

KEEP IT SIM- PLE MAKE IT FAST!

AN APPROACH
TO UNDERGROUND
MUSIC SCENES (VOL. 4)
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Keep it Simple, Make it Fast!

An approach to underground music scenes (vol. 4)

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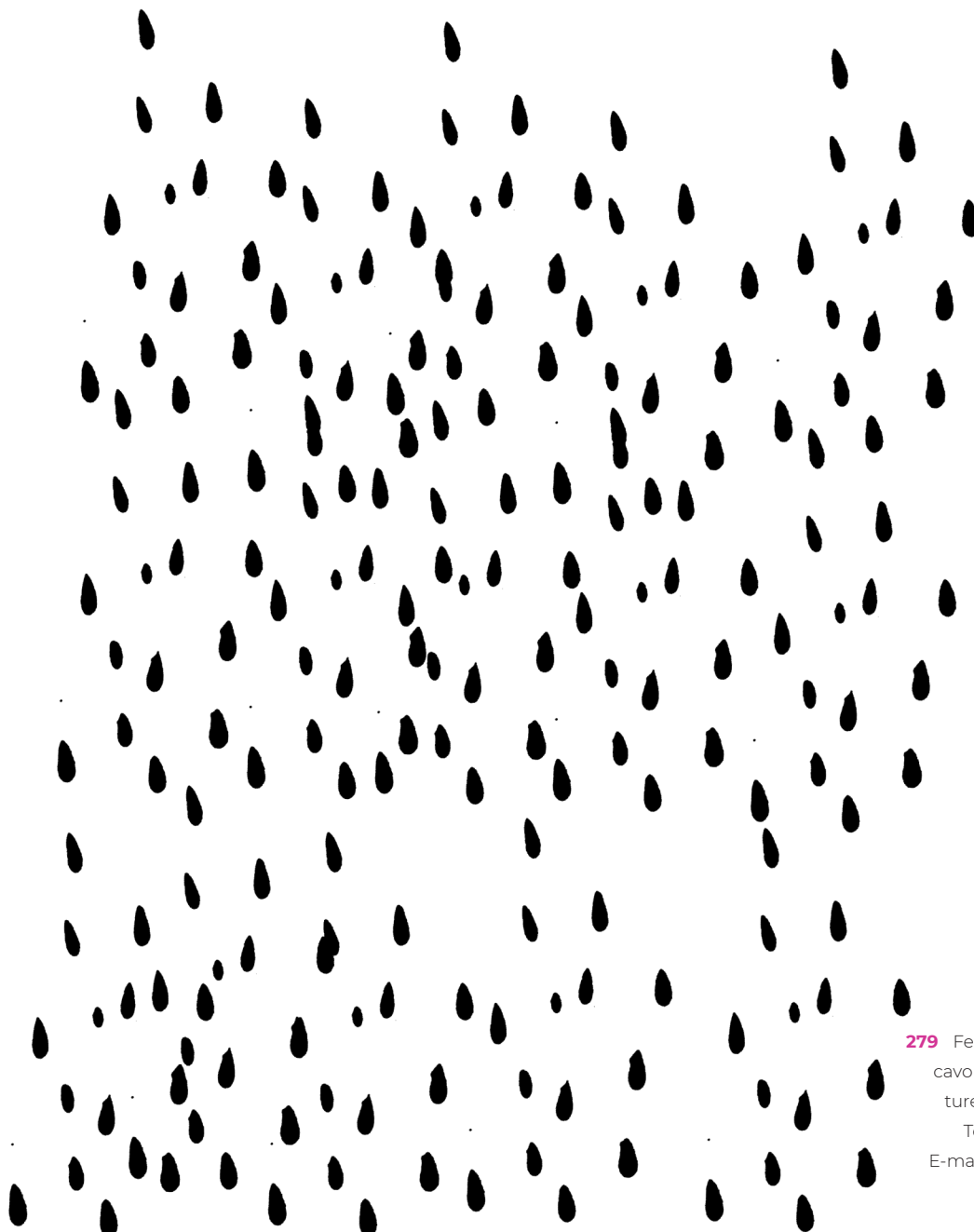
11.4. Lido Pimienta, the post-muse of contemporary Canada

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A b s t r a c t

This article reflects on certain issues such as globalization and its aspects of internationalization, cosmopolitanism, hegemony, contributing to a debate in diverse contexts of cultural studies and, consequently, expanding studies in the field of music and communication, from an analysis of the positions occupied by the Colombian singer living in Canada, Lido Pimienta, as an artist, activist and immigrant. This article is part of the postdoctoral research done at McGill University, which is based on thinking about pop music produced by immigrant artists in territories that are called multicultural.

