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Article

Development and Dream: On the Dynamics of K-Pop in Brazil

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The penetration of K-Pop in Brazil has occurred in tandem with the unfolding of a process of social mobility in the country. The fans which K-Pop attracts in the country mostly stem from families who are part of this process of social mobility. K-Pop somehow resonates with these young people in search of a new social position, as their place in society is no longer that of their parents or grandparents. The brave new world that K-Pop offers may appeal to them especially as an index of future of upward mobility, glamour and consumption. K-Pop is itself the result of South Korean compressed modernity and its Brazilian fans have themselves been undergoing a process of social change in the past ten years. The relation between the latter process and the diffusion of K-Pop in the South American country is the focus of this article. K-Pop in Brazil is approached as a class-based and gendered phenomenon, which mobilizes a dream of society and lifestyle.

Keywords: *K-Pop, Brazil, social change, culture, development, Korean Dream*

Introduction

Following the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 and the IMF-led restructuring of its economy, the South Korean government designated cultural technology as one of the areas intended to lead the country's economy into the twenty-first century (Shim 2008). The push that the entertainment industry received from the government soon proved to reap benefits: Korean pop culture, usually referred to as K-Pop or Hallyu, started gaining popularity in Taiwan, Hong Kong and China, followed by its penetration into Japan in the early 2000s and by its expansion to Southeast Asia and Latin America, as well as to Europe and the United States (Park 2013). The K-Pop phenomenon would not have been possible without the enormous expansion of the Internet throughout the 2000s[1], and the YouTube revolution that took off by 2008. As Oh and Lee state, K-Pop is a "new music genre that is based on the invention of new technologies in digital music recording and online 'free' music distribution through YouTube" (2013, pp. 54-55). In the early phase of the penetration of South Korean entertainment products into China, they became referred to by the name of Hallyu, which translates to "Korean Wave" and refers to South Korean pop music, TV series ("dramas") and films[2]. Hallyu has also expanded further to encompass other realms that supposedly express the contemporary South Korean "way of life", such as Korean food and fashion. Korean pop music is produced by a handful of large corporations, such as SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment and JYP Entertainment, which are driven by long-term strategic plans and market targets. Supported by the federal government, these giant K-Pop music manufacturers not only contribute to increasing revenues flowing into South Korea but also help to advertise and sell the country's image abroad – i.e., expanding its so-called "soft power."[3]

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[1] While there were 361 million internet users in 2000 across the globe, in 2010, there were nearly 2 billion users. In this period, internet users in Brazil climbed from 5 million to 76 million and the country rose from the fourteenth to the fifth position internationally concerning the number of users. See: royal.pingdom.com/2010/10/22/incredible-growth-of-the-internet-since-2000/

[2] In this paper, I interchangeably use the expressions "K-Pop", "Hallyu" and "Korean pop culture" to refer to the South Korean culture industry as a whole.

[3] The concept of soft power was coined in the early 1990s by Joseph S. Nye. It essentially refers to the use of attraction and persuasion instead of force, threats, sanctions and economic means in order to achieve goals in the international arena (Nye 1990, 2009). For a very good account of recent American mainstream foreign policy literature and its underpinning ideologies, see Anderson (2013).

Korean pop culture started to become popular in Brazil in the late 2000s and beginning of the present decade. Even though these figures are not exhaustive, the Korea Foundation estimates Brazilian fan base to amount to 220,000 people (Korea Foundation 2015, pp. 646). At the same time that K-Pop was landing in Brazil, the country was going through a series of transformations. A moderate left-wing government came to power in 2003 and, favored by a boom in the export of commodities – mainly to the giant and expanding Chinese market –, managed to make progress in fighting poverty, increasing income among the lower classes, promoting social mobility, and expanding public and free education, including higher education. Severely hit by an economic crisis since the end of 2014, which, intertwined with a political crisis that eventually led to the impeachment of the Workers' Party president in 2016 and the end of the party's four-term and 13-year rule, Brazil saw these processes come to a halt and, moreover, the new right-wing neoliberal government has threatened to reverse these achievements. Nonetheless, this scenario that emerged in the late 2000s and early 2010s has led to discussions about the rise of a new middle class or of a new intermediate social layer. In short, the debates on the rise of this new intermediate layer refer to the upward mobility of families that were formerly poorer, towards an improved middle-class-like position,[4] as well as the upward mobility of people living in extreme poverty – a situation that has practically been eradicated in Brazil[5] –, towards better living conditions.

