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Discussing the symbolic order: child and youth orchestras in Argentina

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Introduction

A large number of projects and programs for child and youth orchestras teach music through orchestral training and focus on vulnerable populations. This is related to what, in public policy is referred to as social inclusion, integration or transformation. Projects with similar characteristics exist throughout the world in countries like Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, France, Scotland, Mexico, Paraguay, South Africa, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Argentina. However, this is a diverse field. There are different versions of these programs depending on social, political and regional factors which reflect a wide range of distinct conceptions regarding their objectives, target populations, music and cultural policies, among other things.

Furthermore, the specificity of the Argentinean scenario is characterized by the large number of projects being implemented as well as their diversity and dynamics. The present paper seeks to describe and reflect upon the "Andres Chazarreta" Social Program (National Ministry of Culture) and the Child and Youth Orchestra Project (Ministry of Education of the City of Buenos Aires) which are both state managed. It also focuses specifically on the coordinating team's perspectives. I suggest that although these initiatives involve different cultural policy designs due to their underlying concepts, they both contribute to destabilizing a symbolic construct that promotes relations of inequality and exclusion.

Before discussing these programs, I would like to briefly describe the local scenario in Buenos Aires supported by a survey carried out by the Research Group on Music and Inclusion, an interdisciplinary research team from the National University of Avellaneda. This group includes both student and professional researchers from different fields, such as

anthropology, political science, cultural management, ethnomusicology, music pedagogy and journalism.

In the *Gran Buenos Aires* area (which includes the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires and its 24 surrounding districts) there are 116 orchestras, 36 of which are located in the capital city and 80 of which are distributed among the greater Buenos Aires districts (see *Research Group on Music and Inclusion 2015*). Most of these are part of projects or programs run by different public institutions which operate at the national, provincial or local level as well as different administrative areas (Culture, Education or Social Development). We also found several projects run by third sector and private organizations. This scenario is made more complex by the various dynamic articulations which exist between different public, private and third sector institutions. These programs may thus be operated by a single party or by articulated management (Avenburg, Cibeá and Talellis 2017).

Each of these programs or projects develops its own conceptions about music, culture, social inclusion/ integration/ transformation, cultural politics, and about the populations involved. The design and implementation of the orchestras are based on those conceptions, and are also modified according to the experiences and expectations of the participants and current public policies. As a consequence, different programs (and their corresponding orchestras) may vary in both their design and execution. Therefore, although child and youth orchestras are sometimes spoken of as a homogeneous whole, they are in reality dynamic and heterogeneous initiatives which, like all cultural phenomena (Wright 2007), are fields of dispute.

In this presentation I aim at describing two child and youth orchestra programs / projects that exist in Argentina. I will specifically focus on the perspectives of the members of their coordination teams. As I said, I believe these perspectives have an impact upon how said programs are designed and executed. The two programs studied here are the Andrés Chazarreta Social Program (Argentine Ministry of Culture) and the Child and Youth Orchestra Project (run by the Ministry of Education of the City of Buenos Aires). This study is based both on interviews with different members of the coordination teams, and on informal observations and conversations with other program participants in various situations (gatherings, demonstrations, discussion meetings, etc). Both are state managed but operate at two different administrative levels (national and local) and within two different management areas (Culture and Education).

Discussing Orchestras as Cultural Policies

According to Nestor García Canclini (1987), cultural policies are sets of interventions that, among other things, aim at guiding a society's symbolic order. We may then ask what kind of symbolic universe any project or program, as part of a cultural policy, seeks to build, reinforce or question. The perspective held by those involved in creating, designing and executing a specific project may lead to different experiences. Consequently, it is possible to assume that both the perspectives and the courses of action will be fields of dispute.

In the specific case of child and youth orchestras, we can observe how cultural policies that promote musical training through orchestral practice and focus on vulnerable populations have a dual task: teaching music while acting in the social and cultural fields to try to reduce the effects of social exclusion. If cultural policies are attempts to intervene in the symbolic construction of a society, one must ask what kind of symbolic universe do these musical initiatives seek to generate? Also, what idea systems do they reinforce or confront? With these questions as guidelines, I will first describe both programs and then discuss how, in different ways, they seek to dispute a symbolic order that favors relations of inequality and exclusion.

The Programa Social Andrés Chazarreta

The "Andrés Chazarreta" Social Program originated in 2006 in what is now the Argentine Ministry of Culture. It is active throughout the entire country and is directed at children, adolescents and youths placing special emphasis on areas that have historically not benefitted from public policies related to different musical expressions.

This program uses an articulated management modality which may connect the national public sector with third sector organizations, as well as other levels (provincial, local) or areas of public administration, such as the ministry of culture or education.

