Atlantic flows: Brazilian connections to Cape Verdean popular music

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ABSTRACT
Cape Verdean musical genres, especially the morna, cannot be understood with exclusive reference to the Portuguese and African peoples who settled in this archipelago. These two cultural heritages were interwoven with other heterogeneous elements, building a much more complex music scene. The focus of this work lies on the Atlantic flows that allowed for the arrival of music and musicians from Brazil in Cape Verde. It is an analysis of the discourses elaborated by Cape Verdeans about the role that Brazilian music (as they perceive it) plays in their own musical productions.

KEYWORDS: Cape Verde; morna; Brazilian music; Atlantic encounters.

INTRODUCTION
Musical exchanges involving Brazilian musicians outside of the country have been going on for some time, following diverse routes. Both the media and academic literature report on the circulation of Brazilian music, emphasizing two kinds of flows. The first one relates to the global music market. Sérgio Mendes’ Grammy-winning album Brasileiro (Elektra 1992) is just one example of a successful trajectory developed by Brazilian musicians in the world music scene. The second kind of musical flow usually mentioned is the one that follows current transnational movements of people. When going abroad, Brazilian migrants carry with them their musical practices.
These two topics have been extensively discussed, focusing not only on Brazilian music. Significant studies examine musical experiences in contexts characterized by transnational migration (Connell and Gibson 2002; Baily and Collyer 2006; Côrte-Real 2010, among others). The world music scene has equally received great attention from ethnomusicologists (Feld 1995; Taylor 1997; Erlmann 1999; Frith 2000). However, I would like to stress that the presence of Brazilian music outside of the country’s borders is not necessarily related to the global cultural industry, neither to the impact of recent migration processes. My objective is to draw attention to a particular trajectory that some forms of Brazilian music have taken. I refer to the Atlantic flows that allowed for the arrival of music and musicians from Brazil to Cape Verde, influencing musical productions in this West African archipelago.

This article is neither a search for historical links nor a comparative musicological analysis. Opting instead for an anthropological approach, the aim is to engage with discourses articulated by Cape Verdeans on the relationship between the music produced in Cape Verde and the “Brazilian music”, as they understand it.

**Musical encounters**

Luís Rendall, a guitar player, was born in Cape Verde, in the São Vicente Island, in 1898. Working in the customs services, he was in regular contact with foreign ship crews passing by the Porto Grande de Mindelo (“Great Port of Mindelo”). In a context characterized by intense circulation of people and goods between Europe and the Americas, the archipelago was a crucial refuelling stop for steam ships crossing the Atlantic. Mindelo, the main city in the São Vicente Island, was usually described as a door open to the world, an expression of cosmopolitanism and of a hectic life. Eutrópio Lima da Cruz (1988), who published a booklet in honour of Luís Rendall, highlights the significance of this fact in the musician’s career. He states that the many hours Luís Rendall spent on board Brazilian ships intensified the fruitfulness of the musical exchanges he was engaged with. Luís Rendall’s connections with Brazilian music are explicit in the following excerpt of the biography written by Cruz:

> With much humor, Luís Rendall would remember the episode in 1930 in which, in the Church Square in São Vicente, after giving his ‘show’ with the guitar, he is ‘demoralized’ by the summary decree of João Damata, with his big hands and dirty fingernails, a navigator of a Brazilian steam ship making a stop in Mindelo! Self-possessed, Luís Rendall has to lend the guitar to João Damata who, in the end, returns it with the incentive ‘if you keep doing it, you will learn it’. The amusement of Luís Rendall cannot be hidden in the face of the art of João Damata on the guitar. (ibid., p. 6; my translation)

To this day, Cape Verdeans repeatedly comment on the famous guitar solos by Luís Rendall, usually making reference to his affinity to Brazilian music. João Damata, on the other hand, followed a less visible pathway. He never reached notority
among his fellow countrymen – even though he had carried out the significant role of spreading Brazilian musical productions abroad.

Another outstanding Cape Verdean musician whose life history reflects the influence of Brazilian music is Francisco Xavier da Cruz, better known by his nickname B.Léza. He was also born in São Vicente and was one of the most important Cape Verdean composers. B.Léza was born in a poor neighbourhood in Mindelo. In this area surrounding the port, he developed his distinctive style of guitar playing. B.Léza is especially remembered for imprinting his mark on the execution of the musical genre known as morna. According to the Cape Verdean writer Baltasar Lopes da Silva (Laban 1992, vol. 1, pp. 17-18, my translation), “there is clearly one morna before B.Léza and one morna after B.Léza. [...] B.Léza introduced, through the influence of Brazilian music, an accident, a chord transition, here called the Brazilian half tone”.

This is not the only account about B.Léza in which his close contact with sailors and players from Brazil is mentioned. I quote again from Baltasar Lopes da Silva (ibid., p. 17).

He used to be called B.Léza, at least this is the information I have: his name means the following – in the first years of the 1920s, there used to be a great Brazilian influence here. [...] There were many Brazilian ships that stopped here at the port and they came on shore. [...] They are amicable, they associated with the locals and, once in a while, they joined them in picnics and cocktails, gatherings and tocatinas, as we would say at that time. In fact, the guitar playing technique of São Vicente is the Brazilian technique, learned from the Brazilians, it is not the Spanish technique, it is the Brazilian style. And B.Léza also learned the Brazilian lubie ['whim'], he used to pronounce many terms in the Brazilian way, instead of beleza ['beauty', in Portuguese], he used to say bèléza ['beauty', in Portuguese, with a Brazilian accent].