Keywords: *Pop music, activism, transcultural.*



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1. Introduction

Canada is thought of as a nation of cultural diversity worldwide. However, there are tensions and conflicts about this concept within Canada. Sheenagh Pietrobruno, author of the book *Salsa and its transnational moves* (2006), the result of her doctoral thesis at McGill University, makes an analysis with several points of reflection on salsa and the relationship of Latino immigrants with the city of Montreal. One of its findings is, while there is an official (and unofficial) promotion of multiculturalism, it is a myth to believe that these “ethnic” cultures would occupy the same place as the dominant cultures of the two founding nations (United Kingdom and France):

In reality, ‘other’ cultures have little power to affect and influence the prevailing cultures. Official multiculturalism policy is under fire for being a containment policy that keeps ethnic groups in ‘their place’ and renders them unable to significantly influence Canadian society (Paquet, 1994, p. 63-64). The multiculturalism policy remains merely decorative because it neither grants immigrants any ‘real ethnic rights’, nor requires them to fulfill with ‘multicultural obligations’. The promotion of multiculturalism values without actual resources to support diversity can only create a split between what is expected from the official policy and what it can actually put into place in concrete circumstances (Pietrobruno, 2006, p.97).

Pietrobruno notes that, despite the strength of multiculturalism policy as a discourse, places of power are rarely occupied by this multicultural population, and the state gives little space to immigrants in decisions that shape what Canadian society is. Salsa, for example, works as a commodity in this great market of Canadian multiculturalism.

Canadian researcher Afef Benessaïeh attempts to explain the meanings of Canadian multiculturalism in the book *Trancultural Americas* (2010):

In the Canadian context, multiculturalism has been in use since the 1970s, both as a descriptive term to qualify cultural diversity in the population and as a set of programmatic measures conducted by the State to support and encourage such diversity in a non-assimilationist view (mosaïque or the melting-pot sense of the term multiculturalism). These measures concern immigration, labor market, education, public media policies, and regulations as well as support for the arts and culture, sustaining the general view that respect for cultural pluralism is central to Canadian culture (see Heritage Canada’s annual reports on Canadian multiculturalism; and Houle 1999 for a historiography of the policy) (Benessaïeh, 2010, p. 18).

Studying the subject in Canada, Benessaieh considers cultures as flowing relational webs and with active interaction. She believes that the term “transculturalism” is better suited to describe the cultures that originate from migratory flows and ethnic miscegenations because “transculturality here refers to an embodied situation of cultural plurality lived by many individuals and communities of mixed heritage and/or experience whose multifaceted situation is rendered more visible under globalization” (2010, p. 15).

The two authors bring contributions to understand the environment that singer, songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Lido Pimienta, who was born in Colombia, but built her career in the independent pop scene of Canada, is inserted. Designed nationally after her album *La Papessa* in 2017, winning Canada’s top musical award, the Polaris Music Prize, the artist made a very emphatic speech on the day of the awards ratifying her no place in the country. “Not in English, not in French. But we’re here. And again I denounce white supremacy in Canada”. Identifying herself as an Afro-Colombian of indigenous origin, Lido Pimienta is part of the Canadian DIY scene, and the feminist, black, indigenous and immigrant speech permeates her performance. In *La Papessa*, she presents songs about love in a patriarchal and heteronormative society. She sings neither English nor French, but in Spanish and presents a musicality sewn by accounts of femininity, personal and political pain, in which her voice establishes a leading role over experimental electronics and minimalist melodies mixed with her Latin and Indian roots. For the past three years, she has become one of the most important voices in Canada, acting politically so that the stages are occupied by black women, indigenous women and trans-people.

In this text, we want to reflect on the contemporary culture carried out by artists such as Lido Pimienta (feminist, black, and immigrant) from the perspective of cultural studies. We are interested in thinking about pop music from a gender perspective, from migrations, from displacements to observe the transformations that occur in the process of urbanity (Straw, 1991) and from the relations between peoples. We want to understand how new social and artistic practices are being formatted from discourses such as feminism, immigration and transculturalism, intermediated by music. A transcultural territory that allows us to have a contemporary understanding of the social, ethnic and generational tensions that emerge in certain urban spaces to think of urban pop music as a cultural device to understand affective alliances, cultural connections, media expressions, socioeconomic aspects and to perceive the networks that are formed around geographic, sonorous, affective, social and economic territorializations.