This article seeks to analyze the dissemination of Korean pop culture among young people in Brazil against the background of the social changes that the country experienced while this very penetration was taking place. This seems especially necessary since the spread of K-Pop in Brazil follows

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[4] Souza sees the unfolding of a "'new Brazilian working class'" which is situated between the extremely poor and the middle and upper classes (Souza 2010, p. 26). Singer speaks of the rise of a "new proletariat", which he regards as a "group in transition" (Singer 2015, p. 9). According to him, due to the educational boom in the last 15 years, "the new proletariat has a high educational level" (2015, p. 11). Pochmann states that though "undeniable social mobility" has taken place, most of the people that ascended socially still belong to the working class and not to middle classes (Pochmann 2012, p. 20). Salata argues that it is inaccurate conflating the typical Brazilian middle class and the statistical intermediary layer which had its life standards improved within that process of upward social mobility, since people belonging to the latter stratum regard themselves rather as part of the lower-middle class or the working class (2015).

[5] According to the United Nations Development Programme, from 1990 to 2012, extreme poverty dropped from 25.5% to 3.5% in Brazil (see the website: www.pnud.org.br/odm1.aspx). The World Bank states that, between 2001 and 2013, the percentage of the population living in extreme poverty dropped from 10% to 4% (see the website: http://www.worldbank.org/pt/news/feature/2015/04/20/brazil-low-economic-growth-versus-poverty-reduction).

the framework of class markers. Combined with class cleavages, K-Pop is also a gendered phenomenon – a point which requires discussion as well. I shall start by a literature review on the topics of culture, class and gender. I will then present the results of a survey applied among Brazilian K-Pop fans, discuss these results in light of the existing literature and draw some conclusions. Besides the survey itself, I also had the opportunity of having weekly contact with K-Pop fans in São Paulo – Brazil's biggest city, with the highest concentration of fans of Korean pop culture in the country – for about one year at a facility belonging to the Korean consulate that offers Korean language courses. Whereas I sought to participate in Korean language courses at this center for academic purposes, nearly all the other students were young people with a particular interest in K-Pop. This experience will be used here to assist in the interpretation that I develop.

Social Theoretical Approaches: Culture, Class and Gender

As my aim here is to analyze the reception of K-Pop by Brazilian fans in connection with the country's social and economic context, without, at the same time, disregarding the South Korean scenario of production, I would like to start by referring to Chua's methodological suggestion according to which the "larger analytic interest should be oriented towards the structures and modalities through which the [cultural] products partake in the social and economic material relations within the different locations where the products are produced, circulated and consumed" (Chua 2007, p. 120). His proposition is in line with my intention of discussing broader social tendencies related to the tastes of Brazilian consumers of K-Pop. When talking about taste, one cannot escape mentioning Bourdieu's discussion of the topic. Bourdieu argues that taste always has to be considered in terms of class positions. According to him, taste is deeply rooted in people's concrete living conditions, so that different lifestyles correspond to different societal positions, symbolically expressing objective circumstances (Bourdieu and de Saint Martin 1976, Bourdieu 1979).

Drawing on a concept originally formulated by Elias, Bourdieu argues that class belonging generates a specific *habitus*, i.e., an ethical and aesthetical system of classification that converts social and economic differences into individual or group preferences, which become habitual and are taken for granted as being natural (Bourdieu and de Saint Martin 1976). Interaction in the family, with neighbors, friends and at school produces these enduring,

though dynamic, cognitive structures, which remain mostly unconscious and tacit, and are translated into dispositions, skills and practices. The dynamics referred to by Bourdieu have to do with the fact that habitus changes over time in response to changes in one's life and to social transformations. For example, formal education is a major factor in the achievement of cultural capital, which, according to Bourdieu (1979), refers to educational qualifications and distinction through the disposal of technical, scientific and artistic knowledge. Another example of change is provided by processes of upward social mobility, which normally entail breaks with the past and a search for new identities and values (Singer 2015).

