

Review: Maria de São José Côrte-Real (ed.), ‘Special Issue. Music and Migration’, *Migrações. Journal of the Portuguese Immigration Observatory*, 7 (October 2010), 278 pp. ISSN: 1646-8104

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IN THE FACE OF THE DRAMATIC ACTUALITY OF THE NEWS (and cruel images) from the Mediterranean coasts, from the Balkans, from the US-Mexico borders, and from so many other places in the world, dealing with music and migration might seem an intellectual whim. Our studies are unable to enter deeply into socio-political issues, to work immediately in some way to solve the conflict between the world’s desperate South and its exploitation by an increasingly opulent and selfish North.

But, in fact, we do have something to offer. We can provide our small (or, depending on one’s point of view, substantial) contributions that come from our thoughts on the power of musical expression as the symbolic language *par excellence* which has ‘the contradictory attributes of being at once intelligible and untranslatable’ (LÉVI-STRAUSS 1964, p. 18). Far from being simple fun, music is something very serious which has a strong symbolic power. In fact, music has the capacity to bring into play affective and cognitive experiences by human groups and individuals. Through music, people construct and represent their manifold identities, think about the world around them, reflect on who they are, think about who they are and who they would like to be, and so forth. In a sense, music is a privileged means of appreciating and understanding pluralism in the world. Furthermore, music has the capacity to go beyond boundaries between people. As ‘our great *maestro*’ John BLACKING (1974) taught us, beyond the ‘surface’ of sound expressions (which are demonstrations of irreducible representations of cultural diversities), music is able to

configure forms of communication involving the deep structures of human musicality, that is to say, general behaviours and brain mechanisms of the psyche of a universal character. As traits shared by the human species, such 'deep structures' could be a possible explanation of the occurrence of music's evocative power in relations between cultures. They might qualify the ineffable certainty that music is able to open the way to a deep mutual understanding between people, regardless of the diversity of 'superficial' audible acts. In this way, musicological studies have a remarkable opportunity to go inside the essence of peoples' moving around the globe, to look in greater depth at the continuous processes of negotiations that inevitably occur in any meeting/conflict between human groups.

Indeed, I believe that this is also why the discipline's recent literature offers a wealth of contributions on issues such as migration and music, music and diaspora, music and interculturalism, music cosmopolitanism and so forth. For several scholars, it is a widely shared commitment, a sort of 'necessary duty' that lies within the greatest objective of the discipline, which is ultimately to try and interpret the contemporary world around us through music. However, there is a risk that this proliferation of studies may come to constitute a mere intellectual trend that trivialises the issue. By avoiding confrontation with theoretical matters, numerous (possibly, far too many) contributions are in the end sterile, anecdotal, mere descriptions of music expressions, narratives of blending, crossover musics and so on. This kind of oversimplification is mostly due to a sort of free use (or, better, an abuse) of the term *identity* in an essentialist logic. In fact, contrary to what is often taken for granted, the term *identity* itself does not explain anything. As an abundant literature teaches (REMOTTI 1996), *identity* in itself does not exist; instead, there are different ways of developing the concept of *identity* that, ultimately, is always built and determined, which means it is invented. Thus, since *identity* is always a construction, it must necessarily be explained each time it is used. Dealing with music and *identity* means trying to explain and interpret the mechanisms through which a human group chooses to represent (or imagines) itself, both internally and externally, through some musical characteristics, in a dynamic perspective of inclusion/exclusion which is in constant modification because it is collectively negotiated.

It means little or nothing to state that a certain musical expression has certain features because it is part of an *identity*, because it belongs to a given population or to a social

group, and so forth. In this way one ends up endorsing (albeit involuntarily) the idea that people possess certain characteristics merely because they are born (or brought up) in a particular place. It also means reinforcing a relatively simple (and anachronistic) worldview consisting of bounded and definite cultures, each of which has *its own* music, its own music identity—which is rather paradoxical in the era of the Internet and processes of de-territorialization. The so-called ‘mechanisms of belongingness’ are always fairly complex, if nothing else, considering that each group identifies itself with ‘more musics’ in the background of scenarios of global music cosmopolitanism (FELD 2012).

On the one hand, the free use of labels for some expressions of music could also be equivocal. For instance, labels such as ‘migrant music’, ‘hybrid music’, etc., embrace a sort of paradox. They are used metonymically to designate music contemporaneity, to define phenomena that are thus considered a ‘new’ condition of the music of our era: in so doing, they suggest that there are (or there could be) ‘non-migrant musics’, ‘non-hybrid’ (or ‘pure’, ‘authentic’) musics, that is to say, musics which should be ‘autarchic’, that is to say, perpetually settled in one place, and so on. In fact, ‘migration’ and ‘hybridization’ are basic features of music (and making music) in se, both in our time and in more or less remote past times: they represent a large paradigm for music research beyond contemporaneity. In fact, musics have always travelled along unpredictable paths in unforeseeable ways. All music practices have (more or less obviously) included unavoidable and indefinable elements that come from mixing with other practices, elements of acquisition/exportation, of syncretism between circulating components that are due to the unceasing migration, meeting/colliding between real men and women. The idea of a pure (authentic) music expression that is impermeable to the other musics with which it comes into contact is a theoretical abstraction. Surely, today, thanks to the media and because of the ease and extent of modern travel, musics migrate and hybridize much more than they did in the past (for an introduction to this issue RICE 2014). Therefore, if on the one hand, studies of music and migration (diaspora, cosmopolitanism, etc.) are important, urgent, and most useful for intercultural dialogue and cohabitation, on the other hand, simplification and fashionable clichés can nourish confusion and (even dangerous) misunderstandings.

