

“Cutting across the map”

*Toward an ecology of knowledge applied to
the study of ethnomusicology in south Atlantic*

Susana Sardo,

Portugal, University of Aveiro - INET-MD



Throughout several centuries, people and cultures from the Iberian Peninsula, Africa, South America and the Caribbean have circulated within the South Atlantic region. From the first attempts at ocean navigation up to the age of cyber network communication, human diasporas and the associated expressive behavior were influenced by ideological environments, geopolitical strategies and technological developments.

Music and dance accompanied their practitioners crossing the Atlantic sea in both directions promoting new sound encounters and a particular sonic and ecological landscape. Since the late 19th century, on both sides of the ocean, ethnomusicology, and other social sciences and humanities, have attempted to describe, analyze and interpret the repercussions of those transatlantic transits, and their testimonies expressed in music and dance. However ethnomusicologists who were with the study of these processes have rarely contrasted the epistemologies and the theoretical and methodological frameworks that local ethnomusicologists use to deal with music and dance in transit.

The purpose of this paper is to suggest, based on the analyses of different kind of approaches applied to music, a dialogue between ethnomusicologists from the Iberian Peninsula, Africa, and South America in order to (1) discuss local developments of ethnomusicological thought and interests, (2) acknowledge the influence of local history and economy on those developments, (3) consider the influence of the academic mainstream on local ethnomusicologies, (4) recognize

local theoretical approaches developed on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, (5) understand local strategies of knowledge validation and the definition of the contexts and priorities of the subjects studied.

Inter-oceanic knowledge and the concept of South Atlantic

The idea of a South Atlantic strategic region has been raised into the daily life discourse since the last 20 years, both for political and economical reasons. The fundamentals to define the concept are based on the geo-strategical proximity of the countries bordering the Atlantic Ocean and also the common history shared by African and American nations, related to the strong circulation of people in the last 5 centuries.

Meanwhile, this reality – the south Atlantic - has been also the argument of a new theoretical inquiry in the domain of the social sciences, anticipated by Paul Gilroy under the name of *black Atlantic*. According to Gilroy, Black Atlantic can be defined:

“on one level, through [a] desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity. These desires are relevant to understanding political organizing and cultural criticism. They have always sat uneasily alongside the strategic choices forced on black movements and individuals embedded in national and political cultures and nation-states in America, the Caribbean, and Europe (Gilroy 1992:19)”

Gilroy’s proposal is based specially on historical evidences centred on what he calls “black movements” defined by the use of the *dispora* concept. These movements are responsible for a kind of *double conscientiousness*, a process that creates individuals always *in between* - if we want to remember Bhabha’ proposal - in a permanent dynamic of identity negotiation that generate a *changing same*. Gilroy argues that black people crossing the ocean produced a world of “stereophonic, bilingual or bifocal cultural forms” (1992:3), which is no longer a racial property but a reality that creates universes of feeling, communication and remembering, common to all the black Atlantic world. In this sense, Gilroy maintain that the heuristic of Black Atlantic is also a

confrontation with an unfinished sort of identity which is, in fact, a performative reality always in transit, always in construction.

It's probably because of the performative dimension of the concept that music, as a "preeminent expressions of human consciousness", is on the stage of Black Atlantic. However, Gilroy's approach is based especially on the evidence of the products like, for example, the evidence of an African-American music and the way it was created as a hybrid form resulting from the black movements. He assumes that music remains along history, as the only way of communication through people under colonial slavery, once forbidden to speak, pray or think in its own mother tongue. As a result, Atlantic is a ship for merging musics where black people, "striving to be both European and black" (Gilroy 1993:1) could safeguard their own voices and inspiring new ones in both sides of the ocean. In this sense, we may say that all of us are now both Europeans and black as all of us are sharing Jazz, hip-hop or Rap.

But, can we reduce Atlantic transits to the relationship of black movements and European colonial and postcolonial reality? Can we analyse the Atlantic exclusively according to its blackness? Isn't this approach a *white mythology* which analyses Atlantic as a north reality centred in Anglophonic people who, in this case, are transformed in "the European"? And, finally, isn't this discourse, which tries to offer a voice to the black people, a way to elude them to become the subjects of their own histories?