Another approach to the discussion of culture and social class that I consider to be relevant when addressing the dissemination of K-Pop in Brazil is that of Kracauer. Writing about bestsellers during the Weimar Republic, Kracauer stated that the success of a particular cultural product can be explained only by the needs of the consumers, "who greedily devour certain components while decisively rejecting others" (Kracauer 2005, p. 570). The author stresses that if we look at successful cultural products, we will see that they satisfy consumers' needs in one way or another. This means that the fame of cultural products is related to their capacity of responding to "widespread tendencies in the social environment" (op. cit., p. 570). Thus, according to Kracauer, in order to achieve success as a commodity, a cultural product has to satisfy the demands of a social stratum of consumers. And these "demands are much too general and constant for their direction to be determined by private inclinations or mere suggestion. They must be based on the social relations of the consumers" (op. cit., p. 571). When Kracauer was writing this in the early 1930s, the middle classes in Germany were "on the verge of dissolution" (op. cit., p. 571) due to high inflation, concentration of capital, increasing rationalization, and the general crisis his country was facing, all of this leading to the impoverishment of these social layers. According to him, the consumption of bestsellers by the decaying middle classes worked as "(mainly unconscious) measures they take for their own protection; for it can certainly be assumed that books which are hugely successful are precisely those which either represent or support such measures" (op. cit., p. 574).

Comparing Hallyu fans in China and Japan, Oh (2009) suggests analyzing their consumption based on two distinct – and somewhat opposed – patterns of learning. In both cases, the majority of these fans are working-class women, but their ages vary: whereas Chinese fans are young, Japanese fans are middle-aged. Oh argues that this age divide can be explained by the

different position of the two countries in the capitalist world system and by the social fabric of each society. According to Oh, Chinese fans are engaged in forward learning, which "is motivated by expectations of economic and other tangible gain, when learners pick up new knowledge and culture" from wealthier and more developed countries (2009, p. 436). Learning English and absorbing American or European culture are other examples of forward learning young people in semi-peripheral or peripheral countries engage in. Consumption of Hallyu by mature Japanese fans, on the other hand, is related to retrospective learning, which "has no clear economic or tangible benefits, because it involves reawakening by reviewing old pieces of knowledge they acquired a long time ago" (Oh 2009, p. 437). Living in a developed society belonging to the center of the world system, older Japanese fans experience, through Korean dramas, the atmosphere and mood they are reminiscent of having lived in their society in the 1970s or the 1980s – a sort of melancholic feeling. In line with Oh's proposition of forward learning, Käng (2014), discussing tastes for K-Pop among young Thais, identifies a growth of the middle class in Thailand and its consumption of Korean pop culture as an expression of aspirations for development and cosmopolitanism.

If we understand that cultural consumption should not be seen as simply individual but as following social patterns, then one major social structure is gender. Milestone and Meyer argue that cultural consumption "is not only gendered but gendering: that is, that men and women use cultural texts to construct their masculine and feminine identities" (2012, p. 183). Gender is a fundamental key to understanding interpretive communities, whose members "are likely to interpret media texts in similar ways" (Milestone and Meyer 2012, p. 160). Drawing on Foucault's analysis of power and Goffman's concept of performance, Butler (1990) seeks to de-essentialize gender, arguing that it depends rather on performativity than on nature. That is to say that gender identity – feminine, masculine or any other – is a performative construct. She emphasizes that performances are habitual and consist of the constant (re)production of pre-existing gender norms. Best (2007) argues for the importance of commodities and practices of consumption over modern constructions of self. Focusing on young females, she writes: "Girls use the objects offered by a consumer market toward their own ends: to construct identities, to express in group solidarity, to define themselves apart from parents and others" (Best 2007, p. 726). What is important to understand, according to Best, "is the social meanings they generate as they consume" (op. cit., p. 726). Hills puts forth the notion of performative consumption, aiming at moving beyond a "sociological either/

or, where fans are either agents whose fan cultural practices can be celebrated, or they are subjects whose fan cultural practices can be accounted for, and critiqued, as effects of structural/capitalist forces" (2007, p. 1639). Hills' goal is mediating structure and agency in order to better grasp fans and fandom culture. This approach takes active performance into account and, at the same time, seeks to explore aspects of fan identities operating below the level of discursive consciousness. According to Sandvoss, deterritorialization brought about by contemporary social networks creates imagined communities centering on a given fan object and, when there are connections that forge meaning between the fans, these groups can be named interpretive communities (2010).

