



Contemporary Carioca: Technologies of Mixing in a Brazilian Music Scene

Frederick Moehn

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In the preface and introductory chapter to *Contemporary Carioca*, Frederick Moehn explores the changing social, political, economic and cultural conditions of Brazil's post-dictatorship music scene. His insightful examination of Carioca (Rio de Janeiro-based), music practice from the late 1990s to the middle of the following decade, explores how selected collaborators, both individually and collectively, have adapted their sonic practices to navigate socially constructed spaces. By "mixing elements of local or national cultural practices (such as timbral, textural, processual, and performative practices from forró or samba)" (105) these artists have provided an important counterbalance to the "potentially alienating or homogenizing forces of (neoliberal) globalization" (105). Moehn's examination of this relatively recent music movement (1990-2005) dynamically explores the narratives of identity within a process of consciously mixing and reconciling social and sonic spaces. By moving between national and international boundaries, these artists have freely transversed the regional and foreign narratives of technologies and practice, reflecting Brazil's rich cultural tradition of miscegenation and mixture – a Brazilianness; the notion that "what is most Brazilian is already mixed" (104).

Moehn focuses on the creative work of Marcos Suzano, Lenine, Pedro Luis, Fernanda Abreu, and Paulinho Moska. These five Carioca musicians/producers have "facilitated the consolidation of what some observers have begun to call the Nova MPB (New MPB)" (206). The term MPB (*musica popular brasileira*) is an acronym which came into use by the mid-1960s. It is generally viewed as a natural evolutionary synthesis of Brazilian genres. This incubative process, primarily formed in Rio, established what many view as Brazil's "national" music. Moehn explores how this restrictive narrative created a preoccupation with a Brazilian identity largely shaped by the music critics and intellectuals of Rio and Sao Paulo, most of who catered to urban educated middle-class audiences. In this view, "the tastes of urban, educated middle-class audiences, have been guilty of giving excessive attention to bossa nova,

Tropicalia, Jovem Guarda (Young Guard), and Brazilian rock” while excluding the varied regional narratives and “expression found in other parts of the country” (17-18).

The fact that Moehn's selected artists all come from relatively privileged backgrounds is an issue thoroughly explored. The examination of class, taste, and relative fields of production explores middle-class notions of Brazilianness and the related tensions which operate through the socio-economic strata of Brazilian culture. Moehn acknowledges that an ethnomusicological analysis “cannot claim a sustained engagement with specifically middle-class pop music settings, especially in countries where that social sector is not as large as it is in the most industrialized nations” (21). His solution is to contextualize middle class identity within the “dynamics of colonialism/postcolonialism, nationalism, cosmopolitanism, and 'modernist-capitalist' globalization”, while remaining particularly sensitive to “the characteristic way race is experienced and talked about in Brazil” (ibid). Moehn recognises the inherent complexities of integrating class relations into an analysis which accounts for “selected collaborators in a rather unique urban milieu, and during a particular period of transition” (ibid).

Moehn frames New MPB within a contemporary discourse of miscegenation and mixture. The country's history of miscegenation is often cited as the foundational dynamic of the nation, a view which while met with great resistance in the first decades of the republic was by the late 1920s fully embraced within the discourses of Brazilian modernists. The narrative of “national” music making as espoused by Brazilian modernists and later by the leftist student model of the 1960s played a significant role in the canonization of certain genres. The canonization of samba and MPB as a “national” music excluded a large cross section of Brazil's regional narratives. The musicians studied here generally resent the stereotypes of Brazil as narrowly defined in the confines of samba and carnival, and while wary of traditionalism, they have nonetheless continued to embrace samba, though in a field of production which enriches the trajectories of foreign influences and regional styles beyond the limited narrative of MPB.

Thus, in the chapter dedicated to the Carioca producer/percussionist Marcos Suzano we see the trajectories of Brazilian regional music styles and modern technologies collide in a kaleidoscope of samplers, loopers, filters, modulators, and other post-production technologies. Suzano seeks to reconstruct a unique vantage point by recontextualizing traditional Brazilian practice through the lens of technologies historically foreign to Brazilian music making. “The pairing of the 'natural' material to electronics is a central theme in his work, and he has taken it further than his predecessors in Brazil” (30). Similarly contextualized within the narrative of miscegenation and mixture is Lenine, whose lyrical and sonic references to the rich folkloric traditions of Brazil's North-east instill “the spirit of 'revolutionary romanticism' that Marcelo Ridenti (2000) identified in the Brazilian left” (57). Likewise, Fernanda Abreu's celebrated hybridization of funk and samba and her embracement of “samplers and sequencers at a time when electronic dance beats were not typical” (132) all show a generation which has reveled in the multiple trajectories and narratives of music making. Moehn effectively takes the reader on a journey which extensively explores the intersubjective practice of these artists. By relating specific components of their practice to local, regional, national, and foreign narratives Moehn identifies a music movement which is cognitive of a conscious process which accounts for the degrees and types of mixtures employed.

The particular strength of this book lies in Moehn's ability to contextualize his theoretical framework within actual practice. The premises of the introductory chapter

create a strong theoretical and historical overview which forms the basis of Moehn's analytical model; a model which is cohesively presented through the subsequent chapters – chapters that focus on the intersubjectivities within individual and collective practices. Readers may note a stylistic tendency toward inferences “between specific aspects of large-scale problems and more localized refractions” (207). This style remains consistent with Moehn's interest in paralleling recent shifts in sociocultural anthropology - a model which draws largely from mid-level analysis which tends to impart partial and suggestive connections. With his vast knowledge of post-production studio technologies and his intimate knowledge of popular music in both political and commercial contexts, Moehn provides a valuable and highly engaging contribution to the field.