▼ 'MULTICULTURALISM'

Excerpts from the lecture *Are our multicultural music practices a Trojan horse for Ethnocracy?* given in Nitra, Slovakia, by **Dr Josep Martí i Pérez** of the Consell Superior d'Investigacions Científiques, Barcelona

'Multicultural' musical festivals are often given in Europe, especially in countries with high levels of immigration. In Catalonia this kind of festival already has a tradition, where space is made for musical representations of various groups, differentiated through ethnicity criteria. In addition to what people consider autochthonous of Catalonia, the public can find music from other Spanish regions and from foreign immigrants.

The term 'multiculturalism', first used in the sixties, initially alluded in a quite neutral manner to the contact between different cultures and more specifically to the different cultures we find within a state[1]. Afterwards the term involved the idea that different coexisting cultures deserve the same respect and academic interest[2]. The basic idea or ideal is the harmonious coexistence of groups culturally or ethnically differentiated in a pluralist society[3], the mosaic metaphor as understood in Canada for instance, which contrasts strongly with the old 'melting pot' idea.

When people define multiculturalism they normally consider that this implies ideology[4]. Multiculturalism is considered the panacea which assures the right of difference for various groups composing a given population. But in spite of good intentions, many multiculturalist policies have had negative results, further isolating minority members instead of facilitating their integration in society[5], or they have even produced within the population a certain aversion to difference[6].

The main problem of multiculturalism as a concept lies in the idea of the culture on which it is based. Evidently, multiculturalism implies believing in the existence of concrete cultures applied to communities which we often conflate with the idea of state or nation.

It is the same when we speak of 'musical cultures'. In our discourse about music, the ethnicist component always carries weight. People speak of 'German', 'Italian', 'Basque', 'Catalan' music, etc. in the same way that we speak about 'culture'. In fact, we know that the dynamic of musical phenomenon rarely has much to do with ethnic or political boundaries. Musical styles, ideas or instruments cross boundaries very easily. But given our ethnocratic concept of society, we label them according to social constructs named 'nations'. Thus we speak for instance of 'Catalan musical culture'. Obviously, this idea goes nowhere near including all musical practices with relevance for Catalan society, but only those which according to very concrete ethnicist narratives 'deserve' to carry this label. Many of these kinds of music will have a muted social relevance and will only be valid for a limited ambit of Catalan society, but nevertheless they carry a label as if they concerned the whole population.

The idea of the existence of a national musical culture always involves two elements which actually distort reality: First, this musical culture will only be a small part of the total musical culture of the population. Second, people assign social relevance of this musical culture to the whole population which occupies a given territory. We speak - as if it were quite natural- of 'Spanish', 'German' or 'Catalan culture'. This ethnocratic view divides the globe into discrete units assigned to people (Volk), nations or states; as if culture could be fragmented in these categories and each resultant fragment were an organic and systemic unit. If we take Catalan society, we could say that Bach, the Beatles, salsa or tango music are socially relevant although they are elements which

have not been generated within this construct called 'Catalonia'. The fact that the ideas of 'Catalan culture' and the 'culture of Catalan people' are not the same is the origin of many troubles, and the reason why nobody has dared to define 'Catalan culture' in the same way nobody could define what Catalan music really is.

Just as music takes part in the different narratives through which we construct our identity, music is also the bearer of narratives regarding 'the Other'. Ruth A. Solie writes:

> "The question, then, is not 'Is there difference?' or 'What's the difference?' but, rather, 'How do social life and culture construct the differences that all of us understand and enact in daily life?',... if identities are a matter of social role, we may able to study the mechanisms -including musical ones- by which those roles are delineated, communicated, learned, and perhaps challenged."[7].

The musicologist Maria Elisabeth Lucas, in a study of the representations of Brazilian music in the North American mass media, illustrated the reality of narratives regarding 'the Other' through music[8]. All these narratives revolve around representations based on metaphors like 'body-nature/culture'. Brazil is musically translated through the personification of the myth of 'Latin lover', the 'old seducer' which produces music able to offer 'exotic aural delights', 'seductive sounds', 'spicy melodies', embodied in 'sensual ryhthms'. All this contrasts with the ideal

view which North American society (white, English speaking and evangelic) has of itself.

