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Article

Music and Alterity Processes

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Abstract: The concept of alterity constitutes an important issue in anthropological research and, therefore, in the study of musical practices, as well. Without it, we could hardly understand other kinds of music situated in different spaces and time from the observer. In order to effectively approach these musical practices, we have to develop strategies to help us reduce as much as possible that which distorts the vision of the other. However, beyond the strictly epistemological and methodological issues, the study of music cannot ignore the ethical question related to the manner in which Western thought has understood and treated the other: through a hierarchical and stereotypical type of thinking based on the condition of otherness. Throughout the article, different alterity procedures are presented and discussed, such as synecdochization, exoticization, undervaluation, overvaluation, misunderstanding and exclusion. Taking these different alterity strategies into account may help us to better understand how the musical other is constructed, used and ultimately instrumentalized.

Keywords: music; alterity; otherness; ideology

1. Music and Alterity

We know that music practices are a reflection of collective identities, and at the same time, they contribute to building them. If music is closely related to identity concerns, then it will obviously play an important role in relation to how alterity is perceived. Alterity constitutes a central issue in anthropological research. We can even state that alterity, implying otherness and difference, is a prerequisite for that which we understand as ethnography ([1], p. 142). Alterity has been defined as

“the concept and treatment of the alien objectified other” ([2], p. 9). Hence, the concept of otherness also could easily be put in relation to the logic of colonization, in the broadest sense of the term ([3], p. 88). Otherness is based on the appreciation of differences. These, however, are not based on objective differences among human groups, but are the result of a socially subjective selection of them according to the narratives in question. Additionally, what always should be taken into account is that, very often, the power of ideology causes the same socially subjective perspective of us to be also shared by others, especially when we speak of Gramsci’s idea of hegemony. Otherness always implies a construction; a construction of the other according to the subject’s own perspective. Additionally, the process by which the other is constructed is what we call alterity. In the context of postcolonial studies, it was Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who coined the term othering or alterity in order to precisely designate the process whereby imperial discourses create their others: the colonized ([4], p. 156).

It is said that ethnomusicological epistemology is an epistemology of difference ([5], p. 153). However, if we understand musicology, *tout court*, as the study of music, it is obvious that the alterity issue is far from being only an issue of concern for anthropology. We know that what people understand as music or musical practices is not always the same depending on the group or society in which they live. Music is culture, and we are well aware that all cultural manifestations, and therefore music, are generated within complex social articulations. We also know that these social articulations, regarding their associated values, the worldviews that define them and their attained technical achievements, show such diversity within the wide spectrum of human societies that it is unavoidable to take into account the alterity concept. This concept is important because of three reasons. Firstly, because, from the conceptual point of view, we can hardly understand other kinds of music situated in different space-time coordinates from the observer, if we do not acknowledge that they belong to different social contexts from those of the researcher. Secondly, there is the methodological issue. It would not be possible to effectively approach these kinds of music and musical practices if we did not develop strategies to help us reduce as much as possible that which distorts the vision of the other, *i.e.*, of the other people who belong to different cultural frames [6] and are outside of the system that generates knowledge. The ethnocentrism inherent in every society also contaminates the research endeavors of the social and humanistic sciences [7]. Thirdly, beyond the strictly epistemological and methodological issues, musicology cannot ignore the ethical question related to the manner in which Western thought has understood and treated the other: through a hierarchical and stereotypical type of thinking based on the condition of otherness.

We can be sure that the fact of paying attention to the differences between people and also of categorizing and evaluating them in positive or negative terms belongs to the characteristic behavior of the human species. From the early beginnings of the history of musicology, we already find interest in accounting or describing music that was considered different or exotic and that was, therefore, understood as a cultural production of the other. In fact, this interest in the exotic is already observable even long before we can speak of musicology, both by theoretical thinkers (e.g., Michael Praetorius or Marin Mersenne in the 17th century) and composers (we only need to think about those who were inspired by Turkish music: Haydn, Gluck, Mozart, Beethoven, among many others).

The idea of otherness is thus intrinsic to the human being, but what interests the anthropologist and musicologist, as well, is not only the verification of the different alterities that give meaning to our own musical universe, but also how and why they are constructed, which kind of mechanisms are

utilized in order to construct this otherness and, above all, what is the use we make of these cultural constructs. The concept of otherness can be understood both from the psychological and social perspective. However, within this last area, it is clear that the idea of otherness is based on this minimal unit of thought, the difference that distinguishes us from the other. Additionally, what this opposition will say will be clearly determined by the subjective perspective of us, a perspective that is conditioned by cultural, social, economic and political realities.