A full and articulated awareness of the complexity of the ‘music and migration’ issue is certainly the basis of the special edition of the journal *Migrações - Journal of the Portuguese Immigration Observatory*, 7 (October 2010). The two different language

editions (Portuguese and English) have been edited in a careful and responsible way by Maria de São José Côrte-Real. Thanks to its solid theoretical-methodological approaches, the volume represents an extremely relevant and substantial contribution, capable of supplying a large variety of inputs through powerful essays, which are able to provide food for thought, also thanks to a large diversity of case-studies coming from around the world.

At the beginning of her introduction, Maria de São José Côrte-Real opportunely observes that ‘music and migration are challenging concepts, rich and dynamic as few others. They both provide the grounds for studying the junction of the two and a deeper understanding of each individually, as products and processes of human activity’ (p. 12). After a brief and efficient overview of recent ethnomusicological literature about the subject, underlining how the phenomenon has been studied with special regard to its urban dimension, the author illustrates some points that she considers pivotal in the current scientific debate and which, more generally, are at the basis of the different contributions in the volume.

The first one is ‘unmasking boundaries’. In truth, the idea of border is interconnected with identity, given that identity essentially works according to a principle of simultaneous ‘inclusion and exclusion’ on this side and on the other side of a limit. But boundaries are artificially made and move depending on power plays. While migration challenges *per se* the sense and the authority of a boundary, music practices effectively reveal its political nature, given music’s inherent power to step over any boundary and to address both the affectivity and the awareness of the people who are on the one and on the other side of the limits imposed by policy.

Inter alia, the studies on music and migration show how there is always something paradoxical in the concept of boundary in the studies on music, also considering the specific discourses on music makings. The idea of drawing boundaries between one musical expression and another (which is assumed by the concept of music *genre*) is in a sense a reproduction of a way of seeing the world just in terms of exclusive belongingness (or ownership) which is in contrast with the ephemeral nature of music. This paradox can sometimes deflagrate in fuelling controversial initiatives, such as for example, Unesco’s ambitious and grandiose ICH (Intangible Cultural Heritage) programme, which seems to be pivoted on a substantial idea of boundaries both between people and within music and more generally, those of so-called immaterial cultures (MACCHIARELLA 2011).

The other points highlighted by Maria de São José Côrte-Real's introduction concern 'nurturing participation', 'pacifying emotions', 'challenging categories' and 'renewing references', and ensure an adequate orientation towards the key topics dealt with by the great variety of contributions in the volume. The edition is articulated into three main sections: (1) research, (2) good practices, (3) notes and opinion: a tripartite division that illustrates a large 'variety of voices' which represents the real quality of the work. This variety is also seen in the music expressions that are taken into account, since they range from children's music practices to chamber music, within equally different contexts, including experiences in so-called popular, folk and art musics.

The first section consists of focal essays by some experts in the field. The power of music to carry multiple meanings is the core of the opening essay by Dan Lundberg, which calls into question the general issue of 'music and identity'. It starts from a paradoxical case of a musical instrument, the *zurna*, which is claimed as a characteristic instrument by the Kurds, although it is generally a symbol within the folk culture of the Turkish oppressors. It is a musical sharing which effectively—as Lundberg writes—shows that 'an important characteristic for a symbol is its potential of carrying multiple meanings. The condition for this ambiguity is in fact that the symbol's relationship to what it symbolizes is not based on resemblance [...]. The relationship between the symbol and the expression/event/sentiment being symbolized rests on the intersubjective interpretation of its meaning. But this ambiguity is also the reason for controversy' (p. 31). After examining other similar significant cases concerning groups from the former Yugoslavia and Ireland living in Sweden, Lundberg ends his essay by appropriately recalling that the component of individuality always included in any musical practice, all too often overlooked even by the specialist literature: 'Cultural expressive forms are constantly recreated in a synthesis between tradition, available media, technical resources and individual practitioners. It is easy to forget this, not the least in the field of ethnomusicology where we actually have a tradition of regarding music as collective and inherited and the musicians that play the music as conveyors of that belonging' (p. 42).

After a very rich and well argued essay by Silvia Martinez, pivoted on the theoretical paradigm of transnationalism as a tool to examine the music stimuli carried forward by the new Indo-Pakistani citizens in two different places in Spain (Barcelona and Las Palmas de Gran Canaria), Susana Sardo, addresses the issue of post colonial construction of identities.