Such narratives clearly show acceptance of these different groups but always assigning them a relegated place within society, and above all at the margin of power structures.

To assume the existence of 'exotic' musics under a multiculturalist perspective, such as often happens with the *world music* phenomenon, means to use them to validate or to strengthen the ethnocratic concept of culture. When we speak of 'multiculturalism', we are not merely speaking of 'cultures in contact' but of a field of complex narratives which identify one's own group as well as the other, and strengthen a hierarchic *status quo* according to those who make the game rules. It is not difficult to find illustrations of this. According to Charles Hamm, in South Africa the fascist apartheid régime was interested in the ethnic music of the black population while American pop music became a symbol for the political opposition[9]. For the former sociopolitical South African system it would always be better to identify a subordinate group as 'ethnic', because in any case, this music also has a subordinate role within the musical universe of modern society. Mory Kanté, a musician from Guinea today living in Paris, said that, "We have to end with the image of African musicians as bound to tribal music. [...] People speak of African music as ethnic music, but it is also universal music"[10]. This trap is implicit in the philosophy of multicultural festivals and in the idea of World Music. So for instance, when the singer from Mali Salif Keita plays in Barcelona, you read the review in the newspapers under the label of 'ethnic music'[11] while other musicians from the First World take the labels of 'rock', 'pop'

or simply 'song'. The term 'ethnic' applied to music always suggests the existence of superior and inferior forms[12].

Susan Olzak, in her study *The dynamics of ethnic competition and conflict*, concludes that, "ethnic conflicts and protests erupt when ethnic inequalities and racially ordered systems begin to break down"[13].

One manner of avoiding conflict in order to maintain a given *status quo* is to remember that there are differences. The idea of difference is the key in this kind of discourse, but we should consider that:

> "Difference is not 'cultural obviousness' such as black versus white or Latino versus European or Anglo-American; rather, differences are historical and cultural constructions"[14].

Within the current pluricultural scene, the comment by Yossou N'Dour is salutary: "It seems to me to be contradictory: all this artistic interest for African things with the racist wave that today exists in the world"[15]. Within the multiculturalist spirit, African Art is appreciated today more than ever. But this does not exclude racism. Multiculturalism, through the explicit recognition of culture as a label, strengthens the old hierarchic structures of society. In Spain, people praise the musicality of gypsies but do not like to live near this stigmatized group. As Todorov says, "while racist behaviour abounds, nobody declares himself as having a racist ideology"[16].

We assign to certain collectives the social compartment of 'solidarity' or 'tolerance', but we do not always agree with them when they try to claim a place in society beyond the place we have reserved for them.

In the multicultural festivals which take

place in Catalonia we find representations of different groups: Latin Americans, Philippines, North Africans, Subsaharan Africans, Kurds, etc. - all kinds of people who come from the so-called Third World. But we hardly ever find representatives of the German, French or Japanese collectives, some of which are larger than many 'Third World' groups in Catalonia. For this, we have the easy explanation that these festivals are organized under the motto of solidarity. But this special use people make of the term 'multiculturalism', always applied to very specific immigrant collectives, is suspect.

'Multiculturalism' is applied especially to groups who have traditionally been victims of racism. But what at a first sight can seem a laudable social answer to injustice, shares the main feature of what it attempts to fight: the differentiation, the distribution of population into first class and second class citizens. People do not speak of 'race' because of the strong social discredit which this term has accumulated through history, but speak instead of '(national) culture' or '(national) musical culture'. This notion of 'culture' will never be the neutral concept of culture from an anthropological point of view, but will be conditioned by particular ethnicist narratives. This idea of culture implies the adscription to a group. Its social functions are not so different from the functions the concept of 'race' once had. In recent times more and more specialists speak in today's culturalist discourses the phantom of the old racism:

