

**Vila, Pablo (Ed.) *Music and Youth Culture in Latin America: Identity construction Processes from New York to Buenos Aires*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.**

In this book, Pablo Vila gathers a number of interesting and in-depth chapters orchestrated around music and cultural studies. Though numerous works have explored identity construction through music, limited attention within these works has been paid to the music of Latin American societies. The main thesis of the text is that music is enrooted in a set of diverse articulations and that particular types of music are selected by individuals in order to construct their respective identities. These negotiations, far from being unilateral, correspond with political and socio-cultural realms. Vila explains:

Music is a privileged cultural artifact that offers us the real experience of our narratives, imagined identities. Therefore, part of the understanding of our identity (which is always imaginary) would occur when we submit ourselves to the bodily pleasure of the performance or music listening. It is precisely here [that] the connection between interpellation and desire, between the identitarian offer and the actual identification, occurs. (p. 35)

Methodologically speaking, the project shows diverse approaches, with chapters authored by different scholars, which, though not in and of itself a problem, tends to diffuse the focus of Vila's argument a bit. Nonetheless, the vast experience of the invited fieldworkers and writers showcased in the text more than makes up for this particular flaw. Ten chapters totaling 289 pages will introduce readers to the sociology of music, its effects in Latin American cultures, and the relationship between music and identity-building processes. The text combines many topics, including identity and migration (chapters one, two, and four); music in post-communist Cuba (chapter four); new technology and the use of music (chapters three, eight); the process of the "whitening" of ethnic music—or the glorification of the majority (chapter five); political elaboration of past time to protect the interest of the cultural majority (chapters six, seven, eight and ten); and music as the commoditization of experience (chapter nine).

Discussing identity implies questions as to what being Latin American means. From New York to Buenos Aires, the very presence of Spanish-speaking communities has inspired negative, reactionary responses of Anglo-centrism. As such, Latinos in North America dialogue between two cultures; they are mediators of two contrasting worlds. Vila and his colleagues understand that deciphering the codes of cultural diasporas (by means of examining their musical choices) pivots on the "multi-faceted" interpellations that highly mobile bodies face. Educated and socialized in a hyper-global World, says Vila, we are complex agents who pro-actively select some cultural aspects of our identity-narrative (or "plot"), while other aspects are left behind. The chapters appearing in this volume attempt to address the slippery question of which aspects of culture are embraced and selected as a part of the identity-narrative and which are overlooked by the identity-builder. Says Vila, the encounter of listeners with musical artifacts updates the listeners' existing narrative articulations; with each new exposure to musical performance or music listening, some new elements of the identity-narrative may very well surface.

Perhaps most interesting is the work's discussion of the power of music to empower. Where conflict still remains in human interactions, says Vila, music can be commoditized according to a global, international taste, often empowering—through their music—local voices, which are often otherwise rendered invisible. Indeed, the real merit of Vila's argument is in his rethinking of the belief of a one-sided discourse in the first place. To some extent, he says, we are all subjected daily to "dual standards" produced by those maintaining political authority. The case study on Cuba, authored by Ruben Lopes Cano in chapter four, precisely addresses this duality in its exploration of Post-Communist Cuba. Contributing

authors Patricia Oliart, Frederick Moehn, Laura Cambra, and Juan Raffo, among others, also examine this duality. Rossana Reguillo discusses an interesting outcome in her analysis of ITCs<sup>1</sup> and Music. Her chapter, *Errant Surfing*, showcases her vast experience in methodological issues and engages the reader in an examination of the role played by “late-modernity,” which fragments the produced (but disconnected) identities. This means that socialibility is reframed according to the emergence of new technological devices where young people ascribes to. This attachment to music generates identity construction processes which intersect with consumption. To place this in other terms, the music is less important than the syntax constructed by users. Fragments of music, and lyrics are formed to rebuild a new hyper-text that leaves industrialism behind.

According to this text, music not only possesses the capacity to express the emotional disposition of its listeners with respect to their realities, but it also responds to reactionary, counter-actions, rebuffing any pre-existing disciplinary mechanisms of control. Beyond cultural entertainment, music gives a fresh alternative to understanding of identity-narratives as they are constructed, negotiated, or even rejected by self. This text represents a painstakingly-achieved work aimed at discussing the extent to which discourse exerts influence on societal order. Intended to reach a wide audience, *Music and Your Culture in Latin America* is a seminal work that surely will pass the test of time.

### References

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<sup>1</sup> ICS refers to INFORMATION AND COMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES.