulated across regions. They were further shaped by geography and social history. Damodaran’s example contributes to large-scale studies of musical exchanges from folklore and comparative musicology studies while adding a new perspective with nuances grounded in the music and folklore from South Asia.

Mark Aranha’s chapter revisits Arnold Bakes’ 1938 records of the archival records labelled “black Jews” in Kerala and Nazir and Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy’s

1980s research through his fieldwork of 2018, including a Sefer Torah ceremony in Ernakulam. Aranha examines melody as an identity marker among Cochin Jews by illustrating the melody's aesthetic and historical significance for cultural history and connections across borders. The short chapter could be strengthened by adding details on colonial policies, religious shifts, and their influence on melodic variations. The reader is left making conjectures on the criteria used to separate black and white jews music in Bakes' recording collection.

Kathyayini Dash's chapter examines the *wayee*, a musical genre of the Bhagaaadiya Jath community in Gujarat, as a medium of embodied historiography. Dash derives the concept from Indian classical music practices, namely *swar bithana* (seating the note), *riyaas* (musical training), and *mahaul jamaana* (building an atmosphere), to map the histories of grief and devotion within marginalised nomadic communities. She uses Practice as Research (PaR) and connects it with her training in Hindustani classical music. Dash employs Shaun Gallagher's ideas of body schemas and Diana Taylor's concept of performance as embodied culture to frame musical performance as "making history." She integrates Sara Ahmed's idea of emotional archiving to show how Wayee's embodied grief represents a collective memory. Dash concludes that Wayee's performance is an *infra-structure* of resilience and shared grief histories. More detailed musical, cultural and performative realities of the Bhagaaatiya Jath community could enrich the chapter, although it is a valuable example of how musical practices can contribute to historiography.

Luis Gimenez Amoros' chapter investigates the interconnectedness of musical systems between Western Sahara, al-Andalus, and India from the twelfth to fifteenth centuries, focusing on the haul and qaul as markers of intercultural exchange. The paper discusses the pre-modern transregional musical circulations that challenge the colonial binaries of Western/non-Western knowledge, highlighting cultural exchanges facilitated by the Islamic world. Amoros employs theoretical frameworks such as maqām theory, Ranade's "performative exchange," and interdisciplinary frameworks to analyse shared modal systems, such as the haul, qawwali, and Hindustani rāgas. The findings establish haul and qaul as interconnected expressions of Sufi devotion and cultural exchange across Islamic and non-European worlds. Discussing the *haul* modal system's eight modes overlooks their interaction with or divergence from local sub-Saharan or Indian folk traditions, narrowing the scope within Afro-Asian imaginaries. A future article by this author on the influence of *haul* and *qaul* in local traditions and the impact of *maqāmāt* on qawwali's regional aesthetics in India would be a fascinating contribution to the literature.

Nkosenathi Ernie Koela's paper focused on the *ngoma* within the African diaspora and its role in cultural exchanges, trade, and identity. Koela concludes that *ngoma* is a dynamic cultural-religious "technology transfer" forged by Afro-Asian cultural synthesis and serves as a vehicle for cultural continuity in the IOW. It seems that the length of the paper limits the examination of what constitutes this "healing" and the exchanges between the Siddi Goma-Dhamal in India and musical

performances in the African continent. The chapter would be further enriched if it were lengthened to deepen the historical transmission of *ngoma* from Africa to India, incorporating detailed examples of artistic exchanges between African *ngoma* and Siddi Goma or Dhamal.

Sazi Dlamini's paper examines the *ngoma* as a central cultural and spiritual practice rooted in southern African traditions, adapted across Africa and African diasporic communities, using examples such as Siddi Goma/Dhamal and the *ngoma* Lugundu drum. Dlamini critiques Western definitions of music as "organised sounds," emphasising *ngoma*'s performative, material, and symbolic dimensions as an oratory practice. Dlamini compares and details the term *ngoma* in various contexts. The chapter is useful for its short introduction on Siddi Goma/Dhamal and its possible connection to the term, *ngoma*. This chapter could be used as a fundamental reading for the undergraduate and postgraduate seminars on Ethnomusicology, folklore studies and other disciplines due to its concise contribution to a lacuna in the literature.

Paroma Ghose critiques the Eurocentric dominance in global cultural narratives. The chapter examines French rap (1981–2012) as the site of resistance against exclusion, where marginalised African and Asian communities challenge France's myth of egalitarianism. The chapter underscores rap's function as an alternative archive of ostracised voices, critiquing France's superficial multicultural image. Ghose identifies recurring themes in lyrics: critiques of France's colonial legacy, dissatisfaction with the societal status quo, and solidarity among diverse communities. Notable examples include Ghetto Youss (2005) and Different Teep (1997), whose lyrics expose colonial and racial injustices. African imaginaries in French rap, grounded in specific national references like Guinea-Conakry, contrast with the less-defined Asian imaginaries, reflecting disparate migratory histories. The chapter contributes with an example of newer Afro-Asian musical exchanges in the diaspora than the previous two chapters.

The last chapter by Manoj Kuroor focuses on South Indian percussion. Kuroor examines the cultural and historical significance of percussion instruments such as the mridangam, ghatam, thavil, and parai, with special attention to the parai's connection to Sangam-era traditions and the Panar community. Kuroor highlights the chenda, a cylindrical drum central to a tradition such as chendamelam and explores it in depth, detailing its talas (panchari, champa, acantha) and the progressive tempos that showcase its rhythmic complexity. The improvisational art of *thayampaka*, with its evolving phases (champata, kooru, idanila), is presented as a dynamic form of individual creativity. The chapter concludes that Kerala's percussion is a globally relevant cultural treasure, transcending social divisions through its captivating performances. This paper provides rich content on South India's percussion instruments but does not explicitly contribute to the Afro-Asia musical imageries. However, the article shows the rich drumming tradition of Asian imaginaries.

Taken as a whole, the book examines themes of migration, identity, embodiment and cultural exchanges through diverse methodologies applied to specific case studies of music. The short length of conference papers is evident in the chapters. However, each chapter is an engaging read which provides nuanced insights into the interconnected worlds of Afro-Asian musical imaginaries and could be especially useful for undergraduate and graduate students in diverse disciplines.

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