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## **Global vs. Local: The Impact of Globalisation on Traditional Cultures \***

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In the last years, characterized by the opposition between local and global, the traditional music cultures are being featured by different trends and processes. While some traditional musical practices have disappeared (due to changes of way of life, methods of subsistence etc.), others have known a process of revival but suffer deep transformations (through internal evolution or due to external processes.) Other repertoires have been discovered by a wider audience and they have been commercialized thanks to the trend for so-called 'world music.'

The globalization is translated in a phenomenon of standardization or cultural homologation from a planetary point of view, a process that is abolishing the social, cultural, artistic specific traits of the different places, imposing anywhere the western models. Globalization assumes the features of a form of cultural imperialism that is translated in the diffusion/imposition of cultural models that become prevailing above all through the mass media (MTV is an example of it). But is it true that it concerns only an external imposition? Or rather it deals with an adaptation of local music to the constraints of mass media and the music industry?

In the first perspective, the adjustment of 'ethnic' music to the western musical models is a process induced by the outside, by the international music industry (both the majors and the indies) in the search for new sounds to be introduced on the global market, and that are responsible for a commercial neo-colonialism on a global scale based on the exploitation of the artistic resources of the local cultures. In this scenario, the effects of the interference of the market are reflected in the traditional patrimony that is manipulated for a private use of the western tastes.

In the second perspective, instead, the phenomenon of the world music is legitimated by a social and cultural reality deeply changed in the last decades on the planetary level, and therefore the new 'music of the world' is born from a creative demand, from the need of renewal of the traditional canons and from the search of new musical languages "without frontiers" in the wake of globalization.

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### **World Music and Ethnic Music**

In the musical field, the 80s mark the birth of “World Music”; the name was dreamed up in 1987 by the heads of a number of small London-based record labels who found their release from Africa, Latin American and other international artists who could not find rack space because record stores had no obvious place to put them. World music means fusion of different musical languages of extra-European origin, mainly ethnic musics, with the Anglo-American pop/rock music. This process involves the combination of features from several kinds of music in an industrial process, the result being music without roots in any specific ethnic group.

World music arrived as a wave of novelty that came in a period of creative aridity in the international survey pop/rock and it aimed to replace a feeble and decaying rock, deprived of innovations and of contents. World music has had the merit of widening the musical horizons of the western public, till then confined to classical music or western pop, opening the frontiers of our world to music and musicians coming from Asia, from Africa, from Latin America, trying to modify deeply our musical scenery. But the world market has also had a ‘collateral effect’: it has manipulated and distorted the traditional musical patrimony for commercial purposes, to make it more desirable for the record market with ‘sweetening’ techniques and interventions at different levels to make the product fit for a wider public (the western one). Amplified and electronic instruments can be used as substitutes for traditional instruments; traditional melodies are harmonized and orchestrated; insertion ‘ethnic’ sonorities are sampled for insertion in advertising jingles and pop songs. The ethnomusicologist Krister Malm defines this process as “transculturation”:

*“An increasing number of national and local music cultures contribute features to transcultural music. For example, an European record producer travels to Africa with a portable 8-track tape recorder and records local drumming. Once back in one of the music capitals of the world, he feeds some of this into his sampling synthesizer, adds synthetic brass sounds, backing vocalists, mixes in some effects from a recording with a Mongolian singer from a sound archive and produces to a hit record which everyone can sing along but which sounds unique.”<sup>1</sup>*

### **Music and Identity**

From the sociological point of view, the phenomenon of world music is a reflex of the changes of our societies in multiethnic and multicultural realities and of our planet in a global village (Marshall McLuhan). In fact, not only the Anglo-American pop/rock music, but also the African, Asian, Arab or Latin American musical panorama has suffered deep transformations in the last decade: the agropastoral, artisans, hunting-gathering or nomadic

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<sup>1</sup> K. Malm, “The Music Industry”, in *Ethnomusicology: An Introduction*, ed. by Helen Myers, Northon & Co. New York-London, 1992, p.363.

traditional societies more and more have disappeared, while new urban and metropolitan realities, melting pot of different ethnic groups and cultures have consolidated, because of urbanization (the mass-migration from the country to the cities). And it is really in the new urban context that were born styles and hybrid kinds of music that are included in the category of popular music: the Algerian Rai, the Mbalax of Senegal, the Highlife of Ghana, the Mbaquanga of South Africa, the New York Salsa, the Anglo-Indian Bhangra, etc. Kinds of music 'hybrid' but at the same time 'local' in terms of use and appreciation, and that become part of the local reality and share in the construction of its own identity (the sa/sa music has, for instance, become the symbol of the Latin-American identity, a musical-cultural expression shared by people of the Center and South America of different nationalities but that share the same language, culture, religion, history).

