

# Culture Mandala: The Bulletin of the Centre for East-West Cultural and Economic Studies

The Bulletin of the Centre for East-West Cultural and Economic Studies

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Volume 6 | Issue 1

Article 3

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1-1-2003

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### Recommended Citation

Ferguson, R. James (2003) "The transnational politics of Cuban music and Cuban culture," *Culture Mandala: The Bulletin of the Centre for East-West Cultural and Economic Studies*: Vol. 6: Iss. 1, Article 3.

Available at: <http://epublications.bond.edu.au/cm/vol6/iss1/3>

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# The transnational politics of Cuban music and Cuban culture

## **Abstract**

### Extract:

Over the last decade it has become clear that the meaning of Cubanidad and its social construction are no longer affairs conducted just in Cuba, nor even by Cubans alone. In its musical setting, Cuban culture has become a 'pan-American' cultural legacy in the widest sense, influencing both Latin America and North America. As a unique fusion of cultural influences, Cuban music also speaks with great vitality to European and African audiences, and to an emerging transnational youth culture. Although not overtly providing a means of propaganda and politicisation, its affective content nonetheless suggests that Cuba is here to stay as a vigorous and independent nation (with or without Castro), but not without a revolutionary sense that Cuban culture has something unique to offer its global audience.

## **Keywords**

Cuba, North America, musical cultures, world music

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## **The Transnational Politics of Cuban Music and Cuban Culture**

*by R. James Ferguson*

### **Cuban Music in its Cultural Context**

In particular contexts popular music has been found to reinforce unique cultural systems. It can help form both national and local identity, for example in shaping the cultural identity of black youth in Cali, Colombia (see Wade et al. 1999; Wade 2002). In other cases it reinforces conscious national-identity projects (as in Nicaragua, see Scruggs 1999), and is a key method of expression involving both self-reflection and communication to other cultures. Music and song have been used as tools of conscious propaganda, and as mobilizing factors in rebellion and revolution, as in the songs of Carlos Puebla and Silvio Rodríguez in support of Cuba's revolutionary achievements (Fairley 2000b, pp409-410). Elsewhere it has been a patriotic reflection on war and its justification, as in popular songs in the U.S. concerning the destruction of the battleship Maine, thereby supporting involvement in the Spanish-American War (see Detemple 2001). More recently, specific styles of music have operated as a pattern of social resistance and commentary, as in Jamaican reggae and ragga (Hansing 2001; Farley 2001). Musical developments are often "intricately linked to broader social and political developments," most notably in the history of American jazz (see McMichael 1998). Likewise, music revivals have also been used as part of a countercultural re-examination of dominant historical narratives, e.g. in the role of Jewish and Roma music within the European context (see Bohlman 2002). Certain musical styles are now widely internationalised (blues, jazz, pop, reggae, hip hop). In some cases these musics carry with them a particular set of values that were once local but now have been transformed into a transnational culture, e.g. the Rastafari movement via reggae has become much more than a Jamaican local culture (see Hansing 2001), and the emerging hip-hop/rap youth subculture has found enclaves in many parts of the world (see Fenn & Perullo 2000).

In the case of Cuba, the politics of music is especially seminal since the island is a rich and creative source of different music styles that have been largely preserved, in part because of proactive government policies. These affirmative policies include the maintenance of research centers, free music education, support for public performance spaces and *trova* houses, combined with control of the working life of musicians through State-controlled *empresas* or agencies (Acosta 1991, p199, p207; Manuel 1991, p288; Sweeney 2001, pp11-12, p162; Fairley 2000a, p393). These policies are aimed at promoting "a cosmopolitan diversity of musics, including modern and traditional Western art music, Afro-Cuban cult music, regional folk genres, and all manner of local and foreign popular musics," with the exception of punk rock (Manuel 1991, p289).

Ironically, the U.S. embargo has also slowed down the interaction with mainstream styles from North America, reducing some of the economic and cultural pressures that might have led to greater homogenisation of Cuban music. Moreover, over the last decade, one of the key issues for Cuba has been how its socialist and revolutionary legacy will adapt under the increasing pressures of globalisation and economic austerity (for one negative view of limited access to global resources, see Amaro 2000). Music, in terms of its messages, income-generation and social process, is one of the areas where the opportunities and pressures of globalisation have begun to be experienced and manipulated within contemporary Cuba.

