Glocalization of Surf Music: The Floridian Strand Rethinking Surf Music and Scholarship

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From the geographical origins of music types to the mythologies built around their ideological scenes, the loci in which musics develop play a role in their construction and conservation. Surf music was born in 1960s California as a background for the surf lifestyle. It has been confined to an idealized and nostalgic west coast culture following the rock and punk movements' ebbs and flows. However, I argue that surf music, more than a set of musical genres, is better defined as a surfers' community construct. Indeed, as my research shows (Barjolin-Smith), communities of surfers worldwide have developed their own aesthetics from a mobile cultural movement built as a rhizomatic system. Local populations appropriate migrating cultures and subcultures to respond to contextualized expressive needs and organize their social space.

This paper is an overview of my research, which is rooted in American Studies and crosses many disciplinary boundaries to propose a new approach to surf music. It is an ethnographic study that combines cultural anthropology, sports sociology, surf studies, and ethnomusicology. The argument rests on a definition of aesthetics on the one hand as an idiosyncratic experience in which surf music constitutes a surfers community's construct, and on the other hand as action in the form of musicking. The study is based on the observation of a group of Floridian surfers from Cocoa Beach on Florida's east coast. I use Roland Roberston's concept of glocalization to explain how surf music can no longer be understood only from a geo-historical approach as a finite cultural movement deemed to disappear (Badman; Blair; Chidester & Priore; Crowley). I develop the notion of surf strand to explain how the Floridian surf culture has come up with its own surf music and music consumption modalities to articulate a sense of identity stemming from a global surf culture but resolutely constructed as a local subculture.

Some of the questions leading to this study pondered on how to define surf music. To quote my interviewees, what is it that "they" call surf music? And what is it that actual surfers call surf music? Is surf music only Californian music from the 1960s, or is it what surfers make of it? What is authentic surf music – authentic meaning "for us and by us" in the surfing world. "By us" does not mean that surf music has to be played by surfers but that surfers have to determine that it is suitable for their surfing, social, affective, and expressive needs. The more I looked into it, the more I noticed a gap between surf music's conceptual definition, and surfers' idea of their musical practices. This gap highlighted that while surfing's image had evolved in scholarly writings, its music seemed to have remained stuck in a time warp. Therefore, as this snapshot highlights, research on surf music requires concomitantly addressing the topic and its approaches thus far.

Overview of the Research: Deconstructing Surf Music

Surfing is at once a sport, a lifestyle, and a culture. It is unique because it has generated music bearing its name, representing its lifestyle, and spreading its culture. It is a physical activity that is a way of living and a global culture, which, I argue, is composed of a variety of regional subcultures. Thus, more than just a sport, surfing is a space of cultural diversity, and in this space, dominant ideologies have reshaped and standardized heterogeneous realities, including the musical facet of surf culture. The myth of surf music as the surf industry, the media, and scholars have constructed it since the 1960s is an expression of surf culture coloniality as it was founded on the colonization of Hawaii and constitutes the legacy of colonialism in our knowledge of surfing. It has served as a relay for a North American dominant discourse that exclusively anchors surf music in Californian sounds. Indigenous musics are absent from scholarly writings, while regional forms of surf music are barely mentioned. Thus, one of my research objectives has been to uncover the potential aesthetic and socio-cultural meanings of surf music by questioning the status quo.

To do so, I have taken Florida as an instance of one of the world's singular surf subcultures. I have worked antagonistically to the traditional approaches to surf music by focusing on the relationship that we, as scholars,

have with this cultural space to invest with its plurality and its distinctive characteristics. Too often, surf studies rely on a consensual definition of what surf music is or was. They usually and rightfully emphasize the idea that surf music was one of surf culture's most important global advocate and way of disseminating surfing – thanks to bands like The Beach Boys, for instance (Chidester & Prior; Crowley). Indeed, 1960s music brought the surf lifestyle to places with no waves – like the American Midwest. The culture that surf music disseminated represented a white North American hedonistic ideal, and this white music paradigm took over the surfing world. As scholars, we have relaid this big idea, but there were, and there are musics and ways of musicking associated with the surfing world that do not match the archetypes of surf music. It is this aspect of surf music that I explore in my research by looking at its modes of expansion and implementation. In its representation of surfing, I show how surf music globally reflects dominant meanings yet regionally challenges them. Relying on this idea, it is possible to show that musics that symbolize surf identities are cultural productions originating from both global and regional cultural communities. By looking at the aesthetic constructions of surfing communities and the ways they have imagined and implemented their surf music, we can learn about the ways these communities were effectively built, in contrast to the ways they were conceptually and mythologically built by the surf industry, the media, and us, scholars. With this approach, instead of letting surf music die with its staples (The Beach Boys or Dick Dale), it is possible to revise its mythologized history by considering its actual manifestations in time and space among existing surfing communities – not in the Midwest. This reevaluation of what constitutes the core of surfing communities' identity has allowed me to put surf music into a field of experimentation and cross-fertilization. The trans-disciplinary approach facilitates examining the complexity and variety of hybridity forms and functions in surf subculture representations through surf music. One of the research purposes is to explore how popular music can occupy space, migrate, disappear, and reappear to show how various types of music can be associated with some cultures and places without being enclosed in oversimplified categories.

