

Music and Globalization: The Impact of Latin American Music in Japan

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Abstract

Nowadays, thanks to the spread of new recording technologies and sound production, the web of relationships between different and heterogeneous cultures is so complex that the ubiquity phenomenon of cultural transference must be reconstructed. Within this paper, the author describes and analyzes Afro-Caribbean music's trajectories and migrations around the world. Since 1930, thanks to the music industry expansion, Afro-Caribbean music is very well known all over the world. It has travelled from Jamaica, Cuba, Mexico and Puerto Rico to the rest of the world, passing through London and New York. This paper analyzes how Afro-Caribbean music has spread in Japan. The case of The Orquesta de la Luz is used as an example of how Japanese people relate to music from other cultures. As it can be seen, it has nothing to do with the simplistic interpretation of domination and homogenization of culture.

The concept of globalization has been in fashion for more than ten years now and, considering the case of satellite television and the world spread of contents that are standardized to a certain extent, the impression is to be experiencing a rising homogenization of culture. However, a subtler approach to the cultural processes that come from the so-called mass culture or modern popular culture would allow us to see the processes of differentiation, diversification, and cultural creation. Some years ago, the only voice that made itself heard in the media was that of fascination and of the imperative to join a globalized world where the MacLuhanian myth of the global village seemed to be a desirable utopia. Today, thanks to the popularization of some technological tools, other voices can be heard in the public space, voices that challenge and contest the model of global economic 'integration' as another fiction, as a process of exclusion that marginalizes the majority of the inhabitants of the planet.

The problem of the relations among cultures always existed. Nevertheless, given the process of industrialization and the development achieved thanks to new communication technologies, the problem has intensified. In this context, several theories aimed to explain the processes of interaction among cultures have developed. The simplest notion that tries to explain such process is that of cultural interchange. This theory defines in a quite flexible way the contact between cultures that interchange objects and interact in equal ways (Wallis and Malm, 1990:160-183). According to this approach, the emphasis is placed on the circulation of subjects and objects. If the theory is applied to the case of music, it could be said that the circulation and successive transformations that it has gone through relate to processes of human migration. This would be the case of the African music that arrived on the American

continent together with slave trade during the 17th and 18th centuries, and gave shape to an African Caribbean and African American music culture in permanent contact with local cultures. These music cultures many years later spread all over the world thanks to the development of the record industry.

Later in Latin America, during the 1970s, the notion of cultural domination developed. From this perspective, the culture of a group or a society prevails over another one (Wallis & Malm, 1990:160-183). This approach introduces the notion of power: the dominant pole is emphasized and this fact hinders the responses generated from the subaltern pole. The studies on cultural colonialism are included here, and in the music environment, their research purpose focuses on the power processes aimed at imposing a 'superior' culture while eradicating, in this way, the local culture. The notion of cultural imperialism, on the other hand, aims at defining a superior stage of cultural domination. From this view, cultural processes are analyzed from the economic point of view, as commodities; in other words, the economic and commercial aspects of the music industry are highlighted in relation to the phenomenon of cultural penetration.

Most recently, the notion of transculturization tries to explain the more complex ways of cultural interaction produced by the increasing concentration in the market of cultural commodities in the hands of multinational monopolies along with the development of networks and markets worldwide (Wallis & Malm, 1990: 160-183). Unlike the notions of domination and cultural imperialism, which consider linear interaction between cultures, this notion enables us to conceive the multidirectional interaction among diverse cultures in a back and forth process.

According to the development of different notions to interpret the cultural interchange processes, there is a difference between the approaches of the long-standing ethnomusicology and more recent approaches that consider that contemporary popular music is not an impure form of a tradition contaminated by modern Western culture. Instead, contemporary music is the result of cultural processes of music creation that have incorporated the resources offered by new technologies of sound within their reach, so as to produce music culture locally and spread it worldwide.

At the end of the 1980s, in a meeting held in England, a group of independent producers created the notion of *World Music* as part of a market strategy to overcome the problems they faced to introduce in the global market local productions from Africa, Asia and Latin America. As Pierre Edouard Decimus, a bassist of the Antillean group Les Vikings, stated, "to be acknowledged as Antillean, musicians should bring forth their 'difference' and, to compete in the international market, they must produce more technologically sophisticated music." (Jocelyn Guilbaut as quoted by Frith, 1999:19). Their individual sounds could, then, evoke places or communities of the Third World. But the quality of their sounds proceeds from the recording studios of the First World. In effect, the notion of World Music is based on an emphasis on 'difference', either by insisting on 'the other's different / exotic', that is supposed to be commercialized in relation to what is produced in the West, or by focusing on 'difference' in relation to the quality of the sound production related to the local production of limited resources.

