

SAKHA MUSIC: SELLING 'EXOTIC' EUROPEANNESS IN ASIA AND ASIANNESSE IN EUROPE

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ABSTRACT

In this paper* I compare strategies to sell Sakha music in different countries over a ten-year period with a particular emphasis on 2005–2007. Due the fact that local income from performing and selling albums is not sufficient for living the artists from the Republic of Sakha are trying to perform as much abroad as possible. When touring abroad, the music and performances have changed over time depending on the region. Sakha artists attempt to respond to the expectations of the audience and modify their program accordingly. In a period from the late 1990s to 2007, the same artists have switched from pop to rock to folk music, using different languages and different costumes, performing as Asian or European artists. Comparing these strategies, one can see how Sakha musicians use cultural stereotypes of foreign audiences for economic purposes.

KEYWORDS: Sakha • music • youth • hybridity • postcolonialism • post-socialism

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, notions of Europeanness and Asianness among Sakha musicians are closely scrutinised. The focus of my paper is on various forms of Sakha music and how these different genres match the concepts of Europeanness or Asianness. I wish to demonstrate how these categories are manipulated, with varying degrees of success, among the audiences of a different nature and from different regions. In these processes, the geographical distance between the origin of the artist and the audience plays a primary

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role in confirming the authenticity of the music. To offer an audience music by labelling it as exotic is a strategy employed by Sakha artists to market their music and increase their income and prestige.

The notion of the exotic in music was theorised by John Hutnyk (2000), who sees it as a result of the continuing postcolonial cultural relationship between Western countries and their former colonies. In recent years academic discussion whether postcolonial and post-Socialist contexts are comparable is gaining more attention. Several scholars have argued that within the Soviet Union and the Socialist block there were colonial ties between the dominant Russian or Soviet, and other ethnic groups or satellite states (Moore 2001; Chari, Verdery 2009). There are indications that in several parts of the former Soviet Union non-Russian people developed typical postcolonial thinking, presenting themselves as victims of the dominant Russian politics depriving them from authentic means of expression, history and culture (Gerasimov et al. 2013: 125–126; Oushakine 2013). Another side of the postcolonial relationship is the current exoticising of Arctic minorities in Russia in particular and the former Soviet Union in general. As will be shown below, marketing the exotic is a diverse and ambivalent phenomenon, and where Sakha artists present themselves and are perceived by foreign audience as exotic. The ambivalence contains an integrating of local cultures in their performance, as well as evidence of their exposure to the modern world. Subsequently, it will be shown that location and remoteness plays an important role in constructing and selling ‘exotic’ music.

The data for this research was collected using different resources. In 2000 and 2001 I spent 14 months in the largest Russian region – the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) in Eastern Siberia. I went there as a doctoral student of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle (Saale) to conduct research on changing property relations in a post-Socialist transition society. But as often happens during a long period of fieldwork, one has plenty of free time to learn about other spheres of the local life. Since I have always been interested in music, I was eager to see and get a taste of the local music culture. Within a short time I met several local DJs, artists, and promoters and visited many local clubs and other music events. I always took notes and upon my return I had accumulated a solid amount of field notes about Sakha music culture. Since 2001 I have conducted a series of field studies in Sakha with the intention learning more about the republic’s popular music culture. Over the years, I conducted fieldwork sessions for shorter periods in Eastern Siberia, studying changes in the local music scene. Not only interviews and discussions with Sakha artists and managers were a source of this paper: since 2007 I have studied the global world music business. I have observed Sakha artists building their international careers and conducted interviews with their Western managers. Another source for the data was the media of the Republic of Sakha, which loves to cover the ‘success stories’ of the artists, and I have a substantial number of newspaper articles and local TV clips. This paper documents a short period (2005–2007) in the development of marketing strategies in Sakha music, the only period where producers and artists looked for opportunities in the West and in the East simultaneously.

The Republic of Sakha is the largest subject of the Russian Federation covering more than three million square kilometres. It is located in the eastern part of the country, belonging regionally to the Far East. Formerly the Yakut Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic, contemporary Sakha declared its sovereignty in 1991 and changed its name to the Republic of Sakha. The population of the Republic is quite small, less than one million. Approximately 45 per cent of the population are Russian (descendants of immigrants, and immigrants from the European part of Russia). The titular ethnic group, the Sakha speaking one of the Turkic languages, constitutes about 50 per cent of the population. The rest are indigenous minorities, the so-called Small Peoples of the North, including such groups as Evenk, Even, Yukagir and Dolgan. Population density is low, and most people are scattered over the vast territory (Pakhomov 1999: 2; Tichotsky 2000: 8). Therefore the capital Yakutsk and industrial towns like Mirnyi and Neringri, where the population density is high, are important centres of the local social and cultural life. The national government resides in Yakutsk, also the main theatres, the national TV and radio, and the most popular clubs are situated there.

In Russia, the Republic of Sakha is known as the region that produces 99 per cent of Russian diamonds (Tichotsky 2000). The wealth from this economic activity, however, is distributed unevenly. In 2005 southern and western Russian-dominated industrial towns were wealthier: people earned higher wages and had more social guarantees. The Sakha people and indigenous minorities, who live mainly in rural areas, in smaller non-industrial towns or in the capital Yakutsk, had smaller incomes on average, with the exception of the so called new Sakha (*sanga sakha* in Sakha or *novye yakuty* in Russian). Ethnic relations in the republic have been and are complex.