Thus, this overview first defines the notion of surf strand and its relevance to illustrate surfing culture heterogeneity. Second, using the concept of glocalization, it shows how surf music as an expression of surfing culture has been constructed globally and locally. Finally, it explains how surf music has disseminated worldwide in a rhizomatic pattern that has facilitated its glocalization.

Surf Strands and Surf Musics

Most surf studies writings tend to synthesize an idea of surfing based on Hawaii, California, Australia, and South Africa (Hough-Snee & Zavala; Kampion; Warren & Gibson) and apply it to the rest of the world. The problem is that these studies neglect regions where waves do not create marketable excitement, such as Florida. However, this state's surfers have managed to work with their environment to make it a breeding ground for talents like world champion Kelly Slater, aerial pioneer Matt Kechele, the Hobgood brothers, etc.

In his work on surfing as a cultural extreme, Douglas Booth indicates that regional variations reflected in the surfing styles impact the activity's codification, but he and others have not acknowledged Florida as one of these singular regions (96). In my work, the word *strand* represents these regions because it reflects the idea of a complex whole formed by distinct elements or rhizomes. As a notion, *strand* illustrates the interconnected ideas of surf style, local culture, and environment. If, as Booth deems, regional variations reflect surfing styles, then local strands have something to tell us about the societies where they developed; therefore, they must be explored according to their socio-cultural specificities and the particular needs of their surfers. Accordingly, my research addresses two questions: First, how do we connect strands of surfing to musical repertoires adapted to surfers' aesthetic and social claims? Second, how do these regional iterations of surf culture coordinate to create a global surf culture?

To answer the first question, I have used the concept of geomusicality developed by Elsa Grassy to explain the semantical coordination between space and music. Music associated with a definite locus, such as surf music and California, would be synonymous with aesthetic authenticity, whereas displacement would mark a lack of authenticity. This concept highlights the representational issue of surf music's archetype in opposition to what I call its hybrids. Geomusicality implies the imaginary construction of a type of music exploited by the people of a region for their expressive needs and economic coherence with the region (for tourism purposes, for instance). So hybrid, and thus glocal, surf music is born from semantical and aesthetic coordination between archetypal surf music, regional types of music, and importable music. There needs to be an aesthetic valence of all these elements to create a regional stylistic consensus for a type of surf music to be validated by surfers. Then, we, scholars, must acknowledge it.

At this point, one may ask what characterizes Floridian surf music? Surveys and interviews I lead for three years showed that it blends reggae elements and southern rock and is, therefore, firmly anchored in its Southern (rock, blues, country) and Caribbean (reggae) environment (Barjolin-Smith).

Regional and Global Surf Cultures: Glocalization

To answer the second question, which is the focal point of this paper, I have used Roland Robertson's concept of glocalization. It is a term that he borrowed from the business vocabulary in order to explain the production of global culture through the interconnectivity of diverse local cultures:

The idea of glocalization in its business sense is closely related to what in some contexts is called, in more straightforwardly economic terms, micro-marketing: the tailoring and advertising of goods and services on a global or near-global basis to increasingly differentiated local and particular markets. (28).

According to Robertson, the frontiers between the global and the local are blurred, but glocalization does not mean that the world is becoming homogeneous (as opposed to what the word globalization suggests). The local becomes one of the aspects of globalization because the global processes become meaningful in the local cultural processes making the global and the local depend upon each other. The notion is used in works specialized in popular music to describe the appropriation of global musical styles and their re-territorialization and redefinition in local communities worldwide (Kndusen, 88). The ideas of glocalization and glocal help explain the changes relative to the evolution of surf music and regional surfers' cultural practices (Floridian surfers in my work). The glocalization of culture happens in a pendulum movement going back and forth between the source culture (for instance, Hawaii for surfing and California for surf music) and its hybrids (Florida). Floridian surfers look up to Hawaii and California to build their history and myths because they represent the cultural, economic, and spiritual heritage and archetypes of surfing. However, as underdogs of the surfing world, Floridians have also built and imposed their singularities, in part, by constructing a surf music repertoire anchored in their cultural space embedded in Southern culture and the Caribbean.