2. Activist and artsy

Lido Pimienta, 32, was born in Colombia but lives in Canada since the age of ten, currently residing in the city of Toronto, in the province of Ontario, whose language is English. Singer, composer, multi-instrumentalist, she presents herself in a circuit of cultural globalization (Regev, 2013) which, according to the author, produces aesthetic cosmopolitanism that “consists of quests for recognition, for a sense of parity, for participation and membership in what collective and individual actors around the world believe to be the innovative frontiers of creativity and artistic expressions in modern culture” (Regev, 2013, p.19). What Regev calls aesthetic cosmopolitanism are cultures generated in

the flow of the West to other parts of the world, but also from Asia, Africa, Latin America, empowered by a networked society that creates a new dynamic of information exchange, especially from the use of new technologies. These actors who present themselves in this global cultural circuit also do so as a form of resistance to a hegemonic West. In Lido's case, she sings in Spanish (in an English-speaking and French-speaking country), brings indigenous, black and Latin stylistic elements to her music in dialogue with electronic bases, genres with Colombian percussion and rap, and puts her feminist activism, immigrant, ethnic as part of speech and her lyrics.

When moving to Canada, Lido Pimienta moves to another reconfiguration in which she strengthens her national culture and goes through a process in which her body integrates a new territoriality expressing questions about sexualities, ethnicities. It brings its territory of origin and occupies another, an ideological and aesthetic reterritorialization, creating new forms of political subjectivity (Rancière, 2011). Lido positions herself as an artist with a racialized body (Latin, black, indigenous), whose art encompasses marginalized collectives (women, trans, blacks, immigrants). Indie rock in Canada as white, masculine, cis, so she reaffirms herself as the only woman, black and indigenous within this circuit in a country that officially positions itself as multicultural. Her position in current Canadian music is that of tensing the relations of a white hegemonic power, and she does not accept her place as a black and Latin pop artist. Lido always positions herself as "the other" with dissent.

As an immigrant, as an Afro-Indigenous person, an intersectional feminist, as a mother and all other signifiers that qualify me as 'other'. I understand what it is like to see yourself in the media, to not see yourself in institutions and do not see yourself represented or reflected in a music show, because the 'artist of color' (and I put that in quotation marks because even that term is extremely problematic), we do not get to see each other at that level (Brad Wheeler, 2017).

She refuses to be a commodity (Latin American) in this broad spectrum of multicultural consumption that is part of Canadian culture. Along with tension and conflict, there is a fluidity between local and global that makes us think of cultural globalization as a space of creation of new cultures that are related in networks of enormous interaction that we call transculturalism, a concept that, as Benessaïeh puts it, "captures highly diversified cultural changes in a contemporary society that has become globalized" (2010, p. 11). While observing the album, *La Papessa*, we realize that the work crosses several geographic, cultural and ideological territories: the Indian desert of Wayuu, the mountains in Colombia, the city of Toronto. Musically it is possible to perceive the strong Afro-Colombian percussive tradition in a dialogue with avant-garde electronic sounds. From the political and ideological point of view, the artist makes the listeners deal with the complexities of their experiences as an immigrant, woman, afro-latin. This tension with her music, her political and artistic activism, is part of the way that she confronts the labels that she receives from critics and producers, such as being seen as world music, a generic term to cover music produced outside the United States, Canada and Europe. Her

music is driven by activism, be it in sonorities or in statements to the press. She attempts to break away from the male, white, heteronormative narrative of those who occupy the entertainment spaces in Canada.

Adriana Amaral (2015), in an article on fan activism, reflects how pop culture consumption practices are important tools for learning political activism. Amaral's studies are focused on the fans, but the author brings important contributions to the understanding of activism in the pop culture environment and serves to reflect the role of artists as activists, complicating "the relationship between the entertainment industry, political participation, pop culture and social mobilization". (Amaral *et al.*, 2014, p. 152). From the reading of Amaral, Simone de Sá notes the importance of "overcoming the dichotomy between the worlds of consumption and entertainment on one side and citizenship and politics on the other." (Sa, 2016, p. 57). Lido Pimienta is an activist artist for her complete adherence to causes such as feminism, racism, homophobia and xenophobia. Her political participation is in her artistic performance, in her speeches, in her body. There is no division between her art and her activism, the two issues are bogged down, and, as Amaral puts it, "forms of political activism have been made visible through learning with consumption practices of popular culture" (Amaral *et al.*, 2014).