Carrying forward Adorno and Horkheimer's tradition of Critical Theory, Jameson points out the limitations of a "conception of mass culture as sheer manipulation, sheer commercial brainwashing and empty distraction by the multinational corporations who obviously control every feature of the production and distribution of mass culture today" (1992, p. 21). He argues that, besides ideological and conformist features, mass culture products also contain utopian elements. He wants "to grasp mass culture not as empty distraction or 'mere' false consciousness, but rather as a transformational work on social and political anxieties and fantasies" (op. cit., p. 25). The "Utopian or transcendent potential" (op. cit., p. 29) of works of mass culture has to do with offering relief, hope and fantasy that help individuals cope with the anxieties and tensions that everyday life holds. In the specific case of K-Pop, Lie contends that this genre offers an alternative to urbanized and sexualized American performers who celebrate sex and violence. K-Pop, he writes,

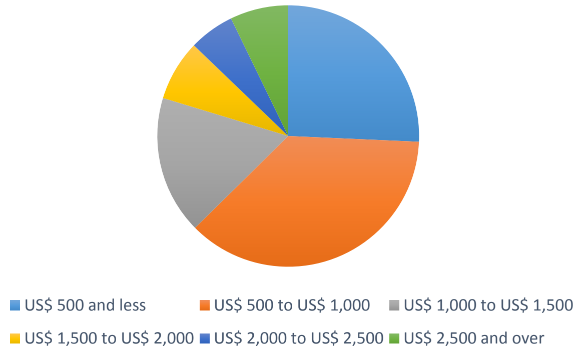
> exemplifies middle-class, urban and suburban values that seek to be acceptable at once to college-aspiring youths and their parents: a world that suggests nothing of inner-city poverty and violence, corporal or sexual radicalism, or social deviance and cultural alienation. K-pop in this sense satisfied the emergent [Asian] regional taste and sensibility, though it would be remiss to stress the region as its appeal could easily extend beyond it. The oft-repeated claims about K-pop singers' politeness – their clean-cut features as well as their genteel demeanors – is something of a nearly universal appeal, whether to Muslim Indonesians or Catholic Peruvians (Lie 2012, p. 355).

A Portrait of the K-Pop Fandom in Brazil

Between June and July 2016, I administered an electronic questionnaire, which was distributed and shared on Brazilian K-Pop online fan bases – especially via Facebook –, and had 636 respondents[6]. The fan bases were basically dedicated to three different topics: (1) Korean pop music, (2) Korean dramas and (3) Korea and "Korean culture" as a whole. Because they are active on the web and in most of the cases do not know each other except for the online interaction, I see the participants in the survey as members of interpretive communities (Sandvoss 2010) of fans of Korean pop culture. By means of the survey, I aimed at acquiring a portrait of the Brazilian fans in social and economic terms, as well as finding out how they relate to Korean pop culture and, by extension, to South Korea itself. Most of the survey respondents were female (93.9%), whereas the male corresponded to a minor fraction (6.1%). Almost half (46.1%) of the Brazilian fans were between the ages of 16 and 20; 26.9 % were between 21 and 25; 9.9% were under 15; 9.3% were aged between 26 and 30 years; and 7.9% were 31 or older. 52.1% of the respondents had already concluded or were attending college; 35.1% had already concluded or were attending secondary education; 7.0% had already concluded or were attending primary education; and 5.9% had concluded or were attending graduate school. Over one third of the fans (36.9%) declared that their monthly family income ranged between US$ 500 and US$ 1,000; another fourth (25.7%) said their income was below US$ 500 a month; 17.1% earned between US$ 1,000 and US$ 1,500; 7.5% from US$ 1,500 to US$ 2,000; 5.6% from US$ 2,000 to US$ 2,500; and 7.2% earned over US$ 2,500 a month.