From here on, we can apply all of those dichotomies that are valid for understanding the worldview of any society to this pattern. If we think about Western society, and taking into account the field of music, it is not difficult to think of the social reality of dichotomies, such as native/foreign, civilized/uncivilized, urban/rural, male/female, young/old, high/popular and dominant/subordinate classes. All of these dichotomies are expressed in music conceptualization and practices. Even a global category, such as humans, can be categorized in this type of opposition: human/non-human. Each person belongs to many different cultural frames [6], and for this reason, each one is a part of many us, and each of this us has an other; therefore, an otherness builds up through the corresponding alterity processes.

Any musicologist can easily realize that all of these aforementioned dichotomies have something to say about how music is understood in a particular area. All of these oppositions (and many others that we might also verify) are precisely based on the idea of otherness, an idea that is built according to the perspective and the interests of us, who may be the autochthonous people, the supposedly civilized, the people living in the city, the men, the young people, the dominant social stratum with their associated musical tastes or, even, as we said before, human beings. Thus, for example, rejection patterns have been configured based precisely on a certain perception of the otherness, which these oppositions mark. Certain music is rejected, because it is perceived as foreign, denigrated because it comes from the savages or infantilized for its peasant pedigree. Some musical practices are outlawed for women; old songs are despised for being outdated or people talk down about musical repertoires of lower classes. Additionally, to follow our examples, this otherness built in relation to nonhumans is also reflected in the field of music. In the West, it is usually thought that music is something exclusively for human beings: animals do not make music. However, there are those who deny this idea and accuse those who consider music only as something of the human species of anthropocentrism. That is why, for some time now, we have spoken of zoomusicology [8].

2. Alterity Strategies

Through the processes of alterity, we aim to understand the other in order to put it in a place within our experiential space that we believe corresponds to it. Additionally, in this process, there are different strategies or ways of approaching that we can detect. Therefore, for example, in the case of Western society, it is not difficult to observe throughout its history the following procedures when facing the other.

2.1. Synecdochization

This metonymic resource plays an important role in the characterization of the other. We find it when particular features are generalized. It is what happens, for example, when a particular group of

immigrants in general is associated with delinquency, by the mere fact that some of its members have committed crimes. It is very easy to detect this strategy of alterity in the field of musical practices; for example, when people respectively identify Spanish or Greek music with flamenco or rebetiko, or when African traditional music is understood as eminently rhythmic ([5], p. 55), or when many Westerners understand skin drums as the African music instrument *par excellence* ([9], p. 15).

2.2. Exoticization

This is the tendency to see a particular group through those cultural features or traditions that clearly diverge from that of the observer. In this subjective construction of the other, common aspects that both groups share are not taken into account or are minimized, and the real social relevance of the exoticized tradition is not relativized. Exoticization enhances that of the other that appears strange before the eyes of the subject. We just have to think about all that which implies Orientalism or many other “-isms” (such as ruralism, folklorism, gypsy-ism, which alludes to the romantic view on the Roma, *etc.*) to get a good idea of this strategy of alterity. In the West, exoticization is a very common feature of the social perception of different societies. Today, for example, in certain social sectors, when speaking about “African music”, it is very easily identified with the ceremonial and ritual music that accompanies or that accompanied rites of passage in the traditional life of the population. However, it is not taken into account that which Africans listen to and dance to with more conviction nowadays is not precisely the rhythms of the ceremonial music of their ancestors, but the international flow of popular music:

For the casual Western listener, it is easy to assume that all African music is folk music. The dominant Western vision of Africa as a backward, underdeveloped continent holds little room for the notion that Africa might possess either the capital or the sophisticated urban culture necessary for the development of a popular music in the Western sense of the term ([10], p. 40).

In a previous publication from some years ago [11], I already mentioned the fact that in the West, very often, we speak of “ethnic music” or “World Music” for African performers, although they may make music with pop, rock or jazz influences, and therefore, it is very easy to understand the Guinean musician Mory Kanté’s complaint about the identification that is made in the West between African music and tribal music: “People speak of African music as ethnic music, but it is also universal music” [12].