After the declaration of sovereignty, ethnic relations between indigenous and incomer communities became tense. This informal ethnic enmity has decreased since 2004–2005 owing to improvement in the general standard of living. Similar differentiation could be noted in the cultural space where in the early 2000s we can speak about two separate communities, both centred on media, music and clubs in their own language (Ventsel 2004a; 2004b). In recent years, ethnic differentiation in music and the media has diminished (Ventsel 2006; 2012; Habeck, Ventsel 2009).

The development of the modern Sakha culture should be seen within the framework of the colonial encounter. The first contacts between the peoples settled in the territory of the Republic of Sakha and Russians took place in the 17th century and it is widely believed that since 1632 the Sakha region has belonged to Russia. However, the subordination of the Sakha people to Russians is a debatable issue. It is a known fact that the Sakha nobility maintained their leading position throughout the Tsarist period. With the Communists' ascension to power, the Sakha people very quickly infiltrated the new power structures (Forsyth 1992: 259). In fact, during my fieldwork trips to different regions of the Republic of Sakha that are populated by Evenk and Even, the older people told me that it was not the Russians who forced them into a sedentary life and collective economy, but the young Sakha Communists. In their region, the Sakha also maintained a leading position in political and cultural institutions during the Soviet period. This was also noticed by the Canadian writer Farley Mowat, who visited this region twice in the 1960s (Mowat 1970).

To maintain their prominent position in regional politics, the Sakha went through a process of cultural adaption and modification. Sakha people already became literate in the 1920s with the establishing of several cultural organisations. In the 1960s they established Sakha schools, music academies and university faculties; newspapers were published in the Sakha language. Over a short period, Sakha culture developed into a high culture with the establishing of theatres and operas. Here, the Sakha culture greatly profited from the Soviet policy that prescribed the establishment of native culture among all the ethnic groups in the country (Forsyth 1992). The Soviet concept of national culture meant that each ethnic group had a fixed territory and distinct culture fostered within this territory, and it was according to this concept that the Sakha people received an autonomous republic. The Sakha people had existing resources – human and financial – with which to establish their own education, literature and arts, which was not typical among other Soviet minorities. In this sense, the Sakha people never appeared to the Russians as a marginal local minority with a ‘backward’ or ‘primitive’ culture, as was the case with many other Siberian minorities (Kotkin, Wolff 1995: 107). Their strong position in the affairs of their own (autonomous) republic created a strong sense of identity and ethnic pride, which the Sakha people still have today.

With the declaration of sovereignty of the Republic of Sakha, Sakha ethnic consciousness increased tremendously. Culturally it meant that the position of the Sakha language strengthened. A local native-language cultural college and many other education institutions were established. For a short time, even a discussion on whether to make all tertiary education institutions use the Sakha language was held (Ferguson 2013: 123–124). Ultimately this did not happen, and even though the Sakha language was and still is in many fields subordinated to Russian, the Sakha people have never felt that their culture is under threat or doomed to extinction, which is, of course, another unusual phenomenon in Siberia.

Owing to their greater number and institutional support, the Sakha people managed to establish a modern culture, especially in the sphere of art, theatre, poetry and music, and incorporate it into their everyday culture. Sakha music in its various forms is not something made and enjoyed by a small educated elite but is recognised by people as part of Sakha *natsional'naya kul'tura* (national culture). The Soviet period did not destroy this culture, but affected its institutional structure and ideology. In the Soviet period Sakha culture, music included, was governed and controlled by the Ministry of Culture and by various cultural and academic institutions. Music was under the influence and control of the Theatre of *Estrada* (mainly fostering entertainment music) and academic institutions such as museums, centres of culture, and also folk music scholars at the university. Ideologically, for the majority of the Sakha people, their *natsional'naya kul'tura* has, symbolically speaking, turned into a holy cow that embodies the essence of their people and their identity. Here the influence of Soviet national policy, which reduced minorities to exotic ethnographic groups, is obvious. After the October Revolution, some politicians from non-Russian ethnicities argued that non-Russian minorities should be seen as victims of Tsarist colonisation, as “proletarian classless minorities” (Glebov et al. 2013: 112–113). Therefore they should be objects of a parallel policy: their cultures should be simultaneously maintained and modernised, a process that produced the “emergence of ‘hybrid’ identities” (Marsden 2012: 343). Similar to colonial subjects in Asia or Africa, indigenous people in the Arctic were supposed to possess a “timeless

Tradition" (Kandiyoti, Cole 2002 in Marsden 2012: 343), a never-changing indigenous culture. On the other hand, modernisation meant a wide range of policies that aimed of bringing 'Soviet enlightenment' to these people. In practice, it meant grafting European culture onto the culture of the indigenous people (Habeck 2011: 65–66). The notion of the enlightenment was broad, including: hygiene, literacy, modern forms of culture, sedentarisation, etc.

Another aspect of Sakha identity is their language, and therefore everything created in the Sakha language automatically belongs to Sakha culture (Drobizheva 1998). Modern forms of music – *sovremennaya muzyka* – are also observed by state and cultural institutions as part of Sakha culture and are often supported as such.

