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Pictures from Ethnia: Peepholes into otherness: A brief analysis of pictures used in Norwegian music textbooks for the 8th grade

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Abstract

In the Norwegian national strategy plan *Equal Education in Practice* it is stated that “To ensure proper subject and linguistic learning outcomes, it is also important that multicultural reality should be reflected in the teaching materials” (2007:16). This means that the multicultural society should also be reflected in textbooks for music.

This article deals with my own uneasiness when encountering pictures and text about non-western culture and music in some music textbooks. I will explore how otherness and exoticism can be said to represent an imaginary nation, a particular geographical place corresponding to a Western fantasy, which I will call Ethnia. I will use some of the pictures and a small passage of text from *Tempo* (Hjertaas and Johansen, 2000) and *Opus – Musikk for ungdomstrinnet* (Opus - Music for contemporary schools) (Andreassen, 2006), which are two music textbook series used in Norwegian schools (8th – 10th grade), to reveal how an educational discourse manifests itself when constructing and representing cultural otherness.

Music is traditionally one of the school subjects that uses textbooks less often, so it is important to look more closely at the praxis in classrooms if one wants to say more about the way these texts are experienced by the pupils. Nevertheless, I believe a textbook, containing a type of distilled knowledge, does tell us something; as monuments in a society’s discourse about ethnicity, youth culture, music and school. The aim is therefore more to investigate certain discursive formations within the Norwegian society, than to be specific in terms of what the textbook’s influence are or could be in the schools.

Key words: Music, textbooks, exoticism, praxis, multicultural education, educational discourse