The encounters between Cape Verderan and Brazilian guitar players in Mindelo reveal a set of themes that deserve consideration. They show us what everyday life in that port city was like during the first decades of the twentieth century, immersed as it was in a bohemian and cosmopolitan atmosphere. They mention movements of people and musical exchanges across the Atlantic. Above all, these encounters reveal how sounds become cultural constructions as names and meanings are attributed to different ways of playing, speaking and singing.

**Cultural identity in a creole society**

The above-mentioned quotes are Cape Verderan representations about the relationship between Cape Verde and Brazil. This connection between the two countries is a way for Cape Verdeans to talk about their place in the world. The importance attributed to Brazil by Cape Verdeans is closely related to the perception of Cape Verde as a creole society. As a product of the colonial encounter, Cape Verde is
structured on the fundamental opposition between an African universe and a Europeanized one. Debates on the classification of Cape Verde as an African, a European or simply an Atlantic country are far from being a banal question. This discussion is present in many national identity projects, sustained by different groups within Cape Verdean society. In this context, the relationship with Brazil, as a country with similar social formation, acquires a special significance. Brazil often appears as an important reference in order to address Cape Verde’s fundamental ambiguity and to mediate these different senses of belonging, interconnecting Europe and Africa.

The encounter between Brazil and Cape Verde has served to articulate the meaning of being Cape Verdean. In this sense, I highlight the importance of narratives about music as an allegory of Cape Verde. When Cape Verdeans describe the morrâ (their national musical genre), stressing its ties with Brazilian music, they define Cape Verde’s position in the Atlantic space. This is especially evident in the debate about the origin of morrâ. Cape Verdeans are immersed in a discussion about the history of this musical genre. The debate often turns into a play of forces between Portuguese and African cultural heritages. Some Cape Verdeans defend the major Portuguese influence on the morrâ; others believe in the hypothesis that privileges the African heritage on the origin of this genre. It is then that the connections to Brazil emerge as quite significant, mediating African and Portuguese cultural references.

One example of this may be found in the work of Vasco Martins (1989, pp. 49-52), a Cape Verdean musicologist. Presenting his version for the evolution of the morrâ, the author suggests that the Cape Verdean national genre was influenced by the modinha – a musical style also known for its uncertain origin, related to either Brazil or Portugal. However, according to him, this musical encounter only happened during a second phase of the morrâ’s development. When the modinha arrived in Cape Verde, a “primordial morrâ” already existed. The latter would have had its genesis in the landu (or lundum), a kind of music of African origin. As pointed out by Martins, the landu arrived in the archipelago through one of two possible paths: directly from the continent or, in an alternative route, brought to Cape Verde by Afro-Brazilians. We can notice, therefore, Brazil’s role as a mediator. The idea of “Brazilian music” in this narrative encompasses both the modinha and the landu, cultural elements of Portuguese and African origins, respectively. Similar to the morrâ, Brazilian music is represented as a result of diverse fluxes, functioning as a tool to describe the double link that characterizes the morrâ itself.

**New traffics of sounds**

I would like to add to this discussion another example of musical exchange, made evident in the so-called “Cape Verdean zouk”. This musical genre is related to other global movements of people, revealing the vitality and dynamic nature of Atlantic flows. The beginnings of the zouk can be found in the 1980s, when the group Kassav’ introduced this new style of music, created out of the mixture of multiple Caribbean rhythms, added to new technologies from the recording studios of Paris.
The zouk achieved a surprising success. It conquered audiences in the Caribbean, Europe and Africa. Among Cape Verdeans, the zouk encountered a significant source of recreation. Cape Verdean immigrants in European cities entered into direct contact with the new genre and began to incorporate the zouk into their musical habits. With lyrics sung in Cape Verdean creole, the new zouk captivated audiences in the archipelago and abroad. Created out of multiple encounters of diverse creole cultures, the Cape Verdean zouk developed itself as a product of the diaspora.

The presence of Brazilian music can also be observed in this set of productions. I refer to one representative example, the Brazilian song “Morango do Nordeste” (Sons D’África 2000). This song, composed by Walter de Afogados and Fernando Alves, achieved enormous success in Brazil in the year 2000. It was recorded by innumerable groups and singers. Among these many versions, there is a special one, in the rhythm of zouk, sung by Roger, who is from Guinea-Bissau, son of a Cape Verdean father and a Senegalese mother. This version of the song was mixed by a Portuguese DJ and recorded by Sons D’África, a musical label owned by a Cape Verdean and located in a Lisboan suburb. In 2001, this album became a best seller in the Lusophone African countries.

Musical flows between Brazil and Cape Verde keep occurring, in great intensity, even though this happens through very different processes. Technological advances allow for new kinds of appropriations. New migratory dynamics favour other forms of musical exchanges. Moreover, the meanings attributed to these processes have also changed. As a product of the diaspora, these new musical creations have another relationship with notions of identity and territory. In the zouk, the meaning of being Cape Verdean was never as relevant as in the morna. Similarly, the appropriation of Brazilian music in the zouk is not necessarily elaborated as evidence of the profound relationship between the two countries.

As a final remark, I want to stress that the narratives mentioned in this article are Cape Verdean representations about different forms of speaking, singing and playing that crossed the Atlantic, producing new syntheses. At times, these narratives make explicit reference to music. They are cultural constructions about “the Brazilian style”, the musical technique called “the Brazilian half tone”. At other times, this idea is extrapolated to the domain of speech. It is in the “Brazilian lubie” acquired by the musician B.Léza. All these are examples of cultural constructions that attribute meanings to the fluxes and encounters of sounds across the Atlantic.

ENDNOTES
1. For an analysis of the increasing presence of Brazilian music in the global market and its image in international media, see Lucas 1996.
2. For an example, see Ribeiro 1998.
REFERENCES


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