The contradictions and inequalities of power and the multiple tensions between the first and the third world are expressed in the music industry as the effect of the globalization process. However, other dimensions of cultural interchange exist and must be mentioned. The increase of the commercial potential of Latin, African American, African Caribbean music

and their influence on Western music is the result of a 300-year process, due to emigration associated with slavery and, today, by the effects of poverty and inequalities that forced millions of residents of the Third World to move to the First World in search of job opportunities to survive. Lately, there has been an intense cultural interchange between the First and the Third Worlds in a double sense. On the one hand, due to migratory movements, the presence of the Third World and its music has been increasing in the heart of the main metropolis (Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Paris, and London, among others). On the other, conversely, by means of the technological expansion, there has been a spread of images and sounds produced from the first world to the third world. This reality creates the need to review the conventional version of cultural imperialism which considers the Center as the hegemonic subject that manipulates and exploits a passive Periphery. Despite the influence on local music exerted by border openings and cultural penetration, together with the incorporation of new cultural forms, the local music culture has been enriched by new forms of creation.

Nowadays, thanks to the spread of new recording technologies and sound production, the web of relationships between different and heterogeneous cultures is so complex that the ubiquity phenomenon of cultural transference must be reconstructed. To illustrate the complexity of such processes, I will describe some routes and migrations of African Caribbean music that circulated around the world. It departed from Africa and migrated to America and Europe, and coming back to Africa and from the West, it spread over the East. During the 20th century, African Caribbean music migrated from Jamaica, Cuba, Mexico or Puerto Rico to London and New York. From there, it spread over the rest of the world. In this process, it underwent multiple transformations.

Here, I would like to reflect on some conditions favorable to the acknowledgement and the circulation of Latin American music in Japan as a major gateway to the Eastern world.

The Trajectory of Latin American Music in Japan

The spread of Latin American music in Japan is a good example to understand the complexity of the processes of cultural interchange and interplay among cultures. It is certain that World War II was a turning point for the encounter of the Japanese people with Latin American music. However, the first contacts go back to the 1920s. In Japan, Latin American music was imported through the US and Europe, because there was no direct line of communication between both regions.

Hosokawa, in an article on the Orquesta de la Luz (The Orchestra of the Light), offers a brief history of the presence of African American and African Caribbean music in Japan, from tango in the 1920s to salsa and pop music today (1999:513-515).

Tango was the first Latin American music to enter Japan, and this took place thanks to the young elite that listened and danced tango in Paris in the 1920s. The French quintet Moulin Rouge Tango Band played for more than three years in the Florida Ballroom, Tokyo's most important ballroom in the 1930s. Nevertheless, choreographically speaking, the Japanese learned tango through British books. The British style of tango was less sensual than the French style, and better adapted to Japanese sensitivity. According to the Japanese, sensuality was vulgar. In Japanese ballrooms, customers would dance with professional female dancers, given the fact that in traditional Japanese culture women were not allowed to dance with male partners.

In 1935, rumba arrived in Japan. However, this music genre did not succeed as tango

because for the Japanese the rumba polyrhythm proved difficult to follow and impossible to dance.

During WWII, foreign popular music was banned and it was only in the 1950s that Latin American music revived in Japan. An interesting example is the success of Trio Los Panchos, in the 1960s, and later, Armando Manzanero and Luis Miguel, in the 1990s. The sweet and intimate songs of Los Panchos, together with the *requinto* penetrated the popular taste.

It could be argued that the success and spread of bolero and tango in Japan, just as the failure of rumba in the average popular taste, is due to the fact that Japanese popular music bears resemblance to the above mentioned genres, as they all are played in general by soloists in slow tempo and accompanied by guitars and orchestra. Notwithstanding, this last argument turns out to be oversimplified and quite superficial considering the penetration of salsa in the taste of one sector of Japanese audience, and the skillful interpretation of salsa orchestras composed of Japanese musicians.

Possibilities of Spreading Latin Music in Japan

Below, I will refer to the conditions favorable to the spread of Latin music and its acceptance by Japanese audiences, despite the deep cultural differences that exist between Latin and Japanese people. This expansion, as I see it, may be attributed both to the characteristics of the music language itself and to certain features of Japanese culture and its relationship to music.

In order to approach this problem, the example I will refer to is that of the Orquesta de la Luz, composed in 1984 by Japanese musicians who were fond of salsa. Before entering the band, they used to play and sing rock and African American music with other groups. The Orquesta de la Luz started its career playing in small clubs in Tokyo. However, as Hosokawa states:

The real success story begins in 1990 with their appearance at Village Gate, Palladium and the 15th Salsa Festival at Meadowlands Arena (New Jersey) with Fania All Stars simultaneously with the release of their debut album, *Salsa caliente del Japón*, that topped Billboard Tropical Chart for eleven weeks and soon gained the platinum album. They have since then gone on extensive tours to the United States, Colombia, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, Great Britain, France, Netherlands, Spain and released five albums (and one anthology) and one live video at the Madison Square Garden. In 1993 they were conferred the United Nation Peace Award. Such a brilliant international career of course echoes in Japan. ... It is the international reputation informed by mass media rather than the music itself that makes the band famous in Japan. (Hosokawa, 1999:512-513)

What was the reason of the success of the Orquesta de la Luz at the international level among Latin salsa groups and fans? How does this group appropriate Latin music? How do they manage to interpret salsa in a way that the Latin people consider to be an authentic expression? Was there a cultural 'mutation' of the Japanese group? Are the Japanese latinized? Or is their interpretation of salsa impregnated with a typically Japanese style? How do the Japanese relate to other cultures through their music?

