

Ignacio Corona and Alejandro Madrid, eds. 2008.
*Postnational Musical Identities: Cultural Production,
Distribution, and Consumption in a Globalized Scenario.*
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Reviewed by Shannon Garland

In *Postnational Musical Identities*, Ignacio Corona and Alejandro Madrid bring together twelve scholars working with (primarily) popular music in (primarily) Mexico and Latin America to consider the relationship between music, identity, and globalization. Assuming that identity is inherent to human subjectivity, the editors analyze the relationship between ethnic and national musical identifications and the globalizing processes that might rearrange, reinscribe, or call into question such correlations. Corona and Madrid lay out their frames for thinking about globalization and music (i.e., “The Idea of the Postnational,” “Music Scholarship in Times of Postnationality,” and “The Collapse of Grand Narratives in Popular Music”) in the introductory chapter, “The Postnational Turn in Music Scholarship and Music Marketing.” They rely heavily on cultural studies and postmodernist scholars such as Stuart Hall (1996) and Frederick Jameson (1998), on pop music scholars drawing on these tradition such as Tony Mitchell (1996); on Appadurai’s (1990) basic charter for an anthropology of globalization (his famous “-scapes” framework); and on Hardt and Negri’s (2000) vision of the “postnational,” neoliberal political-economic order.

Corona and Madrid draw on these scholars to form their main analytical rubric: “postnationality,” which they define as the inadequacy of the nation state as a framework for both identity and analysis following neoliberal structural adjustment and the emergence of a postnational corporate “empire” (as framed by Hardt and Negri 2000). Postnationality thus replaces the nation state as the frame for considering the relationship between identity and music, including those cases in which national identification plays a prominent role. This model is particularly salient in the chapters (including Corona and Madrid’s own chapter on Nor-tec) that deal with US-Mexico border relations and the Mexican and Central-American diasporas in the United States. In other chapters, especially those in the second part of the book, “postnationality” is either not directly referenced or remains implicit. These final chapters call into question the relevance of the concept of postnationality as a general framework of analysis.

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In fact, a striking and seemingly inadvertent juxtaposition in the book arises from the difference in approach and perspective between scholars working in dialogue with US-Mexico border studies and scholars working on transnational exchange with and within South America. The former emphasize the expression of Mexican identity in music created in or in reference to diaspora communities, while the latter emphasize blurry and fleeting identifications with “abstract” points of reference (Magaldi). Thus, scholars working heavily with theories of transnational immigration suggest that “imagined communities” are created because of diaspora, finding that music is fundamental to this cohesion. In contrast, those who focus on technological mediation over greater geopolitical areas find that music coheres experience, rather than community.

In chapter 7 (“Quest for the Local: Building Musical Ties between Mexico and the United States”) Helena Simonett concludes her analysis of musical practices in the Mexican diaspora within the US by arguing that it is the “local” that gives credibility to music (119). Although it is not always easy for the reader to understand who comprises the “subcultures” and “supercultures”—terms Simonett borrows from Mark Slobin (1993) in relation to the micromusics of the Mexican diaspora, Simonett nevertheless shows how various musics derived from rural traditions in Mexico both transform and become reinscribed as sounds of the “local” in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles. This relocalization of musical practices does not, however, always imply coherence in meaning and interpretation (and identity) for communities on both sides of the border. Members of the Mexican diaspora in Chicago, for example, transform rural Mexican *ranchera* and *balada* song styles with synthesizers and drum sets to create the new *pasito duranguense*, which signifies a local authenticity of home to those in Chicago, but connotes falseness and contrivance to people in Durango, Mexico—the place from which the new genre name derives.

In chapter 9, “RockIn’ la Frontera: Mexican Rock, Globalization, and National Identity,” Greg Schelonka contrasts one of these rural Mexican styles, *ranchera*, with Mexican rock, framing the current proliferation of both styles as an effect of the fragmentation of the nation following NAFTA and other neoliberal economic adjustments. For Schelonka, rockers are a countercultural tribe “that resists the processes of globalization by adhering to a local identity” (153). Schelonka arrives at this interpretation by analyzing the lyrics of several Mexican rock bands (especially those of Resorte and Molotov) which, while different from the *ranchera* lyrics that mourn an idyllic Mexican ethos lost to economic globalization, continue to articulate Mexicanness by vocalizing some of the issues associated with it, such as the migration issues so central to US-Mexico relations. Mexican

rock bands, including those that incorporate diverse musical styles and non-Spanish lyrics, have been unable to break into US markets or to appeal to non-Mexican or non-Spanish-speaking listeners. Schelonka attributes this to the rockers' expression of "Mexicaness" (though he never specifies what this is), through divisive lyrics that touch upon US-Mexican political and social relations, despite the commonality of such contestatory lyrics and attitudes in rock around the world. (Indeed, one could argue that this attitude is what helps define rock as rock.) Schelonka tries to strengthen his argument that rock articulates local, regional, or even national identities by referencing Alan O'Connor's study of two punk communities, one in Mexico City and one in Toronto, which appear to be completely isolated from each other. This summary, in highlighting the highly specific logics of exchange and ideals of community organization that characterize punk as a field of practice, contradicts Schelonka's argument for the rock field he analyzes in this chapter, which is strongly defined through mass media.