I will conclude this section of my paper by arguing that the Sakha cultural identity is very ambivalent. The Sakha see themselves as representatives of an ancient, glorious and unique Arctic culture. On the other hand, the Sakha are very proud that their culture is modern. Being physically Asians and living geographically in Asia, their connection with Russian culture is very close. The basic concepts of high culture – the quality of opera, theatre, art – are strongly influenced by Russians because many Sakha artists have studied in Moscow or Leningrad and have maintained strong contacts with Russian colleagues. In the early 1990s, the Sakha cleverly used existing legislation on cultural development for non-Russian minorities and invested huge republican and federal funds in Sakha language education and culture (cf. Donskoi 2001; Donskoi et al. 2001; Argunova 2003; Baisheva et al. 2012). The Sakha also have a very strong state identity, identifying themselves with the Russian state. Moreover, they know that their everyday culture is very European and differs from a 'typical' Asian culture (Korean, Chinese, Japanese). The economic expansion of China and Korea, which started at the end of the 1990s, created a strong dislike of Asian nations, who are viewed as peoples who have come to Sakha to exploit the locals. Therefore, the Sakha people *en masse* have a very fluid identity when it comes to define whether they are European or Asian. The advocates of the European or Asian Sakha identity discuss the issue constantly in their books and newspaper articles (see Afanasyev 1994; Nikolayev 1994; Vinokurova 1994; Kondakov 1998; Tyrylgin 2000; Alekseyev 2003; Vorobyeva, Spiridonov 2003; Bravina 2005; Ignatyeva 2010; Alekseyev et al. 2012).

The so-called urban studies linking music, consumption habits and identity have gained attention since the publication of the works of the Birmingham based Centre for Cross-Cultural Studies (see Hall, Jefferson 1986). Many theoretical works in urban studies have focused on music – linking it with resistance, consumption, ethnicity and identity (see, for example, Burke 1978; Cawelti 1990; Chye, Konk 1996; Dörfel 1996; Frith 1996; Fuller 1998; Connell, Gibson 2003). Over time, a substantial amount of data has been accumulated on youth in urban environments and their lifestyle as it relates to music, identity, consumption, and politics based on studies in Africa, Asia, Europe, and America (cf. Toop 1992; Bryson 1996; Chye, Konk 1996; Friedman, Weiner 1999; Akindes 2002; Brusila 2002).

Within the field of cultural studies, literature on socially marginalised minority music (such as bhangra, hiphop, reggae, qwali) and its content is very rich. The history and development of this music is often discussed from the perspective of (post)colonialism. In my paper I wish to lean on the concept of the exotic proposed by John Hutnyk (2000). Hutnyk discusses the British-Asian music bhangra and shows how the category

of Otherness is applied by the music industry, and how the media recognises such music, which is 'exotic' as long as it does not criticise the racial face of British society. He also addresses the hidden side of the British-Asian music scene and shows how politically aware musicians resist such a policy. In the following I will show how exoticism as a marketing strategy supports Sakha artists, encouraging them to use the notion of Otherness to help develop a career.

THE HISTORY OF SAKHA POPULAR MUSIC

Music has always played a large part in the cultural life of Sakha and non-Sakha people in the Sakha Republic. Not only is the main Sakha national epos, *Olonkho*, performed through singing, but also music as a leisure activity, entertainment and accompaniment to rituals has always been present in the region (Vinokurova 1994; Safronov, Safronov 2000; Crate 2002). In the Soviet Union, the state took great interest and provided support for the maintenance and development of the culture of 'backward' groups that also included the indigenous peoples in Siberia. This policy was applied by establishing village and town clubs – the so-called culture houses – and organising folklore groups, national sports teams, the arts and handicrafts. Not only the Sakha but all minority groups established such groups in their villages, and often more than one group focused on singing and dancing the folk songs and dances in their own language. Parallel to this, music from European Russia always reached Eastern Siberia and melodies from classical music to pop were broadcast on radio and TV. Apart from Sakha musicians there were also several Russian music groups active in Sakha territory, mainly subordinated to culture officials from various state institutions like theatres, culture houses and even the departments of culture in factories. During the Soviet period, the Sakha established and developed their own popular music culture mainly from the example of the Russians. Since then the Sakha have had their own light music scene (*estrada*), which was similar to the entertainment music of the period. The artists of this period – Arkadiy Alekseyev, Petr Toborukov, and Marina Popova – are still remembered and loved today. In addition, there was always music in the Russian language, produced by the local rapidly increasing Russian population. All these artists – both Russians and Sakha – recorded their songs at local radio stations; there were very few Sakha records released during the Soviet time. Thus – according to my informants, who were involved in the music making in the 1960s and 1970s – local pop music was listened to mainly at live concerts or via the local radio station and only a small part of the music circulated among people on home-made tapes and cassettes.