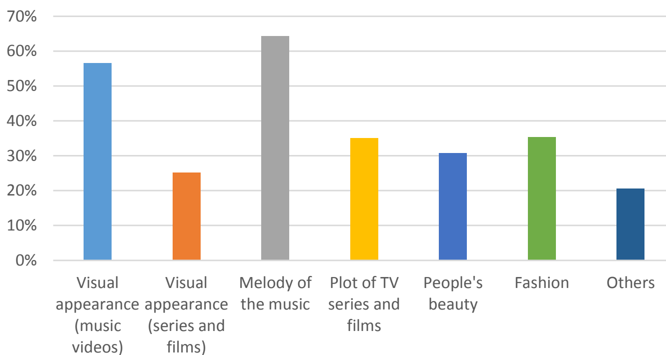
Regarding their first contact with Korean pop culture, 71.6% of the Brazilian fans got to know it through videos or music on internet and 37.6% heard about it through friends. Other sources were less important: 8.4% had contact through news stories on the Internet or in newspapers; 5.4% heard about it somewhere else and 1.3% first experienced K-Pop by going to a concert. Music is the favorite aspect of Korean pop culture in Brazil: 81.0% reported to like it most of all, whereas 15.3% prefer series, 2.5% others and 1.3% films. K-Pop consumption mostly takes place on YouTube (81.1%), followed by streaming websites exhibiting films and series (10.7%), apps

[6] This research was carried out thanks to a grant provided by the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy (KIEP)



SOURCE.—Author's survey 2016

FIG. 1.—Family Income of Brazilian Fans



SOURCE.—Author's survey 2016

FIG. 2.—Appeal of Korean Pop for Brazilian Fans

(3.8%), streaming websites for music (3.0%), others (1.3%) and podcasts (0.2%). The two most important appealing aspects of Korean pop culture for Brazilian fans are the melody of K-Pop music (64.3%) and the visual appearance of the music videos (56.6%). The fans also mentioned fashion (35.4%), the plots of series and films (35.1%), the beauty of the people in music videos, series or films (30.8%), the visual appearance of the series and films (25.2%), and others (20.6%).

As to the question of how "modern" they perceive South Korea to be when compared to their home country, 69.3% of the Brazilian fans see an intertwinement of the old and the new in the East Asian nation; 24.1% answered that everything is more modern in South Korea than in Brazil; 5.5% chose others; and 1.1% stated that everything is as modern in South Korea as in Brazil. No respondent said that Brazil seemed more modern than South Korea. Most of the respondents would like to learn the Korean language (64.7%), but about one third of them was already doing or had done so (32.8%), and only 2.5% claimed to have no interest in the language. 61.1% of the fans in Brazil were highly interested in studying in South Korea; 29.6% had some interest in doing so; and 9.2% said they were not interested. The idea of working in South Korea seemed very appealing to 45.8% of the respondents, whereas 37.6% were somewhat interested and 16.6% did not show any interest at all. The survey also revealed that 51.5% of Brazilian K-Pop fans would really like to live in South Korea; 33.5% had some interest in it, and 15.0% had no interest at all.

The "Korean Dream" Landing in a Changing Society

As Salata has shown, most of Brazilians regard themselves as belonging to the lower or middle classes (2015, p. 117). According to his study, US$ 1,000 is roughly the monthly income threshold that separates the richer 15% and the rest of the Brazilian population (Salata 2015, p. 118). In a study addressing the participation of women in the process of upward social mobility in the first decade of the 21st century, Neri calls attention to a decrease of income inequality in Brazil overall, to a decrease in the income inequality between men and women (between 2001 and 2011, women increased their personal income by 63.1%, whereas the increase for men was 37.4%), to the changes of values and attitudes this situation encompasses, and, by using Gallup's happiness index, to the fact that upwardly mobile women in in Brazil are happier than men of the same social layer (Neri 2012). By more critically assessing Brazil's golden decade of prosperity, Souza (2013) wants to avoid any triumphalism – such as that he identifies in Neri's work –, which could blur the permanent struggle faced by lower-income people in Brazil. According to the author, "'moving upward socially' is only possible for those who manage to attain the pre-conditions which contemporary capitalism demands for the acquisition of various forms of knowledge and cultural capital as the 'gateway' to any of its competitive sectors" (Souza 2013, p. 62).