One of the key factors of the current pattern of globalisation has been the creation of a global media and entertainment companies that seek out products and markets world-wide, especially in film and music. This factor, combined with the emergence of a World Music market (for the market creation of the category World Music from 1987, see Brennan 2001), has led to the irony of unique, local Cuban styles, even rural guajira and Cuban charanga (Hernández 1998; Grossman 1999; Sweeney 2001, p46; updating Benitez-Rojo 1998), being promoted in music catalogues and stores from Berlin to Sydney, from Senegal to Japan. In this setting, Cuban music plays a particular role in the images held of Cuba

overseas, and has been drawn into the symbolic reconstruction of Cubans as a people with a future. On this basis, the messages, styles and usages of Cuban music are fascinating examples of national development under the impact of selective globalisation (with the rubric of the "local made global" taken to extremes).

Moreover, the appeal of Cuban music is also that of a political melodrama in which the messages from different Cuban musical evolutions in New York, Miami and Havana, as well as regional linkages into Mexico, Nicaragua, Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela and the Caribbean (see Aguirre 2002, p75; Franco 1997; Hernández 1998; Scruggs 1999; Sweeney 2001, p83, p173; Floyd 1999) are projected against the wider stereotype of Latin Music and more specific visions of *Cubanidad* ("Cuban-ness" or "Cubanity"). On this basis, the popularity of Cuban music is a useful economic and political tool for the Cuban government. Indeed, one writer would go so far as to suggest that "the cultural expression that best defines what is Cuban to a foreigner is Cuban popular music" (Benitez-Rojo 1998). At the same time, the global interest in Cuban music forms part of affective and emotional network of interest in Cuban culture and Cubans, but does not translate into direct support for the current government. Likewise, although Cuban music is readily accepted within the context of the World Music market, it is somewhat less popular within the more romantic salsa, dance club, and pop salsa audiences overseas (Delgado 1999).

Even from an early stage the diverse elements in the Cuba began to interact in creating a unique music, dance and oral culture, in part as Africans were drawn into Spanish festivals and the "fiestas partly Africanized" (Thomas 1971, p40). In time this led to the evolution of complex Afro-Cuban rituals such as the Abakuá, whose related dances attracted participants from all racial groups, even some Europeans (Hill 1998; Moore 1997, p17; Thomas 1971, p199). Slave populations had arrived from most areas of the west coast of Africa, including Nigerian ports, the Bight of Benin, Dahomey, Lagos, the Congo, and the Gold Coast, with sizeable cultural grouping included the Ibos, Yorubas and Congolese tribes (Thomas 1971, p40, pp158-159; Segal 1995; Moore 1997, p16). This led to an early interaction of African and European music (at first Spanish, but with later indirect French influences largely mediated through Haiti). Nineteenth century observers commented on unique drum dances, and the country dance called the *zapateo* which was danced to the harp or guitar (Thomas 1971, p40, p177). Particular dance forms were developed, such as the *rumba* (for its evolution and different forms, see Berliner 1994) and the *babul*, an African dance that evolved in Cuba's Oriente province (Thomas 1971, p178), followed by the mambo and the chachachá. Cuban music was one of the main early sources of the North American dance music that emerged from the mid-1960s and came to be called salsa (Hernández 1998; Sweeney 2001, p187. For a critique of the effect of commercialisation on the roots of salsa, see Delgado 1999). Salsa had Cuban *son* as its core, but further evolved in the United States and Puerto Rico (Moore 1997, p11; Sweeney 2001, pp188-192; Fairley 2000a, p391). Contemporary music and dance proliferated in Cuba, including a number of unique forms such as the Cuban bolero, the *habanera*, *son*, *trova*, *guaracha*, *bomba*, *danzón*, *guaguancó*, *songo* and *timba* (see Lam 2000; Delgado 1999; Sweeney 2001; Fairley 2000a; Yanow 2000), as well as the distinct contribution of the *nueva trova*, which has a reflective relationship with the values and progress of the Cuban revolution (Fairley 2000b; Sweeney 2001, p130, pp157-160).