The situation changed with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Bars, clubs and discos mushroomed out of nowhere and within a decade had been permanently established in people's lives. Music became more important and visible, and not just because of the new social spaces for enjoying music. With the development of the private economy, private radio stations were established. Most of these played only Russian and Western music, but in 1996 Victoria Sakhalyy's radio station was established, playing mainly Sakha music and with a program presented entirely in Sakha. Another radio station that airs Sakha music, especially older music, is the local state-owned radio station NVK. In 2006, another private Sakha music radio station (Radio Tsentr Sakhalyy) was

established in Yakutsk, followed by state owned Radio Duoraan. With the appearance of places to listen to music and numerous radio channels to broadcast it, more musicians appeared. In fact, for young artists and musicians in rural areas, music became an incentive to leave their villages and set foot in Yakutsk, as I have discussed in a previous article (Ventsel 2004b). The music also became an important channel for the spread of information and promotion of local fashion via the artists' appearance on TV, in public events and music videos (Ventsel 2006).

Over time, various music styles developed, targeting different groups among the local population. The aforementioned *estrada* is a music style based on the melodies of sixties and seventies dance music and is often performed by mature singers primarily for an 'older' audience. Rock is another musical genre practiced in Sakha. The first Sakha rock group Cholbon was established in the 1970s. They have maintained their leading position, while the number of Sakha rock groups has multiplied since the eighties. Two major tendencies can be differentiated in local rock music: Chris Rea-like dance rock music, which is popular among all age groups, and the so-called shamanic rock, represented by a harder rock in the style of Pink Floyd and Led Zeppelin with elements of Sakha traditional music (folk melodies, the use of mouth harps and other traditional instruments), the performers of which wear stylised Sakha folk costumes onstage (Cholbon, Aital). The shamanic rock is more appreciated by students and Sakha intellectuals and is also known in Russian metropolises like Moscow and St. Petersburg and to a certain extent even in world music circles abroad.

The more 'youthful' part of Sakha music is referred to as *popsa*, which simply means 'pop music' in Russian. *Popsa* is average disco-pop, influenced by similar Russian and Western music. The salience of this inexpensive computer-produced music has increased since MTV launched its Russian programme, on which more than half of the aired music is Russian. Active in the *popsa*-style are both male (Igor) and female (Varya Amanatova) solo artists, and boy (X-Up) and girl groups (Maxima). *Popsa* artists tend to be younger than *Estrada* and rock artists, and their main audience is teenagers and young adults, in the cities mainly high school and university students. TV presentations of these artists are colourful and trendy, imitating Russian pop stars and foreign artists on MTV. After listening to new *popsa* in 2006 I noticed that the technical quality of this genre has increased tremendously in recent years.

The fourth musical genre in Sakha is folk music (*fol'klornaya muzyka*). Folk musicians are not only those who are active in village culture houses: there are also many artists with an academic education, especially singers who, among other styles, perform traditional music. Folk music is even more in demand abroad than at home and therefore folk musicians travel a lot, visiting folk music festivals all over the world.

One particularity of Sakha music used to be the lack of strict boundaries between genres. Not only did the best artists perform in multiple styles, and were very successful in this (Valentina Romanova, Saina), but in the Sakha music scene there was also hardly any polarisation between rock and pop music, as we see in the West.¹

Giving performances on the other side of the Ural Mountains is nothing new for Sakha musicians. In the Soviet period artists and music groups often played at festivals in other parts of the Soviet Union. Sakha music was often performed in Moscow and Leningrad as well as in the Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia and other Soviet republics in the European part of the union. In very rare cases Sakha artists were allowed to perform outside the socialist block and, indeed, the luckiest ones performed at festivals in Western Europe or North America.

The collapse of the Socialist world took place concurrently with the growth in popularity of world music. At the same time it was a period of rapid development in the Soviet music scene. Since the end of the 1980s, alternative music collectives, artists and DJs gained more public attention and acceptance. Music that was censored or not supported a few years before got airplay and TV exposure (Cushman 1995). In fact, in the territory of the former Soviet Union, the beginning of the nineties was the best time in terms of alternative and ethnic music. It was still relatively inexpensive to produce music – rehearsal rooms were easy and cheap to rent, the number of studios was small but neither were they very expensive. For an underground and/or unknown band the possibility to get radio airplay or TV exposure was higher than ever before, or after, and many journals published stories and interviews with non-commercial bands. Subsequently during this period contacts with the Western music business were successfully established.

Everything from the Soviet Union and Socialist block was exotic during this period, including the music. The Western media was briefly interested in covering Eastern artists who also performed in Western clubs and festivals. At this time, Sakha music – together with other musical and regional styles – received quite a lot of media attention. My first encounter with Sakha music was around 1990, when a legendary music journalist and DJ Artem Troitskiy played a concert by the Sakha rock group Aital in his extremely popular TV show *Programma A*. He introduced Aital as one of the best Sakha music groups and defined their style as shamanic rock. The period of *perestroika* made contact between Sakha artists with Western promoters and artists possible. It became possible to travel to foreign countries to perform at festivals, while foreigners were also able to travel to Sakha to discover the local music. Simultaneously, this period overlapped with the increasing popularity of world music, ethnic sounds from ‘other countries’ (see Erlmann 1994; Pietilä 2009). It is not surprising that foreigners and also Russians from the European part of Russia were amazed by the nature and richness of Sakha music. The pride that Sakha people have about their culture was also expressed in the large number of artists who were one way or another engaged in performing ‘traditional’ music. There were and still are several solo artists, bands or temporary music projects that attempt to perform very traditional Sakha and northern indigenous music, or mix it with rock, jazz or pop. Notwithstanding the fact that Western interest in exotic music is often interpreted as the “fetishisation of local flavour” and “asymmetric cultural imperialism” (Stokes 2004: 53, 55) Sakha artists saw this as a possibility to be visible behind the former Iron Curtain. From their point of view, the Sakha ‘local flavour’ was the uniqueness of their culture, a distinct Sakha spirituality that they had to offer to the world. Therefore, unlike in Africa, there was little conflict between

local Sakha music business interests and priorities and the global world music business (Laing 2009: 29).