Two things in particular most clearly distinguish this program from others while questioning the Eurocentric formation in diverse spaces of musical education: the repertoire and the instruments used. The former includes "the living expressions of Argentine and Latin American music".

According to one of its members, the Chazarreta Orchestral program was born from a desire to teach Argentine and Latin American popular music emphasizing local musical

repertoires and instruments unlike “programs that are academically rooted (...), and of European origin” (Undav meeting - 2015)¹.

The instruments used by these orchestras include harmonic string instruments (such as guitars, charangos, guitarrones, venezuelan cuatros, mandolins and bandolas), a set of Latin American percussion instruments (congas and bombos legüeros among others) bow strings (such as violins and double basses) and cane and wood aerophones (quenás, sicus, moceños), as well as traverse flutes and accordions (more information is available on their website).

Work on what is lacking

This program’s design (a public cultural policy) is based on the perspectives of the team that created it and now executes it. Both the general coordinator and the coordination group believe that it is very important to work on musical practices that are not supported in the hegemonic universe. In its coordinator’s words, “What must the state do then? Supply that which is lacking; especially if it is genuine” (Interview 2015). Why have they chosen these musical expressions instead of others? Because, in order to move away from a Buenos Aires centric “porteño scheme” towards a direction that prioritizes children from a very diverse country, they need to find musical expressions that involve a wide cross section of society.

Proyecto Orquestas Infantiles y Juveniles

The Child and Youth Orchestra Project was one of the first to be created in Argentina which continues functioning nowadays; it began in 1998 within what is today the Ministry of Education of the City of Buenos Aires, and is organized within a single management framework. The repertoire includes both academic and popular music, creating different arrangements that allow for all the children to play in the orchestra from the beginning. Unlike the Chazarreta Program, the set of instruments is similar to that of the symphonic orchestra, including string instruments such as violins, violas, cellos and double basses, wooden wind instruments such as the flute, clarinet and oboe, metal wind instruments such as trumpet,

¹ The original interviews were in Spanish. Since the translators sought to respect the original ideas word for word, some things may have been lost in translation.

horn, trombone and flugelhorn, and percussion instruments such as plaques and accessories.

“There is a socially valued good that must be distributed”

This project is also thought of as a public policy directed at children and youths. In this case the orchestras function in schools located in areas of social vulnerability in Buenos Aires City. However, unlike the other program, it focuses on the symphonic orchestra because, in the words of a member of the coordinating team, it seeks to "distribute a certain social and cultural good, which is music, which is the possibility of playing an instrument, and being part of an orchestra; and that happens in (...) a context of inequality, where there are obviously population sectors that are hindered by their socio-economic situation". It is based on the idea that “there is a socially valued good that must be distributed”, and that the State, through public policy, should attempt to correct that situation in some way. He goes on explaining that “It is then also part of recognizing a context of inequality in the distribution of these goods, which is not marked by chance, but by social, socio-economic factors”.

Discussing hegemony. Two versions

I have very briefly described both a project and a program that, in terms of their design (how they are thought out, how they are organized) have many similarities as well as several differences.

Among the former we can mention:

- the central role of collective teaching;
- the unrestricted access;
- the questioning of certain stigmas regarding the target population;
- the construction of a public policy that addresses historically neglected sectors;
- the perspective that musical experience can impact positively upon the participants.

In regard to their differences, we can point out:

- One of them is national while the other is local. This has numerical, administrative and organizational implications, and increases the population’s heterogeneity (both programs have very diverse populations).
- They also differ in terms of their management models due to the agents who design and manage them. One uses articulated management between two or more agents (which

depend on the Ministry of Culture and other public or third sector actors), while the other features a single management model (supported by the Ministry of Education).

-I am especially interested in discussing the differences in the repertoires and instruments employed. Even though the distinction between so-called erudite music and popular music must be questioned, the instruments used are associated with two different traditions. The ones employed by the Chazarreta Program, beyond their place of origin, are those usually used in so-called Latin American folk music while those present in the Child and Youth Orchestra Project, are more along the lines of what can be seen in traditional European symphonic orchestras. In regard to the repertoire, the former executes exclusively Latin American genres and the latter executes diverse expressions that include not only academic but also popular and folk music.

But again, the distinction between academic and popular musical traditions² must be questioned: The ideas of "erudite", "cult", or "popular" music are social constructions; they are often utilized to organize, judge and hierarchize cultural expressions as well as populations. Hence, the differences between these two programs do not necessarily signify opposition. It is my understanding that that from different perspectives, focusing on diverse problems and therefore, based upon different designs, both initiatives question a symbolic hegemonic order that reinforces situations of inequality and exclusion.