### **Culture and Global Market**

In the process of marketing the cultural products, ethnic music has become an object of interest of the world record industry in coming into the world market. In the actual neo-consumer system, an artistic and cultural product is always also a 'commodity' that is offered to the 'customers', and as such subject to the laws of the market, of the demand and supply of the competition; both the traditional music performance as the recording, are subject to a process of marketing as any other good of consumption and, as such, it is submitted to the logic of profit. When music becomes a mass-media commodity, the packaging, marketing and advertising are as crucial to the success of musicians as to perfume. More and more cultural goods are produced and distributed for the world market. This development is boosted by transnational operating culture-industries seeking to extend their market-shares. In this context the question is put forward on how these structural changes affect the repertoire of transnational recording companies.

The main question is: Does this world-wide distribution of mainly popular music result in the diversity or homogeneity of the repertoire offered? Do local music-traditions find their way either directly or by amalgamation with Western pop-music into the repertoire of majors and finally into consumer homes in different regions of the world? Or is the repertoire under the wake of Americanisation and Westernisation strongly penetrated by homogeneous and standardized music?

### **Showbiz and Traditional Music**

In the system of showbiz that involves the production and the distribution both of ethnic music and world music, the actors of the 'mediation' between artist and public are always and exclusively European and American musician producers: the fame on the international level of Ravi Shankar (and in general Indian classical music) is owed to George Harrison (former-Beatles); the fame of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan is owed to Peter Gabriel (former-Genesis); Buena Vista Social Club and Ali Farka Toure were 'discovered' by guitarist-producer Ry Cooder, and they are only the most known.

We have to remember that the boom of world music in the 80s is exploded with pop singers (Peter Gabriel, Paul Simon and David Byrne) that have become producers putting up their record companies about the 'music of the world'. In 1989 Peter Gabriel (former singer of the Genesis) found the independent record label, Real World, with a modern recording studio drawn from an old mill built in stone, investing 5 million pounds in it. The first album of the Real World catalog, "Passion", had been recorded by the Pakistani Qawwaly singer, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. It was successful thanks to Hollywood, being the soundtrack of the Martin Scorsese's film "The Last Temptation of Christ" and it consecrated Nusrat as the principal star in the firmament of world music. Nusrat has also become an idol in the West thanks to some collaborations with rock artists as Eddie Vedder of the Pearl Jam and the guitarist-producer Michael Brook ("Must-Must").

The western interest for non-European musical cultures contributes without doubt to their revaluation and to promote the same interest in the countries of origin. The biographer of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Ahmed Aqeel Ruby, complained about the fact that this singer of Qawwali "has the characteristic to have gotten acknowledgements abroad before being famous at home."<sup>2</sup> But in the documentary "Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan: Le derniers prophete" by Jerome de Missolz, the Pakistan singer declared in an interview that he was deeply afflicted and angry because his music had been 'manipulated' without his knowledge, for instance in the film "Natural Born Killers" by Oliver Stone, a sacred hymn was used during the scene of the rape!

The truth of the matter is that a monopoly of the world music market exists, a system eurocentric of 'production' and distribution' of the 'ethnic' and 'world' musical proposals. The WOMAD, travelling festival of world music and the WOMEX, world music musical market, further to be organized and promoted by European record labels, they annually take place in the European countries. But it is interesting to observe the alternative roads undertaken by Africa: the MASA, the Marche des Arts du Spectacle Africain, that every two years takes place in Abidjan (Ivory Coast) and that offers a showcase of proposals destined mainly for American and Japanese managers/promoters and organizers of European festivals. But also the case of the MASA, created and financed by the intergovernmental agency for the francophony, is not without contradictions. The Benin singer, Angelique Kidjo also recognizes that European operators control African music: "Instead of valorizing some young talents worth helping at the MASA, there are only names who are already famous."<sup>3</sup>

### **Music Festivals as Site of Intercultural Encounter**

In the 90s, transnational music festivals have risen all over the world, in Europe, Asia, Africa and America, operating in a multicultural and intercultural context, showing the

<sup>2</sup> A.A. Ruby, *Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan: A Living Legend, Words of Wisdom, Lahore, 1992, p. 10.*

<sup>3</sup> *In Nigritia, luglio/agosto 2001, p.42.*

cultural and musical diversity. The festival gathers in space-time uniting different identities various and different musical cultures (Asian, European, Latin American, etc.)