The Sakha people were not pushed into the “global frame of reference” (Stokes 2004: 55). By looking at the Soviet period of Sakha pop and folk music, then one notices a strong emphasis on the spirituality of the ‘northern people’ and the glorification of Sakha history and shamanism. Therefore, artists did not see themselves as forced to change the focus of their music. Moreover, they were keen to stick with that focus. For example, during my research period in Sakha, I never heard a work or drinking song as an example of folklore on stage or at an official event. In fact, Sakha artists love to perform such music while sitting in each other’s kitchens or drinking backstage. Most often I heard songs about shamanism or Sakha warriors, or songs dedicated to horses (which are considered holy in Sakha culture) and to the beauty of the northern country at concerts. At such performances, artists are usually dressed in modified Sakha ‘national costumes’ of dark fur clothes, horse-hair whips, heavy silver jewellery and hunting knives. The whole appearance was usually very gloomy and depressive: monotonous music combined with fantastic (sometimes even a science-fiction-like) appearance. The glorification of the spirituality of the Sakha people made the whole Sakha culture seem very mystic both for the Sakha artists and the non-Sakha audience.

European listeners and Sakha artists became aware not only of their cultural but also of the physical distance between their homeland and the main regions of their foreign audience. Starting at the beginning of the 1990s, Sakha artists and musicians began to travel and perform actively outside their home republic. In many cases, these trips were financed by offices of culture in the Republic of Sakha. Many artists whom I know performed in Moscow as ‘cultural ambassadors’ of the Sakha people at events like the opening of the Sakha Days, during the celebrations of the 60th Victory Day celebration of the end of the Second World War, folklore festivals and so forth. There is no need to emphasise that music performed at such events is and has always been, at least to some extent, Sakha, i.e. containing distinct features of traditional folk music like blessings and ritual songs. On the occasions when there is a need to ‘represent the Sakha culture’ the music of the mouth harp (an instrument associated with the North and shamanistic mystique) is particularly popular.

Apart from participating in Russian festivals to celebrate Sakha identity, Sakha artists began to travel abroad. According to my informants, the main reason was to participate in folklore festivals. Such festivals spread out over a large area became the travel routes of the Sakha artists. I know artists who visited the USA, UK, and Japan on many occasions, and also toured in Europe. For instance, Stepanida Borissova, a highly respected folk music diva, has toured in Germany many times, visiting even small cities. Many artists (German and Klavdiya Khatylayevy,² Varya Amanatova, Valentina Romanova) have also become nominees for prizes at such guest appearances. When visiting these artists, one notices one or many framed diplomas on the wall, which are shown to visitors with great pride. Attending festivals and giving concerts outside of Sakha is a matter of prestige. The media gladly and frequently covers such events, featuring the events as matters of national importance. Indeed, concerts of Sakha artists abroad are usually reported as ‘X represented our country in France, Germany, England, etc.’ In the media, prizes won at these festivals are equated to trophies won at sports games, which says a lot about the importance of music prizes in the sports-crazed Republic of

Sakha. Performing abroad is also a matter of passive rivalry among the artists, themselves the subject of constant gossip and jealousy. For this reason, Sakha artists try to establish contacts in the Western music scene and keep their contact persons a secret. Performing in Western countries does not only mean the opportunity to travel but also involves considerable sums of money. The amount earned is unknown to me, but it is sufficient to buy new instruments, sometimes even to renovate homes. Therefore, performing abroad is not only a matter of prestige but is also financially profitable. This, in turn, increases the importance of producing music that would be attractive for a Western audience.

I have met many of these artists who have successfully performed abroad. When in 2001 I visited a Sakha couple German and Klavdiya Khatylaevy, they played me their old and new songs for about one and a half hours. In 2006, British scholars and I attended a concert by Aiarkhaan – a prominent female folk music group – in the Centre of Sakha Culture in Yakutsk.³ I have also seen Varya Amanatova, Valentina Romanova and Stepanida Borissova perform folk music with mouth harps, shamanic drums and rattles. Despite their announcements that the songs they play are ‘very ancient’ I have my doubts about this. First, I have seen documentaries shot in the 1960s and 1970s about village singers and there is a significant difference between music performed by a professional singer with academic music schooling and a non-educated village musician. Second, many singers have told me that they have modified songs or created new songs. Some singers even go as far as to modify the whole style. Savigliano (1995: 2) calls this process “autoexoticization” by musicians with the aim of better marketing themselves. However, Siberian (and other Soviet peoples) have had a distinct history of re-conceptualisation of their tradition. In the Soviet era, the urge to create a ‘national’ modern culture resulted in the adaption of ethnic elements into the pop and classic music (see Rothstein 1980; Shakhnazarova 2001; Smith 2002; Tomoff 2003; Merchant 2009; Ninoshvili 2009; Rancier 2009). One consequence was the simultaneous existence of several competing concepts of tradition in Siberia (Donahoe, Habeck 2011; King 2011). Therefore, it was not unusual for artists to choose the ‘appropriate’ version of their music as long as it was seen as ‘traditional’. However, the Soviet-era institutionalisation of the cultivation of tradition often caused a situation in which local culture officials had a very clear idea of how particular genres should be performed and were extremely intolerant to the “allegories of technological progress” (Savigliano 1995: 82). For example, Khatylayevy told me that when they started performing as a mouth harp duo they also introduced new ways of performing in which one of them played rhythm, the other played the lead melody. After this they were banned from many events in Yakutsk because purists among the organisers accused them of spoiling traditional mouth harp music. However, the couple is one of the most successful Sakha folk groups performing abroad, having received many important prizes. As is the nature of academic/professional folk music, it is more listener-friendly than its non-professional equivalent. Modification of mouth harp music is not only the expression of artistic freedom but also serves the goal of being more compatible with the tastes of the folk/world music festival audiences.