I believe that there are (at least) two hegemonic anchors which these programs seek to question. On the one hand, the usual association, already discussed by Bourdieu (2003), between works of art (which are socially and historically constructed as such) and certain social groups that acquire artistic competence through education which reinforces what he calls "distinction". This refers to distinguishing between those who have the spare time and the means to aesthetically perceive works of art (a perception socially constructed as valid), and those who do not. As Bourdieu explains, this legitimizes and reinforces economic and social inequalities.

Even though I agree with authors like Garcia Canclini (2010) who observe that the popularization of museums and of expressions of dance and music through different means question these anchors, it is also true that certain artistic expressions in the western tradition

² Moreover, traditions are not static. Cultural expressions circulate among diverse groups and regions, are appropriated in various ways and acquire different meanings; and those changes, movements, and appropriations generally occur in contexts of inequality.

-wrongly termed “high culture”- contribute to “distinguishing” social groups that know, consume and perform them, considering these groups as superior in their possession of cultural capital.

Is one form of artistic expression better than another? I don't believe so. Then why should it be that the different groups which form a society can not have equal access to these expressions?

According to Bonfil Batalla (1982) we should focus on the differential possibility that various social groups have regarding the use, production and reproduction of cultural elements. Hence the rupture of this pattern of selective access to the production of symbolic goods such as academic music implies a restitution of cultural rights.

I reiterate that these are socially legitimized expressions. I suggest then that the objective is to undermine an entrenched system which only allows the middle and upper classes to know, enjoy and perform certain types of traditional western music.

The second hegemonic anchor which is being questioned has to do with which kinds of artistic expressions are valued by the state. Considering the historically constructed identities in the Argentine nation state and taking into account the social dichotomy created by the so called “generation of 1880” (a succession of leaders who shared a common vision) which considered that the nation was involved in an epic struggle between the forces of civilization and barbarism, it can be noted that this generation sought to build a European like Argentina. This whitewashing of the country made its internal “others” invisible.

Rita Segato (2007) states that Argentina's “national formation of alterity” was characterized by the idea of “ethnic terror”, which refers to efforts on the part of institutions and a eurocentric elite to homogenize society and suppress diversity. To “nationalize” in this context meant to shape a kind of “fictitious ethnicity” which was ironclad in its uniformity. The national identity was molded to be ethnically neutral (civilized) and cleaned of any trace of ethnic or racial particularities that could be associated with “barbarism”.

In this scenario, musical practices originating in or associated with those alterities that “had to be” nullified or swept under the rug, have historically been devalued, negated and/or particularized³. In opposition to this, these practices are now being vindicated by

³ For this reason, even though some of these expressions have their own channels of communication, it is important to have a program aimed at developing socially devalued musical practices at the national level.

national cultural policies which include the entire population. In other words, these practices are now revalued by the state, and the rights of diverse social groups (not only those which generated them) to appropriate them are being recognized.

In light of this, although these programs have designs which can in some ways seem opposite, both are necessary to satisfy varied cultural needs and to contribute to the symbolic construction of a diverse and plural Argentine society.

Final Reflections

I have presented and discussed here the perspectives of different members of the coordinating teams of both programs: the Andres Chazarreta Social Program (National Ministry of Culture) and the Child and Youth Orchestra Project (Ministry of Education, City of Buenos Aires). Since they are the viewpoints of the programs' designers, which are often (but not always) shared, these differing perspectives determine particular models.

Although they have a lot in common, there are differences in their objectives, the instruments and the repertoires which they use. The Chazarreta Program places special emphasis on Latin American musical genres in order to compensate for the hegemonic distribution of so called academic music and other popular musical expressions which have their own distribution channels supported by the cultural industry. The Child and Youth Orchestra Project challenges the historic association between social elites and academic music thereby breaking the "distinction" which according to Bourdieu reinforces relations of domination between social groups.

Hence, I believe that using different designs, both seek to undermine hegemonic symbolic constructions. It could be said that they address two different kinds of symbolic violence (Bourdieu y Passeron 1996). One that classifies social groups and musical expressions and promotes that only certain groups practice certain types of musical manifestations; and another that hierarchizes musical expressions and the social groups associated with them. For this reason, although they may seem to be in opposition, both programs contribute, in their own way, to destabilizing a symbolic order which perpetuates relations of social inequality.

Finally, it is important to note that I'm referring to the design aspect of these programs. Obviously, these perspectives are not necessarily homogenous within each one but in general there is (or should be) a certain level of agreement. I leave it to future research

to investigate the concrete experiences which their execution generates (we are now doing fieldwork in different orchestras).

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