The artistic selections imply some choices that belong to a cultural strategy. The reality we live in, that of the "global village", imposes a problematic choice: to select and to propose to the public only the 'authentic' ethnic musics, those respectful of the traditional stylistic canons, without the transformations that musical languages of the local traditions have undergone (or are in the process); or showing the contamination or blending of the musical languages in the name of innovation, of modernity and of creative freedom? In other words the question is: preservation or innovation?

In the first case, the musical festival risks to become an ethnographic-musical museum, where it tries to exhume some mummies or to do some musical archaeology; a purist philological point of view risks to set itself against any creative or innovative process and to assume the conservative and reactionary position, inclined to immobilism. The truth of the matter shows that no traditional artistic form is preserved "unchanged" in time but has suffered changes, also substantial - for political, economic, social, cultural changes, or as a result of the contact with other cultures - that have left a sign, sometimes a deep sign, on the cultural traditions of the people. Music-cultures, especially today, are dynamic rather than static; they are constantly changing in response to inside and outside pressures. It would be wrong to think of music-cultures as something isolated and stable, impenetrable and uninfluenced by the outside world.

In the second case, the artistic selection for a festival is not (and it does not want to be) an operation "ethnomusicologically correct", but it gives itself other aims; in these cases the schedule or artistic program is not in order to furnish a correct and authentic representation of the local, ethnic, regional or national musical traditions, but to realize a form of entertainment reaching the purpose of political nature (for e.g. gathering official delegations of various nations in an international and intercultural event), social nature (for e.g. contributing to the historical and cultural reconciliation among various ethnic, cultural and religious components that live in one nation), economic nature (for e.g. tourism, or a local economic activity inducted by an event set between culture and entertainment). This choice, however, involves some risks: from the extremely holistic and 'globalized' perspective, characterized by the philosophy of *panta rei*, ('all flows') and by the culture of ephemeral, risks to produce distorted perceptions of the local musical realities.

Some cultural centers that operate as promoters and organizers of the festival since the 70s (among which the Maison des Cultures du Monde in Paris, the Atelier's of Ethnomusicologie in Geneva and the Centro Flog in Florence) have had the role of "avant-garde" offering to the European public performances of ethno-folk music and dance; these, in fact, coherently to their native spirit, have given continuity to a cultural and artistic politics that privileges presentation, or better 'representation' of traditional musicians considered depositaries of the more "authentic" local traditions through the musical festivals.

### **Authenticity as Living Tradition. But What is Authenticity?**

Peter Gabriel expressed his opinion in an interview [released on L'Espresso (29/7/1999)]:

*"Up to yesterday the people associated the concept of authenticity with the field-recording, with the faithful reproduction of uncontaminated musical traditions. I think that they ignored that in Africa and in Asia as in our countries there is a generation that has grown listening to pop music, that adores Michael Jackson and goes crazy for hip-hop. The musicians come to the Real World to mix tradition with forms of pop music because they consider it a stimulating stylistic choice. Not only a matter of survival."*

Peter Gabriel added that *"it would be beautiful to put the world music in a glass-case, even in a beautiful museum. The only drawback is that so it would die. And it's very healthy that it fights for its survival comparing itself with the market. It can sometimes result in impure or excessively contaminated music. But it is, however, still alive. Also an advertising spot can contribute to its cause."*<sup>4</sup>

In my opinion, the more a tradition is authentic the more it is rooted deeply in the culture to which it belongs, that has produced and that make use of it, in a word that maintains it "alive". Tradition is alive when it succeeds in constantly renewing itself, but from the inside, in the bosom of the community that is consumer and producer of it at the same time, and is not induced by the outside.

The society operates a sort of "control" on its artistic-cultural-musical commodities, accepting or refusing them, recognizing them as proper or as extraneous in a sort of *feedback*, in which it is the insider that judges both the competence of the interpreter, and the correctness of its execution, according to fixed cultural (aesthetical) criteria. "There is a constant feedback - ethnomusicologist Alan Merriam affirms - from the product to the concepts about music, and it is this that explains both the dynamics and the stability that can be manifested within a musical system."<sup>5</sup> The acceptance of the innovation in the tradition happens when there is a consent and a social acceptance: the Italian ethnomusicologist, Diego Carpitella writes that "When a document is created "collectively" [...], when this document overcomes the social censorship and is accepted by everybody, then it come into the *tradition*. In the moment when it comes into the tradition, it becomes a *norm*."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Released on L'Espresso (29/7/1999).

