

Metamorphoses of the Real: Music Research and Public Policies in Times of Politico-Economic Change. Introduction



Samuel Araújo

The path of an academic publication is hardly linear, there is always the risk of interruptions, changes of course or zigzagging, for the most varied reasons. Often, the circumstances that make this path sinuous are due to more basic problems of an editorial process –punctual inconsistencies in a given work, an opinion manifesting dissatisfaction or even disagreement with one or another aspect of the content, or even the non-attendance of some deadline or request for adjustments. However, there is a good number of situations in the literature in which the general conditions of human coexistence in the real world –crises, conflicts, wars, catastrophes– change in such a way that the very nature of the questions asked, as well as the feasibility of responding to the necessary reconfigurations of the problems initially enunciated, are strongly called into question. In this last sense, the path of this dossier seems exemplary, as its title already points to the fluidity and fugacity of its initial references, echoing symptoms of social, economic, environmental and political changes with consequences still far from reasonable intelligibility. Such a situation would, however, be further aggravated by an unexpected factor, the global dimension quickly assumed by the pandemic of Covid-19, leading the world as a whole to an even more pronounced state of perplexity and uncertainty, for many, unimaginable.

The contributions that make up the dossier originally came to the public in a round table held in March 2020, in the framework of the 1st Meeting of the Study Group of Music and Dance in Latin America and the Caribbean (ICTM LatCar) of the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM),¹ in the city of Tuxtla, promoted under the auspices of the Faculty of Music of

¹ Self-organized on more circumscribed themes, the ICTM Study Groups regularly hold their meetings in the interstitial years between the Council's biannual World Congresses, after holding a first preparatory symposium. ICTM-LatCar held its first symposium in Salto, Uruguay, in 2018, with significant participation of colleagues from Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as of scholars from other parts of the world that focus their work on sound, music, dance and movement in some aspect of the focused regional reality.



the *Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas*, Mexico. As this publication is dedicated to the debate on policies for research in ethnomusicology, it is then pertinent to highlight the importance of ICTM as an academic association that for more than 70 years brings together researchers, entities and individuals from about 100 countries distributed throughout all continents, interested in the investigation of its general theme, as well as in several related actions and policies in areas of varied scope both in regional and global terms. Therefore, thinking and debating intellectual, historical, socioeconomic, institutional and ethical aspects that mark this field of study in some way led to the organization of this roundtable, bringing together representatives from five different national contexts in the Latin American and Caribbean space. After the initial provocation of Miguel A. García (Argentina), soon obtaining support of Samuel Araújo (Brazil), promptly accepted our invitation the colleagues Katrin Lengwinat (Venezuela), Carlos Ruiz (Mexico) and Mareia Quintero (Puerto Rico). Based on selected issues of the respective national problems in the field of ethnomusicological research, and without losing sight of the general theme, the variety of perspectives presented here seeks, therefore, to foster the continuity of a debate of relevance about the regional reality, a debate that is still pending consolidation.

Without the intention of making here a more exhaustive general summary of the five contributions, some topics of discussion seem to me to highlight quite clearly the importance of initiatives like this. As the dossier focuses on the recent historical context of Latin America and the Caribbean, it is clear the central importance of considering the extent to which the regional reality is affected by the pressure of neoliberalism as a global economic doctrine and its socio-political, environmental, aesthetic and academic implications. Among other aspects related and to different degrees, the following articles address the corrosive role of financial and speculative capital, neoextractive, in regional economies, the growing tendency to hegemony of oligopolies and the concentration of income at the planetary level, fiscal austerity, budget cuts, the changes observed in the world of labor, with emphasis on the expansion of underemployment and structural unemployment, with the consequent subtraction of labor rights, superimposed on –and aggravating– countless and centuries-old inequalities and violence. On the other hand, examining in fine scrutiny the forms of resistance in the face of such a brisk scenario and to what extent the alternatives of coping –systemic or revolutionary– presented by them present themselves as viable and, in reaching power, effective and stable remains and will remain a challenge. In particular, it is highlighted the difficulty encountered in, when eventually in government, going beyond

the rhetoric about culture as a strategic area towards concrete results that become structural or minimally stable state policies, something which can positively impact research in ethnomusicology, as well as a concern shared in general, although in different gradations, with the other areas of humanities and social sciences.

I finish this brief presentation at the end of a week in which the spectacle of the invasion of the United States Congress showed the world –undisguisedly, in a disconcerting way for many who denied it for ignorance or ruse– one of the faces of the state of the art of politics globally. Configuring these events, among other motivations, are, on the one hand, conflicts around the inescapable reality of the growing inability of capitalism –in the meanings emphasized here (financial, neoliberal, neoextractivist)– and of conceptions of state absolutely subordinated to such framework in responding to social demands on a broad scale, notably those most pressing ones, coming from the sectors of the world population in extreme poverty, subject to alienation of decision-making processes and minimal or to no social protection. The identification of possible causes and even the inner origins of such incapacity, and consequently of its systemic or revolutionary overcoming, can generate divergences and fragmentations with consequences perhaps, at this very moment, unpredictable. Not by chance, systemic and revolutionary perspectives emphasize culture as a key dimension of changes towards a more just and equitable society, something which opens up space for consistent argumentation for more substantive and systematic support for research in ethnomusicology. But the challenges remain for moving beyond a generic, rhetorical plan, towards a substantive conception of the field, combined with forms of strategic action for change capable of actually overcoming the metamorphoses of a real morbidly subordinated to the primacy of profit and the private. To interpellate the real in tune with its complexity and its permanent movement requires, therefore, considerable effort of synthesis and (self)-criticism, as well as detachment from concepts and interpretations that will eventually give signs of being excessively rigid in the face of multiple and incessant contradictions and antinomies. To the extent of its possibilities, it is the purpose of this dossier to contribute to the need for this debate to be realized and that its eventual fruits be progressively materialized in more auspicious scenarios.

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