Today, diverse forms of traditional, jazz, pop and rock music have evolved within Cuba, and interacted to some degree with the wider Latin American musical cultures. For our purposes, the key elements of Afro-Latin music can be identified as "afrocentrism, improvisation, and storytelling" (Delgado 1999), combined with the external perception of a vigorous, rhythmically-diverse music with divergent romantic and dance elements. Somewhat more Ibero-american song forms emphasise Spanish rather than African roots, but in Cuba even this music will still use African-oriented rhythms and percussion instruments, especially the basic polyrhythmic structure known as the *clave* (Washburne 1997; Delgado 1999; Sweeney 2001, p5; Fairley 2000, p387). For this reason, Cuban music provides a direct linkage into the history of both European and African migration, with a particular Afro-Cuban linkages into sacred music and dance that underwent both translocation and transculturation on the island, a theme detailed in the work of Fernando Ortiz (see Vega 2000; Moore 1997, p167).

It was this Afro-Cuban influence that would also be one of the sources of Cuban popular music and Afro-Cuban Jazz forms in particular, partly based on unique African drumming and chanting patterns. These cultural elements and their role in Cuban music are part of a wider negotiation of the issue of race and racism within Cuba. The Cuban government, in part due to genuine revolutionary claims directed towards equality and solidarity, has sought to reduce racism within the country,<sup>(1)</sup> but has also used this issue as an ideological tool against the United States, linking imperialism and neocolonialism with a racist orientation (Hernández 1998; de la Fuente 2000, p205; de la Fuente 1998, p2; Segal 1995, p235). As such, government supported agencies, such as the *Casa de las Americas* and a special unit of the *Cuban Institute of Cinematic Art and Industry (ICAIC)* under the direction of Leo Brouwer, had mandates to research and preserve unique African and Afro-Cuban musical traditions, as well as support the protest songs of the *nueva trova* (Hernández 1998; Sweeney 2001, p159, p225). In this context, the Ministry of Culture also tried to elevate the rumba, once a street dance of the working class first developed in 19<sup>th</sup> century slums of Havana and Matanzas, mainly among blacks, into a truly national dance through formal training for performers (Hernández 1998; Moore 1997, p168; Sweeney 2001, pp24-27, pp84-87).

Thus, in spite of the complex issue of race within Cuba today, the planned and spontaneous use of Afro-Cuban forms has further opened the door to exports of Cuban music: -

In summary, while racial discrimination and prejudice may not have disappeared from Cuban society, Cuba's active cultivation of its Afro-Cuban heritage and its emphasis on an explicitly pan-African and pan-Caribbean identity provided economic opportunities and cultural validation for black Cuban musicians that set it apart from its Spanish Caribbean neighbours. These circumstances favourably positioned Cuban music to enjoy easy acceptance within world-music networks, in which Northern consumers were most attracted to musics displaying clearly visible and audible connections with their roots, particularly African ones. Indeed, one need only look at the lineup of talent at the various multicultural festivals that occur annually in both Europe and North America to see how well-represented Cuban music is in comparison with that of other Spanish Caribbean countries. Thus, in spite of the embargo, Cuban music has acquired much more international visibility than the musics of other Spanish Caribbean nations, whose African roots have been systematically deemphasized, concealed, or camouflaged to present a more Iberocentric image and identity. (Hernández 1998, p116)