Taking into consideration the Goan diaspora, she demonstrates how music can function as a sort of social ‘glue’ connecting diasporic communities. The concept of conciliation within the context of the asymmetrical power relationship of colonial frame is privileged ‘instead of hybridity that is based in the almost exclusive idea of analysis of the sound universe where it is possible to diagnose music ingredients from various origins—arising from a purely theoretical idea that those same origins can be circumscribed’ (p. 67). The importance of musical performance in the representation of citizenship is developed by Maria de São José Côrte-Real, as she deals with Fado performance among the Portuguese immigrants in the US in 1990. Fado is considered an extremely intimate expression, connected with the manifestation of a peculiar feeling of sadness: its forging might have the power to link the intimate and public spheres of identity. This is therefore a privileged case for the interpretation of music’s power in achieving tangible relationships between people within intercultural scenarios. Other manifestations of this power of music are developed in the essay by Jorge Castro Ribeiro about the Cape Verdean women’s *batuque* practice in Portugal, and by Jorge de la Barre who explores the complexity of the multicultural music scenes in Lisbon.

Ursula Hemetek, for her part, introduces some exemplary research projects that were carried out by Vienna’s Institute of Folk Music Research and Ethnomusicology (of which she is the director), and reflects on the specificity of urban ethnomusicology. Dealing with the image of Vienna as the ‘City of Music’, she gives significant demonstrations of identity constructions around music. The capacity of music to create ‘a place’ (sometimes in unpredicted ways with regard to common perception, as to some extent happens in Vienna) motivates a need to revise the concept of identity.

Two papers based on case studies carried out in Australia are by John Baily and Marcello Sorce Keller and offer manifold lines of thinking. Inter alia, in dealing with Afghan immigrant musicians, the first study offers a relevant example of the capability of diasporic groups to develop cultural innovations rather ‘than simply repeating what has gone before’ (p. 159); while the other, on the basis of extensive research among immigrant communities in Melbourne, emphasizes how music can also be an indicator of social marginality or malaise since ‘music behaviour has a lot to do with the way the people feel about their present self and their past. [...] And in conflict situations the extent to which the

opposite parties are willing to listen to each other's music tells us how deep-seated their enmity may be' (pp. 181-2).

The first section of the volume is brought to a close with other interesting essays by Dieter Christensen on music transformation in the migration process as regards Berlin's Kurdish community; Mark Naison, who deals with music creativity in connection with immigrant communities in the Bronx, and Jean-Michel Lafleur and Marco Martinello who examine the political involvement of immigrant music for electoral purposes during the 2008 US presidential campaign. Undoubtedly, this first section is addressed to specialists, although it could be useful recommended reading for a larger audience.

The second section is made up of short contributions concerning real on-going (or recently completed) projects about music and migration, which mostly deal with the meeting of music-makers in the wider Lusitanian region. Thus, for instance, there is the description of the association *Sons da Lusofonia* which brings together musicians from Africa, Brazil and Portugal around the experience of the Portuguese saxophonist Carlos Martins; a note about the interesting experience of the *MigraSons* programme on Lisbon's Radio Zero devoted to interculturality and cultural diversity, carried on by groups that differed in terms of nationality, spoken languages, gender, but there is also the presentation of a (very generic) project (BatotoYetu) by cosmopolitan dancers (born in Angola, studying in Lisbon, living in New York City) which aims to revitalize Angolan culture (including generalized phrases such as 'to instil a genuine spirit of peace in all of Angola' (p. 240)), and so on. These contributions outline a lively framework of initiatives, which are actually all very different from each other and which, frankly, do not have the same level of interest. However, they do give the reader a good idea of how the music and migration issue is felt and articulated differently in Lusitanian lands (lands that, as emphasized by many authors, have historically hosted interactions between human groups from different backgrounds).

The third and last part of the volume is just as rich and lively. Here we find a polyphony of voices including musicians, cultural agents, teachers, graduate students, project leaders, interested listeners and Portuguese travellers (or those operating on site). Inter alia, Maria da Luz Fragoso Costa and Maria de São José Côrte-Real offer an enthralling report of an experience connected with 'the pilot project Mussi an original scientific-pedagogical Portuguese conception, aimed to contribute to the optimization of the existing curriculum for the promotion of an innovative public school of quality and

dialogue within the community in the first cycle of Primary Education' (p. 263), whereas Luisiane Ramalho, a music teacher from Fortaleza, Brazil, explains her idea of an intercultural education process rooted in children's representations of music learning. Although the topics in this part have been dealt with a little too briefly and could perhaps have benefitted from a systematic dialogue led by scholars (the contributors are often vague when describing what they do!), the texts do at least represent willing attempts in the direction of mutual understanding through music making.

Indeed, it can be said that the volume fully achieves its planned objective to 'contribute towards the knowledge and relationships of ideas, persons and institutions in Portugal and in the world, stimulating dialogue in and between academic, social, political and artistic means on the use of music and migrant experiences for the integrated development on citizenship in the contemporary world' (p. 19).

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