Some research in surf studies shows that surfers develop regional and national identities (Beal & Smith). In other words, there is no dichotomy between one global, somewhat homogeneous surfing culture and a multitude of surfing subcultures disconnected from each other. So the concept of glocalization is essential here because it limits the polarizing approaches that would set a sort of incompatibility between the regional and the global as cultural phenomena. As noted by sports sociologist Belinda Wheaton, the notion of glocalization illustrates the global production of the regional and the implantation of the global in the regional (2013 *Consumption and Representation* 5). Thus, even though this study focuses on Florida, it is impossible not to consider the global dimension of surfing and surf music in the analysis of this group of surfers' aesthetics. The regional is the focus of this research. However, the articulations of the local with the global must also be analyzed to understand how aesthetic identities are constituted, how they evolve, are transformed, and affirmed in response to economic, social, political, cultural, national, and global dynamics. The term glocal helps describe the appropriation of the activities and musics available globally that are subsequently redefined regionally by various surfers' communities as their surf music.

The glocal dissemination of surf music implies to take into account other cultural units and the direction of the exchanges between them. As Motti Regev shows, glocalization implies the integration of the exogenous into the local production:

> Openness consists not only of straightforward consumption of imported cultural goods. It also includes explicit absorption, the indigenization and domestication, of exogenous stylistic elements, creative practices, techniques of expression, and other components into the production of local, ethnic, and national culture. (8).

The glocal takes into account regional social units and replaces them within the global. Surfing culture is made of units spread out around the globe. These units communicate with each other by traveling (via competitions, surf trips, etc.), using social media, and sharing music (in surf videos, broadcast competitions, surf festivals, etc.). These micro-sociological scenes interact with each other but manifest a singular identity through what I call their aesthetic signatures, which correspond to a community's stylistic preferences and their implementation of music as a cultural tool.

The last significant step that has made it possible to revise the archetypal definition of surf music was clarifying the mobility processes that have enabled surf culture and surf music to become glocal. Various surfing communities representing singular strands of surfing have imagined and constructed their own surfing realities and

surf musics by borrowing from surrounding cultures and blending with the global surf culture. This process has generated hybrids of surf music in terms of style and implementation of the music.

The notions of territorialization and hybridization are essential to understand glocalization. According to Robin Cohen, "Historically, the evolution of particular cultures had often rested on the territorialization of meaning . . . By accepting the idea and reality that cultural boundaries are fuzzy and indeterminate and embracing the notion of 'traveling cultures,' hybridization and creolization have become potential subversive concepts" (4–5). Cultures and identity frontiers are porous and mobile, and hybridization does not follow a single root pattern with extended parts but occurs in a rhizomatic pattern. Studies on hip hop have shed light on how some communities imported and appropriated global discourses in their culture through a rhizomatic system. According to Knudsen, "[they] engage with transnational, global culture by employing an imported form of discourse, largely available through a rhizomatic network" (89). Similarly, observing a group of surfers has allowed me to investigate how they interact with the global surf culture by importing some of its discourse's codes and building up a hybrid glocal subculture substantiated in their practical, social, and aesthetic experiences.

Conclusion

The importance of showing that surf culture and surf music are glocal and have spread in a rhizomatic pattern rather than in a uniform spread lies in the idea that rhizomes become somewhat independent entities in terms of survival. They adjust to a specific area while being a part of a more extensive global system, enabling them to strive and become singular. As such, surf music is not, as many specialists have claimed, a music of the past that no longer exists. In my research, I question the mainstream definition of surf music that condemns it to disappear because of the way the media and the surf industry have constructed it. The reality is that as long as there will be surfers, there will be surf music. We cannot discard this reality because it does not suit a well-established and consensual scholarly agenda categorizing surf music as a genre or style (Blair; Crowley). Surf music is a musical movement that comprises multiple genres that may differ from one surf strand to another.

The consensual definition of surf music as it has been constructed from its mainstream American inception in the mid-twentieth century has reached its limits. It has served to represent the American nation and way of life and is articulated around the concept of origin: it has been constructed as a Californian movement that has helped claim surfing as a North American practice (inhibiting its Hawaiian origins). Arguably, this usage of surf culture reflects a common need for nations worldwide: that of choosing between a founding myth seemingly specific to their cultural identity, or in our case, the construction of a hybrid culture born out of the contact with another culture and history. This hybrid culture has become the dominant Californian surf culture, keeping underdogs of surfing, like Florida, on the margins of scholarly interests. Belinda Wheaton suggests that research should, in the future, look into "how particular discourses are made meaningful by people, and reveal who is included and excluded discursively, materially and spatially" (2015 "Assessing the Sociology of Sport" 638). The study of surf music helps to understand our own practices as scholars and to look at new ways of understanding and maybe deconstructing assumed realities as we uncover cultural identities and the making of local and global national and ethnic discourses underlined by inclusive and exclusive ideologies.

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