In the current period, as well, syncretic religions based in part on African traditions, especially Santería (also known as *La Regla de Ocha*), have become extremely popular in Cuba (Moore 1997, p226), perhaps because this is one area of personal freedom that has not been effectively constrained by state ideology. Santería is often expressed through invoking, playing for, singing to, or writing songs about the Yoruba gods, e.g. the songs *Bilongo*, *Mayeya* and *Devuélveme la voz* (Delgado 1999). Thus, syncretic religious practices such as Santería, Abakuá and Palo are an integral part of Afro-Cuban music in particular (Manuel 1991, p292), and have influenced Cuban popular music more generally. Examples of this include the Síntesis albums *Ancestros* (volumes I & II) with songs dedicated to individual *orishas*, an effort which won an EGREM (the Enterprise of Recordings and Musical Editions) award for artistic excellence in 1989 (Sweeney 2001, p250). Even when not an explicit part of a song, musicians playing *son*-based styles will sometimes nod towards African roots by insertion of a 6/8 rhythm that suggests *batá* sacred music (Delgado 1999; Moore 1997, p95). By 2000 a Cuban-French rap-fusion group could name itself the Orishas, releasing an album called *A Lo Cubano* (Cantor 2000, p69). Likewise, in the United States (and especially New York) diverse Cuban musicians sought to deepen their knowledge of the rhythms originally used in African religious contexts, and came to be conceptually influenced by Fernando Ortiz's work *Los Bailes y El Teatro del Los Negros en el Folklore De Cuba* (Vega 2000, p48). Thus, there has been some emerging correlation of the revival of Santería and the renewed focus on Afro-Cuban rhythms in contemporary Cuban popular music (Whedon 1995).

Certain key approaches can be mobilised to help understand the complex interaction among Cuban, Latin American, North American and European cultures as they begin to converge on a culturally de-centred global market. The first of these is the idea that a certain emotional commitment and political

zeal had been involved in the Cuban revolution (Fernández 2000, pxiii, p25; pp62-81). Originally this had involved a sense of charisma focused on several revolutionary leaders, mass participation, and "solidarity and fraternity in an atmosphere of *pachanga* (festivity)" (Fernández 2000, p68; see also Moore 1997, pp84-85). These feelings have been largely eroded among many Cubans, but these elements are still found as a key element in Cuban music. The *nueva trova* style of songs has often invoked the mood and tone of revolutionary Cuba, though sometimes in an indirect and critical way (Fairley 2000b, pp408-413). Thus the songs of Silvio Rodríguez have attacked racism in the United States, its involvement in the Vietnam War, and have sought the withdrawal of US forces from Guantánamo Bay, while the work of Carlos Puebla includes songs dedicated to Che Guevara and an amusing piece called *Le OEA es cosa de risa*, i.e. the Organization of American States is a laughing stock (Sweeney 2001, pp174-177). However, such music is now less effectively operating as a general attachment between the Cuban people and the Cuban government, as distinct from the more general pride in things Cuban. On this basis, the emotional context and political process of Cuban music represents a point of departure towards a fledgling civil society in Cuba. Thus new voices such as Carlos Varela have been viewed as being mildly critical of the regime, as in the song *Guillermo Tell* (see further below).

Second, the interfaces among cultural systems, political structures, foreign policy and international relations have begun to be researched as major components of the globalization process (see Chay 1997; Hudson 1997a; Hudson 1997b; Iriye 1997; Lapid & Kratochwil 1996). In its most extreme, this has been taken as a clash of civilizations, as advanced by Samuel Huntington (Huntington 1993; Huntington 1996), a view soon widely criticised (Ahluwalia 1994; Muzaffar 1994). Although divergent cultures can intensify political and military conflict, civilizations have long histories of interaction, dialogue and trade, requiring a more sophisticated view than fracture lines and conflicting value-systems. Here the term transnationalism has been highly successful in exploring new identity and production processes that not only cross state borders but thrive in the emerging conditions of globalisation, forging links between persons and cultures in different nations (for differing aspects of this phenomenon, see Itzigsohn 2000).