<sup>5</sup> A.P. Merriam, *Anthropology of Music*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1964, pp.33-34.

<sup>6</sup> D.Carpitella, *Conversazioni sulla musica*, Ponte alle Grazie, Firenze, 1992, p.18.

### **'Global Openness' and 'Local Focusing'**

The record market and the musical festivals are not the only 'actors' in this musical globalized scenery, but also the ethnomusicology, with a conspicuous international scientific community that is gathered in the I.C.T.M. (International Council for Traditional Music - Advisory board of UNESCO), and the cultural politics of the national governments interact.

Recently in ethnomusicology the interest is growing in music's "models of transformation", in the interaction between traditional societies and advanced societies, raising an ethical problem: the ethnomusicologists should try to preserve and exploit the musical traditions (as cultural patrimony of humanity); but how far do the ethnomusicologists have to try to preserve the musical traditions of a culture that DOES NOT desire to maintain them intact?

The reflection about music and globalization brings the attention to the conflict among expansionistic (cultural) politics and isolationist (cultural) politics. In this sense, the question is: should the political-administrative Body (Departments and Ministries of Culture) stimulate the improvement, revaluation, rediscovery of its own musical traditions (through the scholastic education, the musical festivals, the mass media, etc.) or, in a neoliberalist perspective, should we consider the world a free global musical market?

### **Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativism**

I believe that the last frontier for all those people that operate in the intercultural circle is the demolition of any form of ethnocentrism for a cultural relativism that allows it to valorize and to give the same dignity to the artistic and cultural expressions of the people of the whole world. Why is it that extra European music, extraneous to the western classical music, are not considered art music but music for popular entertainment?

The Arabian 'classical' music or the Persian 'classical' music are not less refined and complex than western classical music. Munir Bashir for the Arabic classical music, Ravi Shankar for the Indian classical music, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan for the Pakistani qawwali music, Shadjarian for the Persian classical music, Kudsi Erguner for the Turkish religious music are all artists that cross the national boundaries of nationality or genre, and they have to be considered like a Pavarotti for the opera or a Rostropovich for the western classical music. One of the aims that a musical festival (that is jazz, classical or world music festival) should give itself is that of the representation of musical cultures of the whole world in a situation of equality with western "classical" music: i.e. parity of artistic dignity.

### **A 'Compatible' Globalization**

Globalization in itself, both in economic and cultural circles, is neither good nor bad, but neutral. It is from the formalities of use, that beneficent or destructive effects can be impacted

on local traditions. It is absolutely necessary to know how to manage it, departing from the mechanisms that govern its working, so a 'compatible' globalization should stimulate and support both the local traditions and the innovations, but at the same time should prevent them from being modified by the international music market and by the record industry whose primary interest is not cultural but commercial (the profit, above all).

### Conclusion

Globalization is a phenomenon that invests in the economy, the technology and the mass media communication, the politics, the religion and the culture. The process of globalization has a double effect on the artistic and cultural patrimony of the traditional societies: on one hand the dissolution of the traditional local cultures and on the other hand their transformation both in the form and in the contents. And it is well-known that globalization acts as a road roller, threatening the survival of the popular traditions in their more authentic form; and where such traditions have not been cancelled completely, they have been influenced by the western culture that has made them more commercial.

In a multicultural and transnational reality, as that in which we live, movements of fusion or "contamination" among styles, genres and different languages are developed. This reflects the social changes in action but also the creative crisis that is crossing the western culture, more and more withdrawn in itself and is self-referential.

In the dialectical tension among **global** and **local**, the world cultures' festivals should use some advantages (above all technological and from mass media) that the "global village" offers to valorize artists that safeguard their own local ethno-cultural identity and, at the same time, stimulate the creativeness of emerging artists; it is important also to inform and to form at the same time a taking of conscience and awareness of the public with the purpose to affirm and to defend their own identity against the cultural leveling and the standardization of the cultural models and to lead the spectator/user/consumer to a critical attitude that is necessary for the preservation of the musical, linguistic and cultural difference of the world. In other words: preserving the memory.

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