According to Hosokawa (1999), there are different mechanisms through which the Orquesta de la Luz relates to salsa as a paradigmatic example of how the Japanese relate to other cultures from certain features of modern Japanese identity. In the following sections, I

will present the ways in which this particular strategies articulate with the specificity of music language.

Salsa: Music Language, Interpretation and Sense of Repetition

Among the authors that have reflected on the theory of music, there is a major uncertainty about its status as a semiotic system. In fact, there is agreement in considering music as a vehicle of meanings, but its nature as a language could not be positively established. The comparisons made between music and verbal language are either of a metaphorical or a negative nature.

Adorno (1956) compares music to verbal language through the meaning of 'interpretation' in both cases: "to interpret language" means to understand it, while "to interpret music" is to make it. Music interpretation is to play it; to correctly play music means to speak its language correctly. Thus, it is imitated, not deciphered. It is only in the mimetic praxis that music opens itself." (Adorno, 2000: 27)

Each performance of a repeating music work is a singular act, displaced in time and space, and while repeating and reminding salsa as a synthesis of a set of past performances, it is a new event whose artistic value is expressed through skill and mastery in each performance. In this sense, the *Orquesta de la Luz*, by means of a precise repetition of canonic norms of the music genre, makes of each expert performance an event. As Hosokawa affirms: "Only a handful of musicians can be canonical..." and according to the same author "*Canonization* includes freezing, authenticating, packaging and classicizing existent symbolic entities." The *Orquesta de la Luz*, as non-Latin, is forced to perform salsa within certain parameters considered legitimate. In effect, if the "*Orquesta de la Luz* subverts or transcends the canon, they turn to one non-Hispanic band playing non-Hispanic music. Being outsiders, they must show more loyalty to the Latin flag than Latinos do." (Hosokawa, 1999:520). Among the Japanese, certain standards of excellence are self imposed in order to reach levels of excellence in their music performance, in connection with the canons of a style that responds to identity characteristics of the Japanese. As part of these self imposed standards, the search for quality parameters in the recording itself is highlighted. Unlike independent Latin groups that lack enough economic resources and appropriate technology, the *Orquesta de la Luz* enjoys the latest technology in Japanese recording studios.

Salsa, Authenticity and Ethnicity

Salsa, as an African Caribbean music genre, is just one part of a wider cultural system that includes values, practices and myths among which the myth of authenticity stands out. According to Edward Bruner, "authenticity implies that someone has the power or authority to authenticate a representation. The concept of authenticity thus privileges one voice as more legitimate than another" (Bruner, 1994:399-400). In the world of Latin music, the myth of authenticity is closely related to ethnic, racial inheritance, and as a natural, innate condition. A typical concern among the Japanese people interested in Latin music refers to how to achieve authenticity in music expression without having an African Caribbean origin.

The members of the *Orquesta de la Luz*, aware of their non-Hispanic identity, have developed an authentication strategy consisting in respecting the rules of the genre to the greatest extent, without introducing style variations, refusing to include elements that could be associated with characteristic features of Japanese music. They "prefer to be exotic in appearance, not in sound" and they expect that their work will be publicly acknowledged "as

the authentic salsa performed by the exotic artists” (Hosokawa, 1999:526).

The Orquesta de la Luz has brought salsa to levels of orthodoxy and hyperrealism, and reached full acknowledgement of authenticity among Spanish-speaking communities that are fond of salsa. The way in which the Orquesta de la Luz relates to African Caribbean music culture is expressed in “the sincere respect to the model to simulate, the hard discipline to emulate with the foreign, the keen sense of authenticity” (Hosokawa, 1999:525), a paradigmatic expression of how Japanese people historically became acquainted with other cultures. The somehow unequal and conflictive relationship and interaction among cultures is not a new fact, resulting from globalization; actually, it has always existed. The ways in which local cultures change and transform in contact with other cultures are signs of the vitality of cultures and their forms of interrelation are unique and respond to the condition of each specific culture.

Conclusion

It is clear that, together with the development of new information and communication technologies, and with the expansion of the record industry, music has spread at great speed to all corners of the earth. No other technology has permeated society at such a rate and the rhythm of penetration has been dramatically accelerated. However, with the global expansion of the record industry, a new form of transnational culture is being developed. As stated above, it has nothing to do with the destruction and the subsequent homogenization of music contents or styles, but with the place that music takes in daily life. Steiner states that “The totally new fact is that today any music can be heard at any time and as domestic background music...” (Steiner, 1991:150). Rather than thinking in terms of how Western culture dominates, modifies or transforms local cultures, the question should be how the modern, rational, word-centered culture is being transformed into a sound culture where the verbal order no longer has the same place.

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