On Music and Nation: The Colonized Consciousness of Spanish Musical Nationalism

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In the late nineteenth century, some Spanish musicians attempted to synthesize and systematize the historical, geographic, and social diversity of the musical traditions of Spain. Since their purpose was to build a unified musical identity for the Spanish nation, their movement was called Spanish musical nationalism. Most of twentieth century criticism has endorsed the "difference" of Spanish music on the aesthetic achievements of this movement. In the following pages, I challenge this opinion, pointing to the foreign origins and "orientalist" goals of Spain's nationalistic music. First, I address the outpouring of European music about Spain that came after Romanticism, and second, I explore the links between this exotic view of Spain's music and Spanish musical nationalism. The aim is to question what is today considered the "Spanish musical style," by suggesting that it is largely a concept first subscribed to by composers such as the Russians Glinka and Rimsky-Korsakov, the Pole Moszkowski, the Hungarian Liszt, and the French Bizet, Chabrier, and Lalo, followed later by Debussy and Ravel. I will show that the influences of these composers on Spanish musical nationalism were all but circumstantial. In fact, the nationalist authors promoted the exotic image of Spain that European music generated during the previous decades, adopting the colonized consciousness that central European cultures grant to the peripheral ones. The nationalist claim of a specific Spanish musical identity should be regarded,

indeed, as a rhetorical construction, which supports the bourgeois program of incorporating Spain into the cultural, historical, and political milieu of European countries.

Edward Said's well-known study on orientalism provides the initial theoretical framework for inquiring about nineteenth-century European music about Spain. In this case, the

> dynamic exchange between individual authors and the large political concerns shaped by the three great empires—British, French and American—in whose intellectual and imaginative territory the writing was produced, (14-15)

began with the arrival of the first traveler-composers after 1840. Just like Chateaubriand, Dumas, Gautier, and Mérimée, or Borrow, Ford, and Irving, who "discovered" Spain for Western literature, the traveler-composers unveiled the treasures of Spanish popular music to the world. Glinka, Chabrier, and Debussy are three of these traveler-composers who illustrate the oscillation between exploitation and creation of meaning in Said's notion of orientalism. They exemplify three stages of the European representation of Spanish music: exploration and exploitation, cultural tourism and consumption, and finally geographic distance and impressionist evocation. While Glinka *exploits* the distinctiveness of Spanish musical tradition, Debussy *imagines* it. Chabrier, between these two extremes, *consumes* Spanish music as a fascinated tourist. In fact, the composers who traveled to Spain first looked for ways to literally appropriate its autochthonous music; then, they focused on grasping its colorful musical effects; and finally, they engaged in producing an imaginary substitute of Spanish popular music.

Mijail Glinka's trip from 1845 to 1847 was the first by a European composer explicitly aimed at exploiting Spanish folklore. Just before leaving Paris, Glinka wrote:

> Estoy decidido a enriquecer mi repertorio con algunas [...] piezas sinfónicas que titularé '*fantaisies pittoresques*.' [...] En España me pondré a componer estas '*fantaisies*,' la originalidad de sus melodías autóctonas me será de una gran ayuda, y tanto más por cuanto que nadie ha explotado todavía esta veta. (Álvarez 82)

As a result of the trip, the Russian composer wrote two Spanish overtures, titled *Souvenir d´une nuit d´été à Madrid* and *Caprice brillant sur la jota Aragonesa*. In his memoirs, Glinka explained that the trip allowed him to faithfully transcribe the popular music of Spain (196). However, in spite of Glinka's folkloric curiosity, his engagement with Spanish popular music can be severely questioned. In fact, the works that he composed after visiting Spain approach Spanish folklore in the same way as the pieces that he wrote before the trip.[1] This contradiction discredits the investigatory profile that Glinka displays in his memoirs, unveiling the promotional purpose of his trip. The commercial goal is clearly perceptible in the second of his Spanish overtures, which includes the most famous *jota of Aragón*. Glinka stated that he chose to transcribe this folkloric piece because it had a strong impression on him. However, it is a surprising coincidence that the *jota* transcribed by the Russian composer was one

of the best-known Spanish songs in Europe at that time. Glinka went to Spain to hear a folkloric piece that most probably he knew before the trip. Nevertheless, listening to it in Spain (specifically, in Valladolid) satisfied the exoticism that Parisian audiences demanded, since the authenticity of the transcription was fully assured.

