

Earlier Contacts: African Sounds and Hispanic Baroques

Anne Storch

University of Cologne - Germany

In both baroque Spain and Portugal, it was common practice to include songs that were based on imitations of peasants, Arabs, and northern Africans as part of Christmas music, namely in the villancicos, which usually contained descriptions of the crib and the pastoral scenery around it. At the time of intensified contact with African societies from the 16th century onwards, the inclusion of African musical and linguistic features in this type of religious music resulted in a new type of the villancico, the negrilla, which exhibits some rather new and very marked musical techniques, namely the pronounced inclusion of various string instruments, such as guitars, and of percussion instruments. It is the language of the baroque negrilla which is of particular interest in this talk. It is clearly not a pidginized Portuguese, but exhibits the use of articles, prepositions, verb inflection, and concord. The phonological properties that differ from Portuguese are mostly characteristic for the Afro-Lusitanian Creoles that were spoken (and partly still are in existence) in the Gulf of Guinea, apart from the many sound symbolic passages. Current contributions on foreigner talk, "Tarzanic", and monster talk, suggest that these texts in their perfect imperfectness exaggerate the comic element of the inferior Other. Even though most of the linguistic features are consistent with those of the Afro-Iberian Creole, these invented codes express something quite different than just Creolization. They express ideas about the black Other who mimes the white Self, and they – as Tarzanic – produce concepts of alterity: the Other in this unbalanced power relationship has lost most of his agency, and relies on the mercy of the new Christian saints and masters.