On this basis, the vitality of Cuban culture is not just an antidote to the limited reform process and slow transition of the Cuban government. Rather, via second-track diplomacy, the engagement of international civil society, and its place in an emerging world-music network, Cuban music is one of the main areas where the Cuban nation (as distinct from the state) presents its complex identity to the world. It is in this cultural context that Che Guevara can be resurrected as an international, post-modern icon rather than a failed revolutionary (in the case of his fateful intervention in Bolivia), while the international consumers of culture and protest are even sympathetic to the long speeches of, alas, a cigarless Castro. Such groups focus on symbols of solidarity and participation, rather than repeating the human rights formulae reiterating the real limits to political freedom on the island (invoked repeatedly by Amnesty International, the U.S. State Department, and various anti-Castro organisations). In the current period, transnational processes have a strong impact on both national identity and the consciousness of subgroups within a national culture, with such identities in part being negotiated in social worlds which are at least partly supraterritorial, working beyond tradition notions of national borders (see Vertovec 2001; Scholte 1996, pp47-52).

Lastly, if we look at Cuban music as occupying a certain space in the new global landscape of music and cultural products, it can be seen as colonizing a symbolic landscape that allows the future of Cuba to be viewed as heading on a trajectory that is not just post-Communist and post-Castro, but also post-exilic and victorious over the mean-spirited politics of embargo. Music is more than an emotional expression, story or commentary on current and past events. Music also "expresses and mediates the fear of what lies ahead, and it may serve as a weapon to deflect or stay the impact of an unknown, undesired future" (Bohlman 2002, p7). In this setting, Cuban music mobilizes a wide spectrum of signs, utilizing the very rich cultural "soup" that already exists within the Caribbean setting (Davies 2000). Although the Cuban government may wish to set the trajectory of new grand narratives concerning the island, first from capitalism to Marxism, now from Marxism to a controlled capitalism (for this postmodern construction, see Davies 2000), there is no guarantee that any government will

be able to control this narrative as it interacts with global audiences. Music, in its range of expression and reception, forms part of the imagined landscape (see Scruggs 1999) that influences both national identity and its perception overseas, thus shaping future opportunities that move outside of the official paths of international relations.

### ***Cubanidad* and the Revolutionary Spirit**

Key references in Cuban music include the reiteration of a revolutionary struggle that reaches back into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a reflection on a turbulent history, and a unique identity politics that has tried to transcend, with limited success, divisive racial and class backgrounds. The revolutionary traditions of Cuba were played out against the great revolts by many Spanish American territories which from 1810 began to assert their independence. The first attempt for outright independence in Cuba began in 1809 and was led by Román de la Luz, but was soon broken (Thomas 1971, pp88-89).

Later revolutionaries included Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, who was active from the 1850s and very critical of Spanish policies (Thomas 1971, p243). In 1868 this man led reformist planters in the east of the island against Spanish rule: his program included the gradual emancipation of all slaves (Thomas 1971, p245). He quickly mustered an army of some 12,000 men and launched the war of 1868-1878. Later liberators in the war would include Antonio Maceo, Calixto Garcia, and later on Máximo Gómez. The tradition of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes and other revolutionary leaders helped establish the tradition of heroic Cuban patriotism (Williamson 1992, p437) that would be mobilised in the following century. It is this national epic which created a deeply emotional current within *Cubanidad*, attached both to the great struggles of the revolutionary period and combined with a desire to construct a better future (Fernández 2000, pp32-34).

Another strong influence on this tradition was the brilliant José Martí (1853-1895). Operating from the U.S., Martí founded revolutionary schools, formed the Cuban Revolutionary Party in 1892, and along with other leaders, especially Máximo Gómez, helped launch a somewhat premature War of Independence in 1895 (Thomas 1971, pp306-316). José Martí himself came to be viewed as one of the founders of modern Cuba, in part through his creation of the *Partido Revolucionario Cubano* (PRC) and in part because of his voluminous writings. He remains one of the strongest inspirations for Castro, and his works are continuously reiterated in Cuba's official ideology.

The Castro government sought from the very beginning to link themselves to revolutionary tradition of the island: -

The regime sought to consolidate popular support behind it by identifying the revolution of 1959 as closely as possible with the nineteenth-century nationalist movement. The Cuban people consider the decades immediately preceding the winning of their independence from Spain as the most glorious in their history and regard the philosophers and patriot-heroes of this period as the noblest men the country has produced. Revolutionary spokesmen therefore depicted their program of economic and social reform as the culmination of an idealistic tradition which dates back to José Martí and the War of Independence. Premier Castro himself regularly and freely drew on Martí's writings for his public addresses and, when he posed for photographs, there was often a picture or statue of Martí somewhere in the background (MacGaffey & Barnett 1962, p271).

