

# Introduction

When the NordForsk-funded network *Researching Music Censorship* (RMC) was initiated in 2010, it was obvious that music censorship was not decreasing. There were severe conflicts over freedom of expression in various parts the world, but also a growing awareness of issues concerning control and regulation of the arts. Censorship could be observed in areas of conflict and political tension as well as in politically stable regions like the Nordic countries. Today we experience that censorship of the arts is an issue of increasing social and political significance. We feel that have been heading in the right direction when assuming that it is essential to direct academic scholarship towards issues of censorship, freedom of expression and human rights in relation to the arts, in our case music.

The objective of the RMC network has been to contribute with an academic approach through the development of multifaceted, scientifically based research. At the outset, the aim of the network was stated as follows: “[...] to question the often uncomplicated and simplified definitions of the concept in popular discourse, and based on a firm understanding of music as a socially organised means of communication and through identification and documentation of discourses on restrictions and regulations in musical expression, the participating researchers will examine global, regional and local frameworks for music censorship”.<sup>1</sup>

As the contributions to this issue clearly demonstrate, research on music censorship is, on the one hand, concerned with social and political issues. Since censorship plays a part in struggles concerning class, race, gender and religion, the study of censorship inevitably involves a focus on power relations; on the mobilisation and implementation of power both by the censors and those being censored. On the other hand, the study of music censorship is obviously also about music. It directs our attention towards the particular potential of music to articulate and communicate attitudes and opinions in ways that surpass what can be accomplished by use of the spoken word. Music may serve to empower or distribute a social or political message, but additionally, by way of association or representation, music may constitute a message in itself and can hence be studied both as a medium and as a message. Thus, we have seen that the object of censorship may be both the lyrical content of particular songs and the artists that perform them, but also entire music genres or even the performance of music as such.

The RMC network was officially brought to an end in late 2014, but the rich outcomes are only now starting to appear. The network has consisted of a total of 48 scholars and PhD researchers from all the Nordic countries plus associated researchers from other parts of the world. Their varied academic backgrounds include the fields of popular music studies, music education, ethnomusicology and religious studies. We

1 RMC Website, accessed 4 February, 2015: <http://rmc.ku.dk>.

are confident that the activities of the network have created a new awareness of the significance and ramifications of the study of music censorship and artistic freedom of expression in the Nordic countries and beyond. Through conference presentations, papers and articles RMC members have shared their research perspectives with peers, and through media appearances and teaching at universities and university colleges they have raised public attention to the topic.

Based on the many presentations at seminars and conferences organised by RMC, 25 articles were selected for publication in four forthcoming books and special journal issues. The seven articles published in this issue of Danish Musicology Online are the first publications coming out of the network.

In our first article, based on the repercussions following Pussy Riot's performance of "Punk Prayer" in the Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow, Tore Tvarnø Lind discusses different notions of blasphemy in view of religious and political discourses in Russia. He shows us how censorship and persecution of the group can be understood as a response to their intrusion into sacred space, their political critique, the "imagined violence" of their act, and finally, their feminist agenda. Thomas Solomon's article questions the understanding of self-censorship as merely a capitulation to the censoring forces. Through a case study of the Turkish rapper Sagopa Kajmer (also known as DJ Mic Check) Solomon argues against a "victimology approach", claiming that self-censorship potentially opens up space for creative practice, even involving a critique of censorship itself. In his article on Cuban popular dance music as an expression of political values, Kjetil Klette Bøhler invites the reader to join and reflect together with the political theorists Arendt and Rancière on the aesthetic *polis* space. Through his ethnomusicological fieldwork and careful music analysis Bøhler shows how grooves and melodies shape opinions, values and preferences potentially critical of the state, thereby contributing to participatory democracy in Cuba. Ursula Geisler explores institutionalized music censorship enforced by the Third Reich in Germany. Her article summarises the laws and principles enforced by two specialized cultural institutions assigned with the task of controlling and limiting music in relation to a variety of issues, including Jewishness, Bolshevism and atonality. Geisler draws a complex picture of the Nazi regime's pervasive control system and its strategies of cultural concessions and prohibitions. With a focus on censorship and self-censorship in Finnish newspaper journalism Antti-Ville Kärjä discusses cultural politics in view of major societal changes in "post-Soviet" Finland. Analysing more than 400 newspaper articles from *Helsingin Sanomat* Kärjä identifies four different censorship discourses related to music after the abolition of the Soviet Union. Kristine Ringsager investigates the use of rap music in social integration work among ethnic minority youth in Denmark. She discusses some of the obvious tensions between agencies that are ideally offered by such projects and the often provocative expressions promoted by the young rap performers themselves. In effect, Ringsager suggests that social work of this kind can be understood as a strategy of "repressive tolerance" and part of a dominant ideology. Johannes Frandsen Skjelbo explores the Danish debate following the near cancellation of a controversial concert with the Jamaican dancehall artist Sizzla. From a post-

colonial perspective, Skjelbo discusses the controversy in view of freedom of speech and the protection of minorities as well as notions of the black body and black music.

During the past years we have moved from a vague and, perhaps, too rigid understanding of music censorship towards a much broader idea of it. We have become acquainted with the many ways in which music censorship is articulated and exercised in different locations, as well as a variety of perspectives on the how it can be approached in scientific research. As guest editors of this special edition we hope these insights are useful to you as a reader.

Many people have contributed to the completion of this special issue. We would like to thank the authors for their inspiring article contributions, the peer reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions, Mads Krogh and the DMO editors for their patience and for supporting the idea of a special issue, NordForsk for funding the network over four years, and finally, RMC leader Annemette Kirkegaard and Jonas Otterbeck for excellent cooperation and the great atmosphere in the organizing committee.

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