2.3. Undervaluation

The undervaluation of the other simply occurs when, according to the cognitive framework of us, determined features that have lower value than those of us are ascribed to this other. Otherness is frequently configured on negative value judgments in relation to the other. That is why we speak of ethnocentrism and all possible related terms, which account for socially subjective visions of the other by us: vertical ethnocentrism, Eurocentrism, androcentrism, anthropocentrism, *etc.* Additionally, in the history of musicology and music appreciation, it is not difficult to find blatantly ethnocentric judgments about the music of others. For Van Aalst, Chinese music was for instance “monotonous,

noisy, and disagreeable” ([13], p. 6). Additionally, Hans Christian Monrad, a Danish chaplain, who lived between 1805 and 1809 on the Gold Coast, wrote the following about the music of the autochthones:

Their drums are accompanied throughout the night by noisy singing, and when I was ill few things have tortured me more than all that together. An Englishman told me that when he was in the same situation, he became so enraged that he leapt up and shot into the noisy crowd ([14], p. 187).

For the Western case, the idea of progress can be, for example, a clear appeal to the undervaluation of the other. The evolutionary paradigm that characterized 19th-century anthropology would be hardly shared by current anthropologists, but this does not mean that the evolutionary perception of the history of mankind is absent in the minds of Western society. According to this unilinear scheme, Western society is understood as located in the spearhead of evolutionary dynamics, and therefore, cultural diversity is conceived of as a survival of previous phases. This clearly involves understanding cultural diversity as backwardness ([15], pp. 27–28), and given the positive value that we attach to the idea of progress, the undervaluation of what it lays behind is inevitable. For example, with respect to music from Senegal:

This music, monotonous and with little understandable rhythm, is accompanied by drumming intervals [...] If we add here songs, or rather screams made by the musicians and those who are listening, we will have the instrumental and vocal ensemble of these peoples; I really fear that they are still very distant from the Beethoven’s Symphony with chorus ([16], p. 528).

In the case of music, sometimes this undervaluation is what makes us even distinguish between what is considered true music and what is not, an idea that it is found in the following citations:

The Oorni [a one-stringed bowed lute] scarcely deserves the name of a musical instrument, and I should not have noticed it, but that it is common all through India [...] The sound of this music, if it may be called by that name, cannot be compared to anything better than the crying of a cat or of a wild beast; the same note is heard for several minutes, and is followed by another higher or lower, but always as shrill and monotonous. ([17], p. 30).

[...] civilized or wild people of China and Oceania, passionate about music, only made some progress because of the onset of the English and Spanish in these parts of the world ([16], p. 256).

The musical prehistory of Venezuela corresponds to the musical expressions of our aborigines, who since immemorial time expressed themselves in their primitive form. We have testimonies of chroniclers on the music of the Caribes, the Timoto-cuicas, the Arahucos and other indigenous nations. But actually, our aboriginal people did not have the harmonic sense that actually gave rise to the music when this sense appeared. The rhythm linked to the harmonic sense, *i.e.*, what is meant by true music, came to us from Spain ([18], pp. II, 303).

The undervaluation of the other, either in the area of “race”, ethnicity, gender, social class, *etc.*, constitutes the main strategy to morally justify exploitation.

2.4. Overvaluation

There is no doubt at all that in the alterity processes, undervaluation is more frequent than its opposite, precisely because of the inherent ethnocentrism that characterizes the worldview of any human group. However, this does not preclude that cases of overvaluation also appear. This, for example, is very observable in romantic views, such as the noble savage concept or the idealization of the rural world by urban culture. We found a very interesting precedent of the Rousseauian idea in a book written in the 17th century by Walter Hamond [19], a ship's surgeon, where he praises the virtues of the inhabitants of the island of Madagascar and considers them as the happiest people in the world (the book was designed as propaganda for England's efforts to occupy Madagascar) ([20], p. 112). In the field of traditional songs, for example, the overvaluation of the other peasant in relation to urban life is a constant theme among the folklorists; for Johann Gottfried von Herder "The folk is not the mob on the streets, who never sing or compose, but only yell and garble things" ([21], p. 23). Speaking of the rhythmic richness of "African music", it has been written, for example, that "Africans have not merely cultivated their sense of rhythm far beyond ours, but must have started with a superior sense of rhythm" (William E. F. Ward in [5], pp. 56–57), an assessment that, as we will see ahead, is directly related to different aspects of the processes of alterity.