Souza argues that, in Brazil, this has been possible for part of the lower-middle-class whereas it is largely more difficult for extremely poor families to achieve. Yet the everyday life of the former is marked by a fear of future downward social mobility, by constantly renewed efforts to maintain their achieved social position and to guarantee a better life with more opportunities for their children, and by the ongoing need of being able to face the challenges that continually threaten this position (Souza 2013, pp. 66-67).

As evidenced by the survey, Brazilian K-Pop fans come from lower-income and lower-middle class families. They stem from a part of the population which has strongly felt the impacts of the upward social mobility that took place in Brazil, rather than from the country's elite. I argue that K-Pop can be regarded as part and parcel of the cultural capital Souza (2013) refers to; one which socially upward mobile people or groups manage to attain and which facilitates their very mobility. This class origin of the fans is in line with my own observations among fans in São Paulo, as well as with research results from other Latin American countries, such as Peru and Chile (Ko et al. 2014, Min 2015). Min (2015) has observed that K-Pop in Chile is consumed by lower- and lower-middle-class young people and that, on the other hand, it is vastly unknown or ignored by upper-middle- and upper-class young people; the same phenomenon takes place in Brazil. The preferences of wealthier young people in Brazil largely concentrate on American audio and visual products. In addition to this class marker, an overwhelming majority of the Brazilian fans are women. In terms of age, the fans are young, with about three quarters of them between the ages of 16 and 25. More than half have concluded or are attending college and over one third of them have concluded or are attending secondary education –the latter case most likely due to the fact that almost half of the fans are under 20 (in Brazil, students are meant to conclude their secondary education by the age of 18). In Brazil, Hallyu is thus especially disseminated among lower-class and lower-middle-class young females, who do well in terms of educational achievements.

The two aspects of Korean pop culture which Brazilian fans in the survey mentioned the most, that is, music melodies and the visual appearance of the music videos – the former being influenced by American black music (Lie 2012) but "glocalized" (Oh and Park 2013) and the latter being a celebration of the consumption and glamour taking place in a dream-like atmosphere –, along with other features such as fashion and physical appearance (beauty), are laden with meaning and decoded by the Brazilian fans by using their own cultural background and experiences. I argue that the

images of Korean modernity K-Pop presents attract young people who are experiencing social mobility in Brazil and function as references and inspiration for them, for the construction and performance of their identities in a scenario of social change. This sort of process has been analyzed by authors such as Oh and Käng regarding Asian countries as well as by myself in the case of Latin America (Regatieri 2016). Both in Oh's (2009) proposition of a forward learning pattern among Chinese young Hallyu fans, referring to acquisition of knowledge and culture from a country perceived as more developed and closely linked to processes of upward social mobility, and in Käng's (2014) analysis of consumption of Korean pop culture by young Thais amidst an expansion of the middle class in Thailand as representing the pursuit for development and cosmopolitanism, the image of Korean opulent and 'cool' modernity that Hallyu presents seems to be resounding. Maintaining Kracauer's (2005) insight but inverting his analysis of Germany in the 1930s, I suggest that, within middle classes on the verge of constitution in Latin America, the consumption of Korean pop culture works as a (mainly unconscious) cultural enhancer supporting social mobility. Korean pop culture is actively mobilized by the fans as such a cultural enhancer.

Hills' notion of performative consumption helps to shed light on this process, by offering a point of view mediating culture industry as a system of commodities (Horkheimer and Adorno 1987) and the ways in which individuals construct and perform their identities. The experience of a seemingly liberating broadening of horizons due to social mobility cannot be seen as disconnected from gender performances in the new scenario. Some analysts claim that the process of upward mobility in Brazil corresponds to a market-oriented form of integration, or at least that it takes place in a "highly capitalistic cultural environment", marked by a "profound impregnation by neoliberalism, which society has been suffering from for some decades", and by the "diffusion of the so-called theology of prosperity" put forward by pentecostal and neopentecostal churches (Singer 2015, p. 11). Consumption may be linked to the promotion of individualism, personal empowerment and liberation and, at the same time, it may uphold rigid and narrow gender prescriptions (Best 2007). K-Pop fertilizes the imagination of (female) young people across the world in numerous ways, but it is no secret that it reflects a very conservative society and its cultural and gender norms. Laurie (2016) concludes his text on the gendered aesthetics of K-Pop by stating that, while this genre promises a more expansive terrain of gender re-signification, it does not succeed in challenging gender binaries and sexual norms.