In fact, as Robert Young points out, to write about history is also to write about "*the lapses of history itself. Of spaces blanked out by that ruthless whiteness*" (Young 1990:1). And, I believe, to write about Atlantic is also to write about a cosmogonic reality, which is different when we speak about north or south or when the geographical cartography doesn't correspond to the cultural one. In fact, black movements were not made independently. Portuguese and Spanish were a very important piece of this puzzle since, unfortunately, they dealt with the terrible story of the "discoveries", creating, in 1494 a cartography of power based on the Tordesilhas Treaty. After Tordesilhas the planet was politically divided in two, generating what today we still call Latin America where Portuguese and Spanish languages remain as the official languages of the countries it comprises, or the PALOPS (African countries of Portuguese official

language). As a result, we can also speak of another cartography of the Atlantic: the one created by the transits promoted by the Iberian Peninsula in contact with Africa and South America, which I call South Atlântic.

Meanwhile, the mapping of knowledge, which has been bleached by the hegemony of Western theory, based on the political interests of Europe and on the strategic benefit of the North American academy, has no place for what Walter Mignolo defines as *colonial difference*, when referring to the Latin America's postcoloniality. Unfortunately, we still look at this reality with the eyes of the north and, as Young says, we persist in analyzing it through a white mythology where Europe is represented by those who think and communicate in English, both in Europe and North America.

This paradigm, which theoretical criticism has been discussing in the last 10 years under the label of Occidentalism (Dussel), Neo Colonialism (Mignolo), or Abyssal Thought (Sousa Santos) emerged as a direct consequence of post-colonial theory and the conscientiousness of the permanent colonial condition of the whole planet, to what Anibal Quijano calls *Coloniality*. Also the conscience that other knowledge must be taken into account to register, analyze and interpret the political, social and cultural practices performed during the imperial encounters, which creates an heterogeneity of discourses and inter-subjective relationships. This means that for a democratic debate and a new ecology of knowledge we need to consider and I quote, "*marginalized imaginaries and alternative epistemologies, surviving and emerging subjectivities, and modes of representation which exist in colonial and neo-colonial societies*" (Moraña, Dussel and Jáuregui 2008:11). This includes the knowledge produced by local intellectuals and thinkers, and also the analysis of multiple narratives emanating from the material and expressive culture, and constructed from indigenous tongues and cosmologies, by people who until now have been relegated to the category of *people without history* confined to their status of being "exotic" and unable to think about themselves.

This *cultural semiosis*, proposed by Mignolo, with the aim of "*descentering and multiplying*" the centers of power and the production of knowledge" (Mignolo 1992), is the core of what Boaventura de Sousa Santos call the "ecology of knowledge" based on the idea that knowledge is always a inter-knowledge and

that the post-abysal thinking is premised by the idea of the epistemological diversity of the world, the recognition of the existence of a plurality of forms of knowledge, beyond the scientific one (Santos 2007, 2009).

How does music allows us to understand this reality?

How ethnomusicology might contribute to the new ecology of knowledge?

And how can we look into the South Atlantic as a *locus of enunciation* where music cuts across the map and designs a new cartography of knowledge?

Music ecology in South Atlantic

Since the Portuguese and Spanish opened the routes of colonization, South Atlantic has been a bridge of love and hate, of conflict and conciliation, of forgetting and remembering, of lost and hope. The music was always present, whether traveling with the colonizer as a way to extend the country of origin, or as an instrument of colonization, whether as a threat to their own action when revealing differences, whether also as a form of resistance to the colonizer and a dignity guardian for the submitted people when forbidden to think, speak or act in their own language.

The Colonial Difference (Mignolo) of Africa and South America also creates different answers to music in local cultures. While Africa was a place of exploitation, as a slave warehouse and, after the slavery abolishment by the Portuguese in 1888, as a place for the economic enrichment of the settler, South America represented a land of hope, a place to rebuilt home abroad both for the colonizer as well as for Europeans and other people who, during 19th and 20th century, creates a strong route of migration, transforming Latin-America in a thoroughly cosmopolitan space. As a result, *post-colonia* situation of the colonized countries, is a mirror of its past: while in Africa the settler massively abandoned the ex-colony, in South America, the settlers remain as a “native”, fighting for the ex-colony as their own homeland. In a generic analyses and, I believe, dangerous, how does music express this situation?