In general, foreign music has always had a special appeal, and the novelty that it implies has caused, in many societies, that the music of other countries has served as an imitation model for their own musical practices. In many cases, certain aesthetics of others are assumed precisely to give an added value to their own music production. This can be found, for example, in folklorism practices, in Orientalism or in the same World Music label. There is also often overvaluation in the perception that we have of the other from whom we come. We mythologize the past, something that is easy to observe in the dynamics of folklorism. In addition, we must not forget that generally, in those cases where we must speak of Gramsci's hegemony, we will also find the overvaluation of the other dominant by the dominated group: "the black is bad, he cannot govern", whites do it better; this is what Inongo Vi Makomé, critically, puts in the mouth of one of the Guinean characters in the novel, *Rebeldía* ([22], p. 53).

2.5. Misunderstanding

This also constitutes an important element in the alterity processes. In the field of music, we find it in the misrepresentation of what other musical practices really are, mean or represent within the framework of another society. We merely need to think about what it means to submit the music from the other to the idea Westerners have about music as art, as something that is performed on a stage and is subject to a determined aesthetic appreciation, although there are repertoires that may not be originally conceived of for that kind of aesthetic appreciation. It is very easy that we fall into this trap in listening to, for example, Tibetan ceremonial music without being aware that this music is not conceived of to be played at a concert. For the Western taste, the monodic chants of Tibetan ceremonies may seem extremely monotonous and repetitive, and the instrumental music, which is inserted after every section into these songs, may appear noisy and pointless to the Western audience. However, it is not music that has been created to be performed on a stage, but is for channeling meditation and prayer according to a worldview that is very different from the Western one.

Misunderstandings of this kind, based on a clearly ethnocentric perspective, have been in the history of musicology, a quantitatively considerable source of not only distorted views of reality, but even unfairly denigratory opinions. People have considered, for instance, African music as “inconsistent”, simply because it ignores its creation processes (Richard A. Freeman in [5], p. 56), and misunderstandings easily lead to the aforementioned undervaluation. These different kinds of music are easily labeled as childlike, poor, monotonous, imperfect, noisy, shrill, nasty, chaotic, ridiculous, *etc.*, in short, as “unmusical music” ([23], p. 53), simply because they do not match the Western ideas of meter, melody, counterpoint or harmony [24]:

Their religious songs are no more than shouts and howls, accompanied by the terrible noise of a thousand drums, tambourines, trumpets and other similar instruments. Practically, it is only for these kinds of songs that Hindus make use of their music: the rest hardly deserves the name [of music]. Regarding their instruments, they do not express the delicacy of their taste. [...] I doubt that with such instruments, even if they would in their kind be as perfect as the best of those made in Europe, Hindus would be able to make a music which our music lovers were capable of enjoying ([25], pp. 3, 153–55).

The Soorna is our hautboy; but the Hindoos play it so ill, that they can draw from it only shrill and disagreeable sounds; the European, the most accustomed to the stunning of Hindoo music, cannot stand a concert of several Soornas accompanied with some of their other noisy musical instruments. Every Soorna exerts his whole strength and entirely after his fancy, without any respect to measure or harmony: at a distance, one would imagine that it was the roaring of a number of wild beasts ([17], pp. 78–79).

If, as we read in the previous paragraph, “Every Soorna exerts his whole strength and entirely after his fancy, without any respect to measure or harmony” or as we can read in the same publication as well “[...] there is nothing like regularity or systematic arrangement in the actual music of the Hindoos” ([17], p. 6), it is simply because the person who wrote this was unaware of the bases of the Hindu musical system, with much more complex patterns than the Western metric system, and he also universalized the importance that Western music attaches to harmony.

2.6. Exclusion

Through this process of alterity, the other is excluded from that which is considered to belong to us. This process is based on the vision of the other in a deterministic and homogenizing manner: according to a limited set of features that are defined or characterized by the aforementioned strategies of alterity. The ethnomusicologist, Susan Miyo Asai, gives us a good example of this concrete form of alterity when in an article, she described the rejection that a *nisei* (second generation of Japanese immigrants) had experienced as an opera singer. Despite being born and living in the United States, and having studied music in Chicago, he had many problems being taken seriously as an opera singer, simply because he was identified with a reified Japanese culture that has nothing to do with the Western opera world ([26], p. 434). In relation to African music, the musicologist, Kofi Agawu, complains of the fixation of the West on African rhythm. He asks himself what could be the reason for this persistent theme in Euro-American discourses and suggests that, in fact, this emphasis makes the capacity of

