



Editorial / Editorial / Editorial

The Commitments of (Ethno)musicologies and Other Equally Sensitive Disciplines

Miguel A. García

The Mozambican writer Mia Couto received an *honoris causa* doctorate of the humanities, in the Literature specialty, from the Universidade Politécnica of Maputo in the year 2015. The following passage is part of the lecture he gave on the occasion of receiving such degree:

Escrevi uma vez que a maior desgraça de um país pobre é que, em vez de produzir riqueza, vai produzindo ricos. Poderia hoje acrescentar que outro problema das nações pobres é que, em vez de produzirem conhecimento, produzem doutores (até eu agora já fui promovido...). Em vez de promover pesquisa, emitem diplomas. Outra desgraça de uma nação pobre é o modelo único de sucesso que vendem às novas gerações. E esse modelo está bem patente nos vídeo-clips que passam na nossa televisão: um jovem rico e de maus modos, rodeado de carros de luxo e de “meninas fáceis”, um jovem que pensa que é americano, um jovem que odeia os pobres porque eles lhes fazem lembrar a sua própria origem. É preciso remar contra toda essa corrente. É preciso mostrar que vale a pena ser honesto. É preciso criar histórias em que o vencedor não é o mais poderoso. Histórias em que quem foi escolhido não foi o mais arrogante mas o mais tolerante, aquele que mais escuta os outros...¹

Without digressions or ornaments, with the poetics of simplicity and conviction, Mia Couto's words raise contradictory feelings: they both disquiet and vivify. They disquiet because they reveal uncomfortable situations. They vivify because they offer an ideal with which, and a subject with whom, to identify and, above all, because they underpin the dream of that non-renounceable utopia which proclaims an order without privileges. In a few lines, Mia Couto questions the academic world, the music industry, the mass media and, consequently, he questions us as researchers and as music specialists. It is not difficult to transfer the spirit of those questions to our fields of study: Which stories do our disciplines create? Are they stories which listen to others? How involved are these stories in the struggle against inequality, the invisibilization of the other, the colonizing power of the media and the voracity of capital?

Since the creation of the areas of study which have music and sound as objects of reflection, we have been participants in the emergence, decline and overlapping of various

¹ “Aula de Mia Couto durante a cerimónia Doutor Honoris Causa” <http://www.folhademaputo.co.mz/pt/noticias/nacional/aula-de-mia-couto-durante-a-cerimonia-doutor-honoris-causa-completa/> [Accessed: July 6, 2018].



theories and methods. Until approximately the decade of the 1970s, the most valued theories and methods were those which stood out as the most efficient, those which helped the most to give specificity to the area of study –although they nourish themselves from other disciplines–, the most “aseptic” and/or the most holistic ones. Although these evaluation criteria never disappeared, mistrust in Euro-centered scientific knowledge which germinated in social sciences and the humanities in general, caused the emergence of a new ponderation parameter. Nowadays, a theory and a method are valued if they propitiate an achievement by the researcher which is sensitive to the inequalities, injustice and exclusion, and if they entail any transforming capacity or desire. Since the decade of the 70s, denunciations against the univocal, the limitation of rights and inequalities have gained ground over the quest for preciseness, objectivity and “truth”. How compatible these two perspectives are is a difficult question to answer, although there is no doubt that those who adopt both of them must endure contradictions of different types all the time, to the point of putting at risk the guiding purpose of their fields of study: research.

The echoes of theories and methods, transformed and transforming, or sensitized and sensitizing, appear in the statutes and statements of the institutions, in scientific events, in publications and in the classrooms. For example, on the web page of the *International Council for Traditional Music* we can read that one of its objectives is:

To bring together music and dance scholars, as well as artists, cultural activists, policy makers, and other individuals, collectives, and institutions in pursuit of equality, social participation, human rights, and sustainability in the performing arts².

Also, in recent years, several organizations have formally declared themselves against racist policies, migrant mistreatment, the apathy of the states in financing the institutions of our field and the reduction of teaching and research positions. The same echoes can be heard at congresses and publications by means of statements which denounce the existence of political prisoners, lack of freedom of expression, gender inequality, the increase of poverty and the limited access to university studies, among other evils. Even if it is not a homogeneous scenario, we are actually the protagonists of an increase in denunciations and of the politicization of discourses and practices of our areas of study. This tendency is very much in line with Mia Couto’s ideas. But the writer, the same as the musician, seems to have an advantage in these matters with respect to those of us who study music and other sound practices: denunciation is fully concurrent with his or her profession since the denouncing action itself, even in its starkest and most ideologically marked manifestation, can be the foundation of its poetics, stories and performances. In our case, compatibilizing denunciation with institutional routines and spaces always requires an exercise of accommodation which implies administrating uncertainties and contradictions in order not to abandon research. A challenge as vivifying as Mia Couto’s words. The question is if acceptance of this challenge will sooner or later lead music researchers committed to the construction of a less violent and less hierarchically organized world to have their own Thesis XI.

² <http://ictmusic.org> [Accessed: July 7, 2018].