Another important issue is throat singing. On Sakha folk music CD samplers issued at various times and in various places, one hardly finds anything that is referred to as throat singing. However, some artists like Stepanida Borissova tour successfully

abroad performing 'Sakha throat singing' or even more often 'Siberian throat singing'. The term throat singing became world famous with Tuvan music and groups like Yat-Kha or Huun Huur Tu. Today, throat singing is among other things a good marketing tool, opening doors to festival organisers and music producers. Stepanida Borissova was extremely successful in exploiting this category and in the early 1990s, when she released a CD titled "Stepanida Borissova and Hulu Project" in Finland. Since then, she has been touring Europe constantly. Alongside her international success, her position in the Sakha music scene became very prominent. In 2006, she was the headliner of open-air concerts in Yakutsk.

EUROPEAN IN ASIA

Ethnic music and its modifications are not the only export article of the Sakha music scene. As interesting as it is, for a very brief period around 2006, Sakha artists attempted to establish themselves as templates of European music culture in Asian countries. This short period required another type of the autoexoticisation. The pop music tradition in Sakha music goes back to the 1960s. When looking at the production of CDs and cassettes in the Republic of Sakha, *estrada* and *popsa* are definitely the music styles that dominate the output of the local music industry. Pop music is important for Sakha artists in terms of popularity and income. The possibilities of performing it (at an increasing number of clubs and events), getting airplay (an increasing number of radio private stations that play this music) and earning more money by performing such music have increased. National pop music is often an object of debates in countries outside of the Anglo-American sphere, where the influence of global pop is viewed as a hegemonic force that erases national particularities (see Larkey 1992; Pennycook 2007; Regev 2007; Luvaas 2009; Leppänen, Pietikäinen 2010; Varis, Wang 2011). The brief attempt at marketing Sakha pop music in China as European pop demonstrates another form of authenticity that – contrary to the ethnic music in the West – should not contain 'locality' in its sonic scripture. In the attempt to market Sakha pop in China, the music was freed from the local colour and presented as global 'European' pop.

Until 2001, Sakha pop was rarely performed outside Sakha. On a few occasions, some artists participated in *estrada* contests outside of the Republic of Sakha performing light popular dance music, but it was more important in terms of prestige (as such events were covered on TV and in newspapers – for example Varya Amanatova performing at the Siberian *estrada* festival in Buryatia in 2002) than income, albeit such occasions were quite rare. Such is, for example, the situation when Varya Amanatova met the popular Mongolian singer Nariana in Buryatia. Already at the festival, they formed a friendship which led to Varya singing backing vocals for the Mongolian diva at the festival. Further development of this contact was the arrival of Nariana in Yakutsk in 2003 where she performed many successful concerts.

Because *estrada* is generally performed with pre-recorded playbacks and no live musicians, organising the tours are quite simple and inexpensive – one needs only the equipment for the singers and a CD player. On a return visit, Varya toured with Nariana for many weeks in Mongolia. She played me recordings of the concerts and to my surprise I heard how she preferred to sing in Russian. At the end of concerts she performed

duets with Nariana, singing famous Russian romantic ballads. What struck me was the fact that Varya's repertoire hardly included any songs with distinctive Sakha melodies or other Sakha features. Outside Sakha she wore a stylised Sakha folk costume and used a mouth harp in her songs, which was not the case in Mongolian videos. When abroad Varya stressed her Sakha origin when talking between songs, introducing the Sakha culture in a few sentences. This was not the case here, either. On the contrary, the entire appearance of Varya resembled that of a European pop diva. This was an assumed role, since she often appeared on stage in Yakutsk where she was and is a very popular artist in the contemporary disco-pop scene. This tour in Mongolia was not the only one for Varya. Next year she repeated it, again giving a series of concerts with Nariana in Mongolia. These concerts had a similar structure to the year before: Varya performed a series of *estrada* and *popsa* songs and concluded the show with some duets with Nariana. The only difference from the concerts of the first tour was that Varya also performed one or two songs in Mongolian. Varya earned some money in Mongolia, not as much as she would have for performing at a Western folklore festival, but enough to buy some new clothes and update her wardrobe.