Africans in domains, such as harmony, melody and musical forms ([5], p. xx), invisible. That a Japanese group makes a Western audience vibrate at a taiko concert or a Senegalese entertains the audience with a kora is something that would not surprise anyone. However, today, it seems that it is still difficult for some people to accept the important role that Japan plays in the practice of the so-called “Western art music” (as well as other countries, like Korea or China) or that music created in African countries can go far beyond the old “tribal” music. After a performance of Asian musicians of classical music of Western origin, it is not strange at all to hear prejudiced comments as, for instance “they have a very good finger technique, but the spirit is missing...” In the West, people celebrate others’ music, which is presented within the World Music label, but on the other side, it is clear that World Music operates according to the dynamics of exclusion ([27], p. 398).

3. Some Conclusions

Michel Foucault, referring to the art of punishing in the regime of disciplinary power, spoke of five different operations that have no other purpose than to normalize: comparison, differentiation, hierarchization, homogenization and exclusion ([28], p. 183). They are exactly the operations that we also find in the different strategies of alterity processes that we have mentioned. We approach the other, comparing it to ourselves; we differentiate this other according to our interests; we hierarchize according to our own pattern of values, homogenize, and, if advisable, we also exclude. It is very easy to apply these five operations to all of the different examples that we have been seeing so far. The alterity processes, throughout essentialist criteria, naturalize features of the other by means of fixating stereotypes.

It is also not difficult to link alterity strategies with what, in relation to the reproduction of inequality processes, has been labelled as “oppressive othering”, in which the difference is basically seen as deficit. Oppressive othering may be understood as a set of mechanisms that defines another group into inferior positions, turns subordinates into commodities and creates patterns of interaction that reaffirm a dominant group’s ideology of difference” ([29], p. 423). Additionally, this can also be easily seen regarding music practices. There is Music with a capital M and other kinds of music, and among them, those groups subdued to alterity processes; other’s musical practices are commodified within folklorism and similar processes and patterns of interaction based on the “differences” that are created, framing this diversity within structures of social hierarchy. To assume the existence of “exotic” music under a multiculturalist perspective, which often happens in festivals or also in the World Music scene, means to use them to help give meaning to or to strengthen the ethnocentric conception of culture [6]. Very often, the rhetoric of an egalitarian multiculturalism hides the existence of a multiculturalism based on unjust inequality ([30], p. 8). When we speak of “multiculturalism”, we are in fact not just speaking of “cultures in contact”, but also of a field of complex narratives, which serve not only to identify one’s own group, as well as the other one, but also to strengthen a hierarchic *status quo* according to those who make the game rules. It is not very difficult to find examples that illustrate this argument. According to Charles Hamm, for instance, in South Africa, the fascist apartheid regime was interested in the ethnic music of the black population, while American pop music became a symbol of the political opposition ([31], p. 133). For the former socio-political South African system, it would always be

better to identify a subordinate group through “ethnic” music, because in any case, this music also has a subordinate role within the musical universe of modern society.

Due to the aforementioned characteristics of alterity process, the idea of otherness may very easily imply marginality. It is not for another reason that in the West, the histories of music of other societies are marginalized in Universal History of Music publications. Additionally, it is precisely because of this marginality that when, for whatever reason, the music of another penetrates the arena of that society that considers it marginal and puts into question determined values, the idea of otherness can also convey the idea of subversion. That is why people speak sometimes of music that invades or infects that which is considered their own musical culture:

People have to be aware that [the twist, Madison, *etc.*] are rhythms and manners strange to our [Spanish] musical culture, and therefore, they finally have to be rejected by our people, who feel uncomfortable with them in spite of the efforts of the propaganda and the snobbery in imposing them ([32], p. 316).

Additionally, the anti-Semitism in the U.S. of the twenties also charged against the “Jewish infection in our music”:

The insidiousness of the Jewish menace to our artistic integrity is due partly to the speciousness, the superficial charm and persuasiveness of Hebrew art, its brilliance, its violently juxtaposed extremes of passion, its poignant eroticism and pessimism, and partly to the fact that the strain in us which might head against it, the deepest, most fundamental strain perhaps in our mixed nature, is diluted and confused by a hundred other tendencies ([33], pp. 66–67).

Well known are also the critics in the past in many Western countries of the invasion of the so-called “Negroid” music:

We have to conserve European culture and protect it from the danger which comes from outside the West; [from the danger that] Mozart’s minuets which were composed to be danced by queens degenerate into orangutans’ dances ([34], p. 26).

