Book Review


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Made in Brazil is the fourth volume in the Routledge Global Popular Music Series, a series devoted to the herculean task of presenting the state of popular music studies around the world by focusing on single countries and national contributors. This volume in the series collects 15 essays written by emerging Brazilian scholars from different disciplines. The authors look beyond bossa nova and tropicalismo to discuss a wide range of musical phenomena from a country that boasted the first pressing plant in Latin America in the 1910s, was the sixth most lucrative national record market in the 1970s, and in 2015 had the seventh highest GDP in the world.

In her Introduction, Martha Tupinambá De Ulhôa traces the development of popular music studies in Brazil. She emphasizes how, once primarily the domain of folklorists, journalists and musicians, the field has seen significant academic expansion during the last two decades. This explains the editors’ decision to collect here essays written mostly by authors of doctoral dissertations post-2005.

The book is organized in five parts. Part I and II mainly deal with the historical legacy. Part I tackles the two “sister genres” (15) of Brazilian popular music, samba and choro—an instrumental genre fusing the influence of African dances and European music. In “The Invention of Brazil as the Land of Samba”, historian Adalberto Paranhos analyses the ideological struggles by which samba became the icon of Brazilianness between the 1930s and the 1940s, when the emergence of samba-exaltação (“exaltation samba”, such as Ari Barroso’s ‘Aquarela do Brasil’, aka. ‘Brazil’) provided a type of inter-classist song that gave crucial support to the ideology of racial democracy of the Vargas regime. Treading in Vianna’s footsteps (1998), Paranhos’s fascinating account of the “invention” of samba—that is, of this music’s rise from mar-
ginal neighbourhoods to the pomp of national fame—tells a story that casts deep reverberations across many American countries. A similar historical approach is adopted by Luiza Mara Braga Martins, who investigates the case of the *choro* band that first took Brazilian popular music to Paris (“The Construction of Memory about the Oito Batutas”). By examining accounts spanning 80 years, Martins discusses issues of authenticity and cultural identity, showing how, thanks to their ability to negotiate between conflicting representations, the band eventually emerged as a symbol of national music. “Samba and the Music Market in Brazil in the 1990s”, by Felipe Trotta, looks at how samba, after decades of commercial decline, repositioned itself into the market thanks to the emergence of romantic, commercial *pagode* music, which offered both elements of break and continuity with previous conventions. Other chapters examine early *choro* and its dissemination (Pedro Aragão), historical recordings by wind bands (David Pereira de Souza) and *fado* in Rio de Janeiro, where that urban style was adopted by rural immigrants coming mostly from northern Portugal who were totally unfamiliar with *fado* (Alberto Boscarino).

Parts III and IV discuss more recent styles and scenes. Jorge Cardoso Filho (“Marks of a Recent *Antropofagia*”) analyses listening practices related to albums by Novos Baianos, a 1970s band fusing bossa nova, Música Popular Brasileira (MPB) and psychedelia, and Os Paralamas do Sucesso, a 1980s rock band mixing Brazilian, African and Caribbean music. Although little-corroborated by empirical data, the latter article raises issues of styles that deviated from dominant cultural norms, leading Cardoso to celebrate the “cannibalistic” aesthetics (*Antropofagia*) that modernist poet Oswald de Andrade elevated to the founding principle of Brazilian culture. In “Cosmopolitanism and the Stigma of *Tecnobrega* Music”, Paulo Murilo Guerreiro do Amaral examines a type of commercial music from the northern city of Belém disseminated through huge sound systems. Faithful to its name (“tacky techno”), such music combines a fondness for sentimental pop with a cosmopolitan attitude that remixes a variety of sounds taken from the Web, enabling its artists to subvert socio-cultural stigmas and notions of good taste, and rise to national prominence. Herom Vargas explores the counter-cultural movement of *manguebeat* and the artistic course of Chico Science and his band Nação Zumbi, the symbols of the cultural rebirth of the town of Recife. Vargas discusses the fusion of Afro-Brazilian music, rock guitars and hip hop vocals that eventually resulted in a hybrid style that emphatically rejected any claim to authenticity. Sergio Gaia Bahia (“An Ethnomusical Look at the Performance of Ney Matogrosso”) examines the case of an MPB singer with a remarkable contralto voice, whose mix of Brazilian music, progressive rock and sexually-challenging stage presence consis-
tently defied ordinary notions of gender. Ivan Paolo De Paris Fontanari, in his article “Mixing at the Global Margins: The Making of Brazilian Drum & Bass”, discusses the spread of London-born drum and bass (D&B) to São Paulo. He shows how paulistas DJs developed a type of Brazilian D&B that incorporated samples of MPB tunes and exported it back to the British scene, eventually becoming local creative icons, in a global cultural flow where their music appeared to take on diverging meanings across conspicuously different audiences.