Referring to the American and African countries of Portuguese Official language, we may say that music expresses a very diverse reality as a consequence of the

colonial and post-colonial past of those countries. In both cases, indigenous music and dance still remain within their regular context of performance and are frequently re-contextualized by folclorization processes promoted by governmental institutions. They are always sung in local languages. At the same time popular and traditional music, which emerged in urban or non indigenous environments in different historical moments, is sung in Portuguese, in the case of Brasil, and almost exclusively in local languages, in the case of Angola, Mozambique or Cape Verde, for instance. Developed since the end of 19th century in both sides of the ocean, traditional and popular music has been disseminated as an expression of identity differentiation, using music industry as a strong way of spreading and the world music label as an opportunity. In both cases they intend to design local specificities while representing national diversity and frequently – as in the case of Angolan Semba, Brazilian Samba, Guinean Capoeira, Portuguese Fado or Cape-Verdian Kola San Jon – they are locally understood by institutions or even their performers, as hybrid musical and dance expressions where Europe, Africa and indigenous music meet. This is, of course, an essentialist analysis, which I will not discuss here. In fact the concept of hybridism, in music, revived by the post-colonial theory, hides all the conflict and conciliation processes that contributed to the performative construction of music and, in my opinion, amplifies the gap between hegemonic and subaltern discourses as the concept of hybrid always refers to one single direction: the settler influencing the colonized. However, is evident that popular music, both in African countries as well as in Brazil, have adopted western functional harmony which is, we may say, *creolized* in order to create a musical accent that intends to represent the country's soundscape identity.

The panorama that I dangerously tried to describe above suggest that South Atlantic is a place of multiple encounters, where human creativity gave rise to a diversity of musical vocabularies while mimetizing, excluding, inventing, safeguarding, transforming or merging music and dance behaviours. Through music, we can achieve distinct forms of meaning construction for life, finally recognizing that living together while living differently is a real possibility or, as Small certainly said, it's possible to musiking together while musiking differently.

In this sense, South Atlantic is not black or European but is a multi-coloured ground where different dialogues gave rise to multiple sonorities, for which Africa, South America and Iberian Peninsula took part. We may say that South Atlantic, is a real locus of enunciation (Mignolo), a place for pluri-topic hermeneutics, where musical archive and repertoires, did anticipate theory and criticism.

In my argument, the presence of “musical objects” - like instruments, structures or performative texts and contexts – in both sides of the Ocean (Africa and Brasil), is important but the less relevant aspect. In fact, my argument deals firstly with the way as these evidences were and still are a manner to construct meaning, for people who identify, perform, receive and transform it today as well as in the past. Is not the evidence of the proximity that is important but also, and especially, de evidence of the difference in spite of the proximity. In this way, Iberian Peninsula must be included in the South, this south which is now re-thinking its iberism, africanism or europeanism, proposing alternative epistemologies with Europe but from outside Europe.

Post-colonialism, as a theory, tried to create a holistic premise based on the interests of the countries represented by the Western academy, in order to analyze the whole process of colonization of the planet. In most cases, music was excluded from the theory’s focus despite the attention it gave to human behavior, especially as regards the examination of cultural identity. Nevertheless the music embodies aspects of culture that will probably not be found in another kind of behavior. I am referring to its “natural” features of portability and sharing, the ability to create an expressive memory, the power to promote the acceptance of and by the Other, and also because it allow us to silencing, hide, reveal, choose, experiment and experience, inter-subjective behaviors by evoking and inducing the emotional archive which is the core of the human understanding.

It’s now time for the ethnomusicologists from both sides of the Atlantic as well as from Iberian Peninsula, (1) to decide if it is possible to cut across the map, (2) to agree, as I believe, that there’s a South Atlantic reality which includes Iberian Peninsula, (3) and to share our problems and approaches in the name of a new cartography of knowledge. It’s time for us to listen together the multiple voices

of the music we study and to contribute to this new ecology of knowledge, placing music and dance in the arena of the new epistemologies, by demonstrating how music allows rethinking the lines of abyssality.

Luanda — The central plateau Huambo Province will host on 17-19 December, 2010, the national festival of traditional music and dance, under the promotion of the Culture Ministry (Mincult). The event that will run under the slogan "Dance and Music as sources of inspiration for modernity" will stimulate the study and dissemination of diversity of the country's traditional music and dance. The festival is also intended to enhance cultural exchange among the different regions and the knowledge of cultural potentials and diversities.

<http://allafrica.com/stories/201012140848.html> (consulted in 10th July 2011)

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