Additionally, entering now in the realm of what Philip Tagg categorized as “the popular other” [35], when the musical practices of a sociological other came subversively into the field of the elitist Opera, as happened at the end of the past century with the well-known phenomenon, the “Three Tenors” [36], attitudes of rejection appeared: “What the ‘Three Tenors’ are doing is not art, it is business. [...] The public only expects the big concert of the Tenors as it happens with a rock concert. The opera is a more serious thing” ([37], p. 30), stated Mirella Freni. Additionally, Alfredo Kraus, referring to an opera spectacle that Pavarotti, Domingo and Carreras offered in June, 1990, in Rome’s open-air Caracalla Theater, said:

I don’t think I offend anyone in saying that the concert was more of a show of easy music for an easy public, a festive public that goes to a show to enjoy itself and may even be eating a sandwich while doing so [38].

Talking about ethnicity, Fredrik Barth, in his book *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, published in 1969, made it quite clear that ethnicity can be understood as “the social organization of culture

difference” [39]. This means that what defines a group is not only its internal characteristics, but also the diacritical features that this group shows in relation to others, and above all, how these differences are interpreted: that is to say, otherness. It is not too difficult to relate this reality to the idea of the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas that “Self is not a substance, but a relation” ([40], p. 20), to the thesis of Mikhail Bakhtin that meaning is established from dialogic situations that arise from differences [41], or to Georg Simmel, when he wrote that “the eye of a person discloses his own soul when he seeks to uncover that of another” ([42], p. 358). One understands oneself through the differences that are seen in others in a way that the construction of the subject is inseparable from the construction of the others. Additionally, these diacritical traits should not necessarily be based on objective differences, but on those that are built through the socially subjective process of alterity. In this way, we construct the other according to the manner in which we try to understand ourselves. Additionally, given the fact that, as the interactionist perspective teaches us, identities are built through the internal/external dialectic relationship ([43], p. 71), this is also how we construct our own identity, and this is how we construct our musical identities, as well. In James Clifford’s words: “It has become clear that every version of an other, wherever found, is also the construction of a ‘self’” ([44], p. 23).

Thus, in dealing with otherness, we can never forget that in addition to representing the other in one way or another, it can also be understood as a mirror that reflects the way we look at us. The blurry concept of “the West” can be hardly understood without this fact. Additionally, in the framework of hegemony: “alterity is the other against which the dominant group recognizes itself as dominant [...] the same is dependent upon the other to exist as the same” ([3], p. 89). Colonialism has not been simply a marginal activity on the edges of the civilization of the colonizing countries, but also fundamental in their own cultural representation ([45], p. 174). Additionally, if this other just ends up understanding the values of the dominant group that it helps to construct, not only as characteristics of this group, but as purported universal values or mankind, as well, we can think that the process of alterity has been fully effective in order to establish strong social hierarchies between us and the others. It is not enough within the alterity discourses to state the superiority of the colonizers. This superiority also has to be internalized by the colonized.

This clear relationship of complementarity of us with alterity is also important to be taken into account in order to find out which exact one we are talking about when we talk about the other. As a construct, this other may show very different faces. We can apply on this specific other both undervaluation and overvaluation strategies, always depending on the context in which we are interested in understanding this other. Thus, for example, while alterity strategies may overestimate a determined other in the festive context or musical practices, this same other may be underestimated in other areas of the social arena, such as those concerned with labor or policy. We just have to think, for instance, of the case of Spanish Gypsies who traditionally are exalted because of their gift for invoking the *Duende*—the spirit of evocation—but on the other hand, people close the doors on them to everything that goes beyond the entertainment world, something that is also the case in other countries with the Roma and other stigmatized collectives, as for example, it was with black people in the U.S. for a long time. People ascribe to them some positive values, as well, but it is not by chance that, normally, these values are far away from such values that modernity preaches:

When a stratified society is well established, people do not even bother to discuss their relative worth; they take for granted that members of minority groups are childlike—emotional, irrational and incapable of heavy responsibilities. But the characterization is not entirely negative; such people are also seen as warm, friendly, and considerate ([46], p. 96).