Varya's Mongolian tours, of course, were widely covered in the media in Yakutsk and this coverage incited rumours among artists and people involved in the music business. Even more rumours concerned Varya's next project – performing in China. Via Mongolia Varya made contacts with Chinese producers and they offered her a tour of China. The China project was more serious and also ambitious because she was also given the possibility to record an album in Chinese. The gossip of the Sakha music scene ran wild when Varya announced the details of this story. All the Sakha tabloid and serious media discussed the issue for weeks and the success story spread throughout the nation. Indeed, Varya Amanatova did record an album in China. The music on the album is very sweet and plays on the image of European pop being sung in Chinese. Apart from the lyrics, Varya had learned some phrases in Chinese to introduce herself and her music for the audience. Nevertheless, the tour and CD were not exactly successful. She gave sold-out concerts but she had peaked and this was not followed by another album or tour. The Sakha media ignored that side of the story and portrayed it as another success story and a sign of how modern Sakha culture is gaining popularity beyond the country's borders. China is a huge music market and Varya's Chinese affair inspired many Sakha artists and producers/managers to seek contacts with Chinese music managers. The emergence of many new producers in Yakutsk in 2005–2006 who planned to establish lucrative contacts with Chinese producers and managers was a new strategy in the music scene. It is significant that all these young producers who looked for contacts in China were music entrepreneurs whose protégés were young *popsa* artists and groups. Many of them had been successful disco artists a few years before who decided to build up their own studio and concert agency. The segment of Sakha music that had copied Western commercial pop music like disco, hiphop and RnB was being marketed and there was in general a certain distance from their traditional music. Western-style pop music was and is in many non-European countries associated with hedonism and modernity and with participation in the globalised commercial cultural arena, whereas ethnic music is often seen as old fashioned and musically not very interesting (see, for example, Toop 1992; Erlmann 1994). Performing global pop also means a certain degree of de-territorialisation: artists feel part of international, rather than national, culture

(Luvaas 2009: 4, 9). This trend can be seen as a reference to the postcolonial situation in which artists who perform Western pop and rock acknowledge these styles of music as more prestigious, related to global cultural centres and the West, and concede that these genres shape mainstream music and fashion. In contrast to the tradition and spirituality of ethnic music, pop artists embody a certain modernity and consumption, global trends that are superior to the peripheral regional culture.

Up to the end of my fieldwork in July 2007 I had not heard any other success stories about Sakha artists in China, although but I met many producers who were keen to endorse it. These producers sent promo materials to Chinese concert agencies and gained some limited success, with Sakha pop music getting some airplay on Chinese radio and a few young singers having the chance to perform in Chinese discotheques. First of all, young promoters tried to learn from Varya Amanatova how to establish contacts with the Chinese music business and understand the demands on the artists. Varya's experience with the Chinese music business was well-known on the small artist's circuit in Yakutsk and therefore it was no wonder that other people tried to get a foot in the Chinese pop market as performers of contemporary pop music.

I met Varya after her Chinese tour to discuss her experience with Chinese audiences and the music business there. She explained to me that Chinese managers were interested in her as a pop singer from their first meeting. In negotiations about a possible tour and other arrangements it was stressed on several occasions that Varya Amanatova was expected to perform modern pop music without any folklore elements. "Chinese like western pop," she explained me, "for them, Russia is a European country. People who come from there are exotic and must perform European music." (FM 2007) As I heard, she had to dress in a 'European style' and to many people she appeared 'almost European', since her North Asian appearance is different from how the Chinese look. Authenticity in pop music is a matter of interpretation (see Middleton 2001) and in the Sakha case caters to different perceptions of distances and space as a result of what the Chinese believed to be a 'European style'. Varya's music was cleansed of any reference to her Asian ethnicity when she performed in Chinese. According to the audience perception, this did not decrease her 'Europeanness' because her music concurred with what people in China expected Western pop music to sound like. Moreover, Varya was an artist from a European country, which also delivered a certain degree of the authenticity. A 'European style' stage costume symbolised the Western nature of her music and carried more weight than her non-European physical appearance. Varya's succinct Chinese period demonstrated her flexible approach in reacting to the demands of the audience. Being a successful folk music singer and having participated in many folk music festivals in the USA and elsewhere, she was able to adapt herself to performing other types of music when needed.

HYBRIDITY TALK

One concept of the world of popular culture is that it is seen as a dream world, a place for public fantasy (Storey 1998: 12). In this paper I have discussed the marketing strategies and activities of Sakha artists in two different fields: as representatives of 'traditional' culture in the West and as representatives of Western pop culture in the East.

In both cases the artists attempted to satisfy the public fantasy held by their audiences, fitting into the image of the traditional Siberian or Asian or contemporary European.

In cultural studies the audience's taste and artists are manipulated by a phenomenon in business referred to as the "total institution" (Clarke 1992). The artist's music and image are manipulated and controlled by record companies, managers and agents who attempt to form a product that is easily marketable (Negus 1999). Theodor Adorno speaks about the "cultural industry" as a "monopolistic" industry (cited in Hutnyk 2000: 19). The impact and the dominant role of managers, marketing specialists and producers in the culture industry is of course true, but this does not mean that other agents – the artists – have no will or choice. In my article I have demonstrated the position of artists in the music business who manipulate the expectations of the audience to get access to resources – prestige and money.