3. Local, global, cross-cultural

For Regev, the standard imposed on products in the cultural globalization circuit does not eliminate diversity, but fosters the emergence of new cultures within the framework of a hegemonic West, that is, these subaltern, non-hegemonic cultures propose resistance, appropriations and subversions and "new aesthetic languages" (Regev, 2013). We do not pretend to use the terms cosmopolitanism and globalization without questioning, Regev himself draws attention to the complexities of this forged world culture and must be seen as distinctive cultural units (Regev, 2013). We live in a world in which cultures are interconnected, but what we perceive is that these same cultures seek to surround this globalization with their singularities, a way of legitimizing themselves based on their nationality, ethnicity, gender.

Post-colonialist studies present globalization as part of a hegemony of the so-called Global North, of a western system that is oppressive and imperialist. The globalized culture has been, from the great navigations, the preponderance of tastes, standards and values of Europe and, more recently, North America. This northern -centric hegemony (Prystron, 2001) has to be observed in a critical and complex way in order to understand the global flows (Parry, 1991) in order to avoid falling into a fight of the Global North X Global South and think of the complexities that surround an increasingly globalized culture, but permeated by local issues. Regev (2013) argues that aesthetic cosmopolitanism emerges from a combined action between the global and national cultural fields, because it places social actors in both positions simultaneously. For Regev the influence of pop in this cosmopolitan aesthetic inspires artists of the most diverse musical practices in a kind of symbolic resistance to the peripheral place that these cultural practices would be submitted in the field of cultural production.

In the book *The Convenience of Culture* (2013), George Yúdice analyzes at various levels the impacts of globalization in the field of culture. Even if several pessimistic visions of critics of globalization are exposed, Yudice realizes that

“globalization has facilitated new progressive strategies that conceive the cultural as a preferred area of negotiation and struggle” (Yúdice, 2013, p. 144). Lido Pimienta on her upcoming album, *Miss Colombia*, brings her relationship with Latin American music and Canada, but she always reinforces the speech that she does not feel like a Colombian anymore: ‘But I know that I’m definitely not Canadian, either’. We know that we live in a world in which cultures are interconnected, but what we perceive is that these same cultures seek to surround this globalization with their singularities, a way of legitimizing themselves based on their nationality, ethnicity, gender. Simone Pereira de Sá updates the discussion of Regev by stating that aesthetic cosmopolitanism materializes from the circulation of music culture in digital networks (2016). It analyzes the connections that are made between global and local actors and, especially, in the means that these contexts cross to change influences. Thus, by complexifying the global and local relationship, Pereira de Sá brings reflections on the importance of mediators between these two places, and the mobilization power of the network.

4. Final considerations

The Colombian researcher Omar Rincón, when he brings us the term *Culturas Bastardas*, from the reading of other researchers like Martín-Barbero, Canclini and Bhabha, reflects that “popular cultures are bastards because in our time we know who *our cultural mother is*, but not who are our parents. Our cultural mother is the place, the own, the one. But we will have many possible parents (and few of us are aware) (Rincón, 2016, p. 34). The list of “parents” formulated by Rincon is extensive to account for our most diverse cultural references: the authentic, the colonized, the artistic, the mainstream, the technological, among others that would give rise to what he calls bastard cultures.

Both Regev, Rincon, and Yúdice complement Hall’s (2003) thought that cultural forms are not entirely corrupted or entirely authentic, but contradictory. As Hall puts it, “(...) the meaning of a cultural symbol is attributed in part by the social field to which it is embodied, by the practices which it articulates” (Hall, 2003, p. 258). The questions brought by these authors help us to reflect in analyzing certain cultural objects that, from the consumption of musical practices, construct meaning, identities and subjectivities, and share social, economic, ideological and cultural values and even in a nordocentric environment we construct new “aesthetic languages”.

The construction of social groups around music takes place through the necessity of belonging, through the recognition of the sensitive and ideological sharing of aesthetic and social aspects, at the same time as it serves to connect them to a network of “like souls” (Janotti, 2014). For Frith (1996), from the twenty-century pop music became one of the most important tools for understanding “ourselves in a historical, ethnic, social class, genre and national theme” (Frith, 1996, p. 276).

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