The "Korean Dream" is an inspired expression coined by Jorquera (2016)

rephrasing the idea of the "American Dream". She speaks of the forging of such a Korean Dream among Latin American fans to refer to the fact that Hallyu consumers in the developing countries of the region seek to emulate and belong to an imaginary ideal society constructed through the images of K-Pop. And I see the Korean Dream to be thoroughly gendered. After she learned I had spent some time living in Seoul and then moved back to São Paulo, a young female K-Pop fan I met at my Korean language class said: "But why did you come back? If I went to Seoul, I would find myself an *oppa*[7] before even leaving the airport and would never come back." In this statement, the arrival at the imaginary Korean society goes hand in hand with meeting the idealized *oppa*. Within the international culture industry, K-Pop is able to offer something novel, providing a "new, colorful and cheerful start" (Messerlin and Shin 2013, p. 31). Analyses of K-Pop in other Asian countries have often argued that Korean pop culture is part of a new Asian cultural cosmopolitanism (Fung et al. 2015, Käng 2014, Lin and Tong 2008). However, in the case of Brazil and other Latin American countries, which belong to a different civilizational area of the globe, it is not fitting to speak of such commonalities in order to understand the popularity of Hallyu. In contrast to Korea's Asian neighbors, K-Pop in Brazil counts on the exoticism that stems precisely from the fact it comes from the "Orient" – in the words of Oh and Park (2013), the "local" content of K-Pop's internationalized production chain –, with the idols and *oppas* being embodiments of this exoticism.

The survey not only sought to explore the appeal of the products of Korean pop culture but also the draw of Korea itself on the fans. Besides consuming Korean audiovisual products, Korea becomes a goal for the fans, in terms of learning its language and of studying, working and living in the country. As Lie (2012) has suggested, American pop culture is pervaded by violence and the inescapable contradictions of urban life under capitalism. Indeed, American society and its problems resemble those of Latin America, such as urban violence and insecurity, the existence of gangs and drugs, and poverty co-existing with extreme wealth. K-Pop's aesthetics is void of all such things and its performers invite to social conciliation rather than conflict. In conflictive societies such as those in Latin American, Korean pop culture much probably works as a breath of hope pointing to a socially more

[7] *Oppa* (오빠) means literally 'older brother of a female'. The word is also often used to refer to a boyfriend or to older males to whom younger females are close (both in a respectful and in a flirtatious way).

harmonious and economically wealthier world. That may be understood in connection with Jameson's (1992) proposition of utopian elements existing within products of culture industry and allowing people to come to terms with social and political anxieties and aspirations. In the case of Brazilian fans, I suggest K-Pop consumption fosters hope and fantasy, and, at the same time, functions as a mechanism of sublimation for socio-political tensions that are so present in a developing yet extremely unequal country. Korea itself becomes a matter of a dream, a Utopian land to be consumed along with its pop culture.

Conclusion

K-Pop flourishes under the conditions of South Korean compressed modernity (Chang 2010a, 2010b) and the high-capitalistic world that it offers appeals to ascending Brazilian lower-class young people as an index of future of upward mobility, consumption and glamour. K-Pop's world is evocative and celebrative of the successful and rapid modernization of South Korea and of its present affluent lifestyle. Even if modernity in Brazil has had different roots and has not fallen under the same compression, K-Pop may work in this country as a cultural enhancer of upward mobility for young people from particular social layers who have grown up in a highly capitalistic cultural environment, who are on an ascending social track and thereby experience ruptures regarding the past generation and who seek meaningful role models. K-Pop's dream factory offers these models and a certain imagination repertoire of modernity centered on the image of the promised pleasures of consumerism, fashion and glamorous "modern" city life (Ang 2004; Lin and Tong 2008). The Korean Dream proves not to extend to young people of Brazilian upper-middle classes and elites, who largely ignore the very existence of K-Pop and its allure. Rather, it is among the young female fans whose families benefitted from the left-wing golden decade of improvements in consumption and education that K-Pop found a niche and a landing spot.

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