Artists often try to predict what is expected from them and shape their music and appearance with the aim of pleasing the audience, managers and promoters. John Hutnyk (2000: 3–4) writes at the beginning of his book *Critique of Exotica* how Asian music is often viewed as an intellectual music. He draws his examples from music of Indian, Pakistani and Bengali origin. Things are not much different when 'shamanic music' comes into play. Arctic music is consumed by a Euro-American audience as spiritual, esoteric and containing a mystical energy. There is the phenomenon of Otherness that people want to see in the performances of the Sakha artists. The fact that a large audience for Sakha artists is non-Sakha, both at home and abroad, shows that the audience expects the emphasis on mysticism, intellectuality and exoticism. To meet the promoters' and audience's expectations, artists adapt their repertoire to meet people's fantasies. The same goes for commercial pop music in China. The Chinese audience is unlikely to dream about intellectuality in pop music. But they too definitely seek the Other and the exotic that for Chinese music consumers is represented by a 'European pop artist'. To fit into this framework, artists should perform a particular kind of music and have a particular style of appearance.

A very popular approach within cultural studies is to talk about hybridity. Originally, hybridity in cultural/youth studies was used in the discussion about marginal social group identity and its cultural forms (for example, Hebdidge 1979). But the concept of hybridity can also be used when discussing the manipulation of music. Jo Haynes (2005: 369) argues that the balance between hybridisation and authenticity is one dilemma in world music. City dwellers and professional artists performing 'ancient traditional music' and artists with Asian features satisfying their audience's thirst for European contemporary pop music is also one expression of this hybridity. From a 'culture industry' viewpoint it is a process of "commodification of the Other" (Durham, Kellner 2001: 22). However, artists have their own agency within this framework. They "exploit" the audience's "fantasies about the 'Other'" and profit from it (ibid.: 23). Hiphop and black culture in general is something that in cultural studies is used as an archetype and the best example of hybridity. Paul Gilroy writes about how hiphop claims that this genre, the nature of which is based on the concept of hybridity, has nevertheless become a "symbol of racial authenticity" (cited in Hutnyk 2000: 19). The "facts of blackness" are fluid, cultural, political and social categories that can be flexibly remade in order to fit into the general idea about black culture (Gray 2001: 443). Motti Regev discusses Otherness, national uniqueness and rock music criteria in the

Argentinian and Israeli rock scenes, and concludes that when the music finds a balance between the interior and exterior, fans have no problems identifying themselves with the music (Regev 2007: 318, 322). The authenticity of various forms of Sakha music is illusionary: musicians offer a glimpse into the dream like world of 'Europe' or 'Asia'. The Sakha rock groups who mix their music with the mouth harp and appear on stage in folk costumes, or the pop artists who use electronic pre-recorded playbacks in a Western style, are also carriers of the same authenticity that hiphop is for its audience and performers. Hutnyk writes that the "audience is largely uncritical of world music" (2000: 22) and the pop music audience's enthusiasm to pick up what the trends deliver is discussed in many works. All this is true. This "tolerance" is used by the Sakha artists for whom "hybridity means access to the market" (Hutnyk 2000: 94). The common term for the Sakha 'traditional' music in the West and the 'contemporary European pop' in the East is exotic. There is a culture industry that helps people to "consume exotica" (cf. Hutnyk 2000: 94, 134) and artists adapt themselves to it.

CONCLUSION

The question is how can one artist be at the same time 'traditionally Asian' and a 'contemporarily European'. Here one has to take into account the ambivalent content of Sakha culture and the people themselves. On the one hand the Sakha people believe in their glorious past as great Asian warriors, and on the other hand they have created their literacy and other forms of 'high culture' from a Russian template, and through Russia have a culture based on a European model. Sakha culture is by nature hybrid. It is the result of the historical colonial struggle of political and economic power both in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union. Therefore, ideologically there was and is no contradiction in adapting elements of their Asian and European cultures and showing it to non-Sakha people. The hybridity of Sakha culture is supported by the opinion that there is no contradiction in incorporating various elements of the East and West into their culture; on the contrary, this was seen as an enrichment, a development and a strengthening of Sakha culture.

The other side of this coin is the perceived Asian or European authenticity of Sakha music. What makes this authenticity credible is the geographical origin and distance. For the audience, the artist comes from a distant place and embodies another culture. It seems that the distance the music has to travel adds substantially to the 'realness' of the performed music. The Arctic or Europe are reduced to stereotypical and coherent concepts that Sakha artists have to exploit in order to reach the necessary degree of authenticity. The fact that the artists come from a region that is located far away reinforces their Otherness and exotic qualities and helps to establish their artistic credibility as people belonging to a different cultural sphere. In this way, distance helps to create musical concepts that are turned into marketable products.

NOTES

1 This situation changed rapidly after the discussed period and currently the Sakha music scene is strictly divided between folk, ethnorock and pop with very little crossover (see Ventsel 2010; 2012).

2 In 2011 Khatylayevy released a CD in France.

3 In 2012 Aiarkhaan performed at WOMEX, a central event for world music, and were guests on various BBC radio shows. In 2013 they toured Europe, mainly Germany.

SOURCES

FM – Author's field notes and interviews in the Republic of Sakha between 2000 and 2012. During that period I conducted dozens of formal interviews with artists. However, more important for my research than interviews are documented spontaneous discussions and field notes from public events or rehearsals.

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