Part IV deals with the making and selling of music in a changing mediascape. Luciano Caroso (“Ethnomusicology in Cyberspace”) analyses virality and sampling on the Web, discussing creative reactions to controversial videos and examining how a group of DJs produced “funny songs” by manipulating interviews taken from sensationalist television. Leonardo De Marchi (“Structural Transformations of the Music Industry in Brazil, 1999–2009”) sums up the history of the Brazilian music industry and discusses the emergence of digital media companies, suggesting how their differences today essentially rest on their ability to access digital content, which “restores the power of the traditional industry agents” (184), imposing severe limitations on memory, innovation and artistic democracy.

The last part of the book looks at recent representations of Brazilian popular music abroad. Lúcia Campos (“From Roots to Networks”) draws an ethnographic sketch of bands of roots music performing in the European world music circuit in both commercial and cultural settings. Natalia Coimbra de Sá (“Northeastern Brazilian Music in New York City”) examines the case of two Brazilian bands that cater to cosmopolitan audiences, in the name of a mestizo aesthetics that invokes once more Andrade’s notion of cultural cannibalism. In their “Afterword”, Cláudia Azevedo and Felipe Trotta interview Lenine, an important Latin Grammy-awarded singer-songwriter from Recife.

As a country of significant importance and appeal, in the last 20 years Brazil has seen the publication in English of a number of academic books that cover considerable ground about its music (e.g., Vianna 1998; Dunn and Perrone 2001; Moehn 2012; Herzman 2013). Made in Brazil intentionally makes little mention of customary topics such as MPB, bossa nova and tropicalismo, but presents a wide overview that deals with both aspects of the historical legacy and the recent scene of Brazilian popular music, offering insights into lesser-known sounds such as choro, technobrega, manguebeat and Brazilian D&B. Considering the number of essays and approaches involved, the book suffers from some unevenness. A few contributions, for example, focus strongly on the ideological content of music, but shed little light on the actual role of sounds in making popular music into such a powerful cultural force. One might also argue that, in a volume about Brazilian popular music, per-
haps dance could have been specifically addressed (but this absence, in my view, reflects a more general problem with popular music studies). Somehow surprisingly, the volume barely mentions funk carioca (a popular yet deeply controversial hip-hop-derived style) and does not discuss the contemporary scene of Brazilian rock. Is it because they were considered too derivative? A totally different problem is the prohibitive price of the book, which clearly makes it affordable only for academic institutions.

On a decidedly positive note, the volume covers a variety of methodological perspectives, drawing on a range of disciplines such as musicology, history, anthropology, cultural studies and media studies that offer a good balance between musical and “non-musical” approaches. Some essays, for example, opt for a musicological angle that discusses music’s stylistic features and disputes scholarly clichés. Most raise issues of class, gender, identity and technology, often challenging commonplace beliefs about what Brazilian and “world” music are supposed to be. Trotta’s article, for instance, finely combines the analysis on the aesthetic/ideological positioning of pagode with the discussion of some of its specific musical traits. The scrutiny of the early history of the Brazilian recording industry by Souza and De Marchi, on the other hand, reminds us how “world music” and global commerce have been at the heart of the international music industry from its very inception. The last two field studies by Campos and Coimbra offer interesting attempts to make sense of Brazilian popular music as seen and practised abroad today. Several essays problematize aesthetic value and bring up the issue of artistic hierarchies and social positioning implied by the styles and artists under discussion, clarifying aspects that would otherwise be difficult to grasp for foreign readers. A number of authors, finally, give particular relevance to the relation between popular music and national identity, an issue that has been worrying Brazilian commentators since very early times. The recurrent framing of their discussion under the “anthropophagic paradigm” (Jauregui 2012), curiously, transforms the venerable Andrade’s notion of aesthetic appropriation into a sort of Brazilian antecedent of postmodern and postcolonial cultural theories.

To sum up, Made in Brazil provides an ample picture of genres and critical approaches that considerably widens the international perspective on Brazilian popular music studies. Unlike some of the works that previously appeared on the English-language market, the volume focuses less on the “arty” side and great names of Brazilian popular music and gives space to (internationally) lesser-known historical and modern genres. The book also casts its glance beyond the traditional Rio-São Paulo axis, emphasizing recent shifts in the country’s geo-cultural map. Overall, it offers a valuable sample of the variety of methodologies and directions practised today by academic
studies on popular music in Brazil, and of their positive efforts to combine national and international (i.e., mostly, but not exclusively Anglo-American) analytical perspectives. The volume includes a selected final bibliography, a glossary, an analytical index, and useful links to a website with copious audiovisual samples.

References