> "...der klassische Rassismus in Gestalt der alten biologischen und anthropologischen Positionen zurückgeht [...] An deren Stelle jedoch sei während und nach der Zeit des Thatcherismus

zunehmend eine neue 'ethnozentrische' Komponente getreten: die These von der 'Unvereinbarkeit der Kulturen'"[17]

'Multiculturalism' can give the impression of living in an egalitarian situation, but it is far from the case:

> "Such an understanding of difference implies, as Iris Marion Young notes, 'coming into the game after the rules and standards have already been set, and having to prove oneself according to those rules and standards'"[18]

So as Berger and Luckmann said, the apparition of a symbolic universe as an alternative is a threat because it demonstrates empirically that our universe is not inevitable[19]. But when we have to live together with this new symbolic universe or when this coexistence is even desirable for very concrete reasons, for instance economic ones, one way of neutralizing it is to subordinate this symbolic universe within our hierarchy, so this system is accepted as a different one, but its destabilizing potential disappears when people, within the cognitive orientation of the receiver society, give it an inferior value to their own system. We have a clear example in the gypsy population, which bears a symbolic universe quite different from other citizens' and which is easily perceived as a threat for the general value system. The social status which people give to the gypsy neutralizes, nevertheless, the subversive potential implicit in his representing an alternative symbolic universe.

The idea of multiculturalism serves to legitimize social constructs which are used to

strengthen differences which are progressively weakened through globalization processes. It implies the existence of 'cultures' from our immigrants which will always be seen according to our particular and biased perspective. Our multicultural musical festivals contribute to legitimizing these constructs.

1.. Fred L. Stanley, "multiculturalism", in Michael Payne (ed.), *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory* Blackwell 1996, p. 353
2.. Cfr. Ibidem, p. 354
3.. Cfr. E. Cashmore, *Dictionary of race and ethnic relations*, London/New York 1994 (1st edition: 1984), p. 216
4.. Cfr. E. Cashmore, op. cit., p. 216
5.. Cfr. Steven Vertovec, *Multiculturalism, culturalism and public incorporation*, «Ethnic and Racial Studies», 19, 1996, p. 49-69
6.. Cfr. Peter McLaren, "Multiculturalism and the postmodern critique: toward a pedagogy of resistance and transformation, in Henry A.Giroux and Peter McLaren (eds.), *Between Borders. Pedagogy and the politics of cultural studies*, New York 1994, p. 195
7.. Ruth A. Solie, "Introduction: On 'Difference'", in Ruth A. Solie (ed.), *Musicology and difference Gender and sexuality in music scholarship*, Berkeley, 1993, p. 10
8.. Maria Elisabeth Lucas, *Wonderland Musical: Notas sobre as Representaçoes da Música Brasileira na Mídia Americana*, «Trans. Revista Transcultural de Música», http://www2.uji.es/trans.
9.. Umberto Fiori, "Populäre Musik: Theorie, Praxis, Wert", in Günter Mayer (ed), *Aufsätze zur Populären Musik*, Berlin 1991, p. 133 (pp. 130-139)
10.. Marino Rodríguez, *Entrevista a Mory Kanté*, «La Vanguardia», 15.2.97, p. 45
11.. See for instance «La Vanguardia», 21.5.1997, p. 58
12.. Cfr. Keith Swanwick, *Music, mind, and education* London/New York 1988, p. 103
13.. Susan Olzak, *The dynamics of ethnic competition and conflict*, Stanford 1992, p. 3
14.. P. McLaren, op. cit., p. 205
15.. «La Vanguardia», 18.7.95, p. 47
16.. Tzvetan Todorov (ed), *Cruce de culturas y mestizaje cultural*, Madrid 1986, p. 11
17.. Wolfgang Kaschuba, *Kulturalismus: Vom Verschwinden des Sozialen im gesellschaftlichen Diskurs*, «Zeitschrift für Volkskunde» 91/1, 1995, p. 37
18.. Peter McLaren, op. cit. p. 204
19.. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *La construcció social de la realitat*, Barcelona 1988 (1st original edition: 1966), p. 154

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