It is also not accidental that it is precisely in music where people more easily recognize the merits of many of these discriminated groups. Although, it is not true that people give music a discrete social importance, considering it basically as entertainment. That is why the sour criticism that the Senegalese musician, Youssou N'Dour, made some years ago is still valid today: “It seems to me contradictory this artistic interest in Africa, with the wave of racism that exists today in the world.” ([47], p. 47).

We may think that one of the problems of the concept of otherness, as we conceive it, rests on the very characteristic pattern of thought for the West, the binary opposition. Earlier, at the beginning of this article, I mentioned a series of oppositions that, among many others, we use to understand our society. These kinds of oppositions undoubtedly have epistemological value, but they also imply negative counterparts. The problem of understanding our social universe under these oppositions is not only the simplification and standardization of the terms that they enclose (that what is neither white nor black is either excluded or is forced into one of the two categories), but we always tend to rank them according to certain schemes of values. In this manner, such relative oppositions, such as up/down, high/low, right/left, more/less, as well as the more concrete ones, such as black/white, male/female, native/foreigner, *etc.*, are put easily and automatically in correspondence with oppositions, such as superior/inferior, good/bad, better/worse.

In the West, people understand these oppositions in the form of head-on collision. Derrida, in his general strategy of deconstruction, criticized the logics of binary oppositions, such as the ones that we find in Western thought. In these oppositions, one term is always given a more privileged position than its opposite, something that is characteristic of ideologies ([48], pp. 56–57); that it is a particular way of understanding reality that is proven not only through the criticisms that post-structuralism thought has made on the Cartesian vision of the world, but also through the worldviews of other societies in which this dichotomous thinking can be expressed in a different way. We have just to think, for instance, of the well-known *yin-yang* dichotomy. In this case, the difference is remarkable, given that this dichotomy implies complementarity more than shock or confrontation, something that even clearly suggests its visual representation: the sinuosity of the line that separates the white from the black invites one to think about this dynamic relationship of complementarity, while the dots of different colors, which are in each of the two fields, remind us that one is also included in the other. However, this binarism, which is characteristic of the otherness discourses, cracks when we fix our attention on the reality of everyday life. We already know that the other, when we abandon the field of the abstract and the stereotypes and when we concretize this other in some determined person, can be less other. In the same way, that which we consider part of us, when we least expect it, can defy us with the most abject otherness. All of this makes us think of the extremely fluctuating nature of everything that we conceive as otherness. It is simply the result of an ongoing dialectic game between the other and the us, a game that is also marked by the contingency of discourses and the contradictions inherent in an

always hybrid reality in which the ambivalent identities simply belong to the logic of the reality. This was made manifest very well by Homi Bhabha, when he spoke of the *Third Space* [49].

One of the clearest consequences of the social relevance of these different processes of alterity for the current music scene is the conceptualization of labels, such as ethnic music and World Music, labels that serve not only for alterizing a music production, but also for alterizing the people who are represented through this music, and at the same time, they serve to remind us of the existence of a solid border between the West and the rest, a border that has its expression not only in the political and economic sphere, but also in the symbolic dimension of cultural productions. The concept of World Music is used to sing diversity, but at the same time, to frame this diversity within structures of social hierarchy. That is why we can understand it as “that insulting term for non-Western pop” [50] or consider this “trade in World Music” as a “reminiscence of the colonial trade patterns” ([51], p. 167). Through the narratives that are implicit in these tags, a static and reified vision of the culture of those who we try to know better through music is transmitted, and at the same time, this strengthens the Western hegemonic vision of the world. All of this has obviously to do with what currently is criticized as the “ideology of difference” ([5], p. 64).

Today, anthropologists are well aware that all systems of otherness are structures of identity and difference that have more to do with the establishment of identity than with the empirical reality of the other ([2], p. 12). It is precisely for this reason that, when in the context of music pedagogy the concern is to learn about other music cultures, it is not enough to teach students about specific knowledge on musical practices different from ours in order to develop an effective multicultural sensitivity. It is necessary to carry out a systematic introspection in relation to our own music culture, not only to become aware or deconstruct its ethnocentric components, but also in order to know our own assessment limits of the other [52].

If we assume that the alterity concept is important in order to understand musical practices in today’s world, it is worth taking into account the aforementioned alterity strategies: synecdochization, exoticization, undervaluation, overvaluation, misunderstanding and exclusion. In a world marked by powerful globalization processes and social inequality, these strategies help us to better understand how the gaze between the one and the other is constructed, used and ultimately instrumentalized in order to consciously or unconsciously maintain old structures of the logic of colonization.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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