The emphasis on national identity in these essays is balanced by an emphasis on transnationalism and cosmopolitanism in others. In "Before and After Samba: Modernity, Cosmopolitanism, and Popular Music in Rio de Janeiro at the Beginning and End of the Twentieth Century," Cristina Magaldi analyzes the cosmopolitan identifications in Rio de Janeiro as articulations of national identity through music. The contrast with other chapters is especially apparent in Magaldi's discussion of rapper MV Bill and hip hop in Brazil, which has become a powerful form of expression for poor, black youth, particularly in Rio de Janeiro. Magaldi first gives a short history of cosmopolitan musical tastes in turn-of-the-century Rio and the process through which samba became the "cosmopolitan" music most intimately associated with ideas of Brazilianess. This association was predicated on positioning black Brazilians as poor and internal Others, and was the mechanism through which Brazil could be articulated as Other to Europe (178). Thus for blacks in Brazil, a "local" appropriation of hip hop one that would articulate Brazilianness by incorporating "Brazilian" sonic elements such as those found in samba could only reinscribe the kind of socio-economic marginalization that US rap and the cosmopolitan category of "black music" could help disrupt. Magaldi notes a somewhat similar process of identification in the popularity of rock in Brazil in the 1980s. Rock became popular at the close of Brazil's twenty-year dictatorship precisely because of its distance to sonic representations of the nation, articulating instead an urban cosmopolitanism.

Similarly, Denilson Lopes, in "Transnational Soundscapes: Ambient Music and Bossatronica" (chapter 12), analyzes the emergence of ambient music and its various incarnations as an inherently transnational phenom-

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enon that attempts to articulate the “landscape” of the urban, cosmopolitan experience. Drawing on Josh Kun’s concept of the “audiotopia” (2005), Lopes argues that ambient music sounds the experience of urban modernity, dissatisfaction, and “the nostalgia for a different future” provoked by the insecurities of chaotic cities which failed to fulfill the promise of modernity, and thus the “fragility of a subject deprived of subjectivity” (212). For Lopes, music doesn’t articulate a national or ethnic affiliation, but rather becomes a particular kind of space that resembles the space-time of urban cities, the organization of sensibilities common to modern (especially urban) subjectivity.

Other contributors to this collection of essays analyze neither local identities nor cosmopolitan ones, but rather focus on the production of sound through transitional exchange. In “The *Miamization* of Latin-American Pop Music,” Daniel Party details the emergence of the “Latin Pop” genre, which includes ballads that sound “halfway between American adult contemporary and *balada*, and fast songs half-way between American dance pop and Latin American dance rhythms” (76). Party connects the emergence of the Latin Pop industry in Miami to the migration of multinational conglomerate headquarters in general to the city, illustrating the convergence of multinational business strategy with preexisting regional musical styles and business interests. He begins by tracing the seventy-year evolution of the Latin Pop aesthetic from *bolero* through *balada* to the “Miami sound” using poetic descriptions of musical form and giving a history of pan-Latin American music marketing strategies. He then provides a concrete example of “Miamization,” illustrating the musical and lyrical changes in Chilean *balada* artist Myriam Hernandez’s music after she signed to Sony Latin and relocated to the company’s headquarters in Miami. Party corroborates these changes through ethnographic work in Chile with Hernandez’s (former) fans. Not only does Party’s chapter offer an important contribution to music scholarship by destabilizing the divisions between folk and popular music that are often idealized or demonized as resistance or hegemony in the academy, he also offers a glimpse of the too-often missing history of musics that have been consumed *en masse* throughout Latin America for the better part of a century.

Likewise, in “Productive Orientalisms: Imagining Noise and Silence Across the Pacific, 1957–1967,” Barry Shank traces how both Orientalist and anti-essentialist ideas were heard and misheard in a series of influences between US and Japanese modernist composers, particularly John Cage and Toru Takemitsu. Shank shows how Cage’s (often Orientalist) ideas about Japanese and Asian philosophy and aesthetics enabled him to hear indeterminism in the “Japanese” music of Takemitsu. Meanwhile, Takemitsu had

composed this music with the specific intent of escaping all connotations of “Japaneseness,” which at the time was still strongly linked to the highly militaristic Japanese nationalism developed prior to and during the Second World War. In this way, Shank argues, the minimalist ideas of American composers such as Cage offered Japanese composers a route for composing modern music outside of the nationalistic framework they sought to escape, because “Japan” could still be heard in the music and recognized as Japanese by (admittedly Orientalist) Western composers and audiences. In exchange, Japanese aesthetic concepts of *sawari* and *ma* that Cage found in Japanese composers’ works offered him a route to the kind of minimal indeterminism he sought but could not find until his encounters with the “the East.” As such, Shank details the way in which national and regional imaginaries (“Japan,” “the West,” “the East”) became productive for animating transnational encounters, and in creating shared compositional aesthetics.

The essays in *Postnational Musical Identities* offer diverse scholarly interpretations of music in relation to globalization through varied musical examples; however, the book as whole reflects a reading of music as a cultural text, an approach common to the disciplines and training of many of its contributors (musicology, cultural studies, comparative literature, and American studies). Corona and Madrid leave the reader wondering how the insights into globalizing processes offered by these disciplines can be used to reconsider assumptions about the very categories of identity and place, and in turn, the ways in which the study of music can aid in critiquing these assumptions and analytical methods. While many of the individual chapters suggest such new alternatives, the insights offered are not brought together in the introduction to articulate the new perspective Corona and Madrid seem to perceive and obviously desire.

Despite the lack of synthesis in the introductory chapter, the individual pieces have much to offer. They contribute to knowledge of particular musics, illustrate varied processes of musical production and explicate the interpretive frameworks these musics both engender and by which they are engendered. Taken together, the examples show the tenuousness of grand analytical theories or categories, such as the “local” and the “global,” when confronted with particular data that may not easily fit into such general modes of analysis. In this sense, the book offers a variety of methodological and conceptual approaches to the study of music production and meaning in the complicated, “globalized” world in which we all live.

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