It cannot be an accident that Franz Liszt, in a hurried concert tour in Spain a year before Glinka's visit, was fascinated by the same *jota*. He includes it in *Fantasy on Spanish Airs* of 1844, as well as in the more notorious *Spanish Rhapsody* written in 1863. Decades later, Moszkowski (who was one of Turina's professors) also included the same *jota* in his *Caprice Espagnol*. The *jota of Aragón* was a commonplace of Spanish popular music in Europe throughout the nineteenth century. Glinka simply transcribed the favorite Spanish tune of the European public. The selection of a recognizable Spanish melody, and the writing of fanciful travel memoirs that introduce the reader into African landscapes just beyond the Pyrenees (Glinka 196) guaranteed Glinka's success in Paris.

Emmanuel Chabrier's trip to Spain of 1882 was less pretentious than Glinka's. At that time, the Spanish musical mine was already discovered and internationally recognized. Upon visiting Granada, Chabrier simply tried to accumulate exotic and inspirational experiences, just like any other tourist. For him, Spanish music was everything but notes and melodies: "The tunes strummed by the guitar are not important; in any case they can't be heard above all the exclamations of '*Anda! Olé! Olé! la chiquilla*!'" (Myers 43). In the 1880s writing music about Spain was still a good path to success, and Chabrier was well aware of this. He wrote the following to his friend Charles Lamoureux: "my rhythms, my tunes will arouse the whole audience to a feverish pitch of excitement; everyone will embrace his neighbor madly" (Myers 43). Yet, success could not rely on folkloric investigation and transcription of original tunes, since Spanish music was already a well-known product. Chabrier had to develop a different approach to Spanish music, focusing on improving the colorful representation of Spain by enriching sound effects and developing harmonic and melodic complexities. His orchestral piece *Espagne*, which he presented as the fruit of the trip, cultivates the taste of an audience that demanded the exaggeration of Spanish aesthetical conventions. While Glinka's strategy consisted of assuring the exactness of his transcriptions, Chabrier's approach maximized the oriental image of Spanish popular music.[2]

Debussy's musical descriptions of Spain constitute the final stage of the European orientalization of Spanish music, in spite of the fact that his approach to Spanish popular music was less commercially guided than Glinka's and Chabrier's. Debussy displaced the existing musical traditions of Spain by producing a substitutive representation of Spanish music. Debussy, who visited Spain only to attend a bullfight in San Sebastian, wrote descriptive music of Granada's sunsets and applauded the supposed realism of Albéniz's *Suite Iberia*:

> [it] is the joy of morning, the happy discovery of a tavern where the wine is cool. An ever-changing crowd passes, their bursts of laughter accompanied by the jingling of the tambourines.

> Never has music achieved such diversified, such colorful impressions: one's eyes close, as though dazzled by beholding such a wealth of imagery. (Chase 159)[3]

Although Debussy's music treats subjective imagination and objective experience as equals, it was largely celebrated as proper Spanish music. Authors such as Manuel de Falla and Federico García Lorca praised Debussy's impressionist descriptions arguing that they were genuine examples of non-exotic appropriations of Spanish music. For Falla, Debussy's music represented "la verdad sin la autenticidad" (74).[4] According to the Spanish composer, Debussy's deficient knowledge of Spain and its inhabitants was not a limitation in writing accurate Spanish music.[5] Falla argued that Debussy had a certain mysterious ability to understand Spain and faithfully represent its musical traditions:

> [Aunque Debussy] no conocía realmente a España, creaba espontáneamente, yo [Falla] diría que de manera inconsciente, música española capaz de dar envidia a tantos otros que la conocían demasiado. (73)

Similarly, Lorca recognized the magic of Granada in Debussy's musical description:

> en la tierna y vaga *Soirée en (sic) Grenade*, en donde están acusados todos los temas de la noche granadina, noche dibujada y destruida al mismo tiempo, donde brillan las enormes púas de niebla clavadas entre los montes y tiembla el admirable rubato de la ciudad, bajo los alucinantes juegos del agua subterránea. (III 42)

Despite Lorca's enthusiastic recognition of his beloved Granada, Debussy's piece is immersed in an obvious orientalist atmosphere forged by fifty years of European music about Spain. *Soirée dans Grenade* is the second piece of a collection of three titled *Estampes*, the first of which, *Pagodas*, evokes a Far Eastern scenario, and the third, *Jardins sous la pluie*, a French melancholic garden. The European music of the nineteenth century generated such a complex image of Spanish music that Debussy's description of Granada was judged fully satisfactory even though it was entirely imaginary.

After Debussy, the next step in the process of colonizing Spanish folklore was carried out by the Spanish nationalist composers. Instead of looking for an approach rooted in the historical and social contexts of Spanish folklore, they incorporated into their works the same understanding of Spanish popular music that triumphed in Europe. While European music about Spain unveils the colonial side of European culture during the nineteenth century, the adoption of its aesthetic principles by nationalist composers reveals the dependent role of Spain in regard to central European countries. My point now is to show that the Spanish composers' assumption of a colonized consciousness supports the bourgeois political goal of reducing Spanish culture to a mere supplement of the European one. The Spanish musical nationalism achieved the symbolic incorporation of Spain into Europe by creating a musical identity that restrained the diversity and varied historical provenience of Spanish folklore, making it suitable for the colonialist enterprise.

Spanish musical nationalism repeatedly affirmed that Spanish musical difference was of European origin, and thus, compatible with the culture of the West. Felipe Pedrell, the founder of the movement, argued in his *Cancionero popular español* that the Spanish distinctiveness was due to the influence of the Byzantine liturgical songs from before the eleventh century. He contended:

> la civilización musical bizantina [...] ejerció gran influencia con la asimilación y nacionalización ibérica del elemento oriental musical que acusan, claramente, multitud de cantos. (87)

However, Pedrell consciously overlooked the obvious similarity between Spanish, Arab, and Jewish musical traditions, as well as the historical importance of the multiethnic Iberian society of the Middle Ages: "La música, pues, no debe nada esencial a los árabes ni a los moros. Existía antes de que ellos invadieran el suelo ibérico" (87). The avoidance of non-Western elements discloses Pedrell's interest of assimilating Spain into the cultural and historical context of Europe. He tried to erase the complexity of the popular heritage of Spain that Américo Castro identified as "la realidad histórica de los españoles."

Although the musical quality of Pedrell's oeuvre is not critically acclaimed, his theoretical and pedagogical work with such outstanding students as Albéniz, Granados, and Falla make him a key figure in understanding nationalist aesthetics. Pedrell's dream was to compose an opera of "*arte patrio*," in accordance with his project of regenerating national vigor. The opera titled *El último Abencerraje*, which is based on the novel by Chateaubriand, began such a patriotic engagement. However, although the work was received as an exemplary revival of Spanish musical identity, Pedrell selected a libretto that illustrates vividly Said's notion of orientalism. The idea of nation that Pedrell promotes is devoid of popular referent—indeed, he was a fervent critic of the extant popular traditions. By contrast, it is based on the exotic European interpretation of Spain as an oriental *lieu*. By approaching Spanish popular music using the same categories as the Europeans, Pedrell's work created the false impression that Spain was an integral part of the colonizing nations. Pedrell, as Glinka did before him, claimed that his transcriptions of Spanish music were authentic, faithful, and precise, while at the same time he consciously avoided addressing their historical and social contexts. Nevertheless, Pedrell confirmed that his works were completely different from most European music about Spain. In his nationalistic pamphlet *Por nuestra música*, he wrote:

> los autores, si este nombre merecen, de esa balumba de composiciones que pretenden aparecer inspiradas en nuestros cantos característicos y circulan con bastante crédito por el extranjero, gracias á los indoctos gustos de la muchedumbre y á determinadas direcciones de la moda, [...] no conocen absolutamente ó conocen muy mal su estructura melódica, su ritmo propio, su modalidad. (42-43)

Pedrell's argument is difficult to prove. First, the ignorant and fashionable social tastes he refers to defined the Spanish middle-class audience. Moreover, some European composers who wrote orientalist music knew the melodies, rhythms, and

modes of Spanish popular music acceptably well.[6] Pedrell's opinions try to hide the fact that the ideological coordinates of music written on both sides of the Pyrenees were interchangeable: while Europe constructed an exotic image of Spain, Spain exploited that exotic representation to become part of Europe.

Pedrell's criticism of European music about Spain was an expedient to present musical nationalism as an ally of popular culture, rather than of bourgeois culture. It is a fact that, in spite of its popular and Andalusian idiosyncrasy, Spanish musical Nationalism was born of the Catalan upper-class. Moreover, the most outstanding members of the movement emigrated to Paris to compose their best works, beginning with Albéniz's *Suite Iberia*. It is not surprising, then, that the triumph in Europe of Albéniz's and Granados's music was due mainly to its exotic and colorful sonority. As María Martínez Sierra noted:

> el prejuicio [el de considerar a la música popular española como 'vulgar' y únicamente apropiada para gentes comunes y turistas ávidos en su búsqueda de algo 'pintoresco'] ha alejado al gran músico español Isaac Albéniz de España—pero irónicamente lo condujo al éxito en el resto del mundo. (126-27)

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Spanish musical nationalism presented itself as different from European music precisely to seal its link to it. Difference was constructed by homogenizing the diversity of Spanish musical traditions, and by subsuming them into the European orientalist portrayal of Spain. The nationalist adaptation of Spanish folklore to the exigencies and expectations of modern Western listeners allowed Spanish music to find its place within European classical music. However, entering into the canon of the West implied the erasure of political, social, and cultural meaning of the traditional popular music produced in Spain.

Notes

[1] Glinka had already composed some Spanish melodies before the trip. As Álvarez states:

> En 1834 Glinka compone una canción 'serenata española' sobre el poema de [Pushkin] *Aquí estoy, Inesilla* (1830), y una segunda en 1837 con el poema *Céfiro nocturno* (1824) donde Pushkin recrea una Sevilla imaginada, con el río Guadalquivir y una hermosa gitana. En 1840, con un poema de su amigo N.V. Kukolnik, compone otra canción con aire de bolero. (82)

[2] Chabrier was self-conscious about his exotic portrayal of Spain. He excused his exoticism by saying that Spanish music is impossible to imitate:

> as for the malagueñas, they can hardly be written down. [...] The women [...] instinctively syncopate the rhythms in a thousand different ways and manage while dancing to stamp an incredible number of rhythms with their feet. (Myers 42)

[3] Debussy is referring to Albéniz's *Eritaña*.

[4] Falla stated:

> se diría que el maestro francés [Debussy] ha huido de [los documentos populares auténticos] para crear una música propia, no tomando prestado sino la esencia de sus elementos fundamentales. (77)

[5] Anna Rita Addessi studies the influence of Debussy's aesthetics on Falla's music.

[6] Falla admitted the following:

> hasta cierto punto, Debussy ha completado lo que el maestro Felipe Pedrell nos había ya revelado de riquezas modales contenidas en nuestra músi-

ca y de las posibilidades que de ellas se derivan. (77)

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