Castro attempted to address the issues of racism, in one televised speech of 22 March 1959 asserting that the revolution would address the problems of discrimination in key areas including education and employment (Segal 1995, p234), setting the tone for future policies. In this context, "dominant interpretations of *cubanidad* have consistently minimized racial differences on the grounds that they endanger national unity" (de la Fuente 2001, p30). Building on the 19<sup>th</sup> century revolutionary movement, the 1959 revolution also promoted a specific sense of national identity through cultural forms, including music, art and, for a time, architecture: -

Cubanidad, or the nature of Cuban identity, is a debate that had been taking place since the 19<sup>th</sup>

century. Jose Marti, who is upheld as the original and most important intellectual figure in the long-running struggle for Cuban independence, understood the need to establish a specific culture, free from traditional Spanish domination, that recognized the fusion of both African and Spanish influences on an equal basis.

Although the development of Cubanidad remained centrally important for the relatively small intellectual community throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, its influence was subsumed by the continued spread of Western capitalism. It was only the 1959 revolution that provided the unique opportunity to promote an architecture that truly reflected Cubanidad. (Foster 1999)

With the pioneering work of Fernando Ortiz, *Cubanidad* came to be seen as a cosmopolitan construction to which "all the races and cultures that passed through Cuba added their own ingredients" (Wilkinson 1998, p6). On this basis, the core of Cuban identity had to include a recognition of AfroCubans as having an essential role in modern Cuba. In part, following Ortiz, this was a sociological and artistic exploration of what was at first seen as "an unexplored zone of Cubanness" (Benitez-Rojo 1996). Furthermore, such a construction is forward looking, allowing new elements and influences to be added (Wilkinson 1998, p7), or rejected. Whether this leads to a return to old elements of Cubanidad as Soviet/Russian influences fade (as suggested in Wilkinson 1998, p8), remains to be seen. The relative hardship experienced in Cuba through the early 1990s, driven in part by a decline of economic activity of approximately 39-50% in the 1990-1993 period (Amaro 2000, p284) tarnished these aspirations, leading to both a sense of disillusionment and irony within the rhetoric of identity politics. The irony has begun to influence contemporary music in Cuba as well (see below). In such a setting, the iteration of *Cubanidad* and national pride within Cuban music is now taking on more complex timbres than a simple support for the rhetoric of revolution.

### **The Politics of Reconciliation and *Ennui***

Cuban music was recorded by American companies as early as 1912-1920 period, e.g. groups such as Sexteto Habanero and Sexteto Boloña, while regular radio broadcasts from 1922 began to spread its popularity (Fairley 200a, p389; Moore 1997, p98, p103). Early markets for such 78 rpm records included "Cuba, the United States, Spain, Mexico, and to a lesser extent South America" (Moore 1997, p102). The Spanish tinge may have begun to influence early ragtime, and more certainly the jazz of the 1920s through the works of Jelly Roll Morton (for early musical linkages between New Orleans and Cuba, see Washburne 1997; Santoro 1993), while by the 1930 numerous Cuban bands began to play Cuban dance music in New York (Yanow 2000, p2; Moore 1997, pp179-181). Cuban music underwent a complex interaction with swing and jazz during the 1930s and 1940s, leading in turn to *bebop*, and through the 1950s large-band and brass additions to traditional Cuban musical forms. American musicians as diverse as Dizzy Gillespie (through contact with Chano Pozo), Stan Kenton, George Shearing and Herbie Mann were influenced by Cuban music and musicians during this period (Yanow 2000, p3; Sweeney 2001, pp95-97). Soon thereafter Cuban masters such as Machito and Tata Guines worked with jazz greats including Charlie Parker, Dizzie Gillespie, Dexter Gordon, Stan Getz and Miles Davis, moving towards what would become Latin Jazz (Benitez-Rojo 1998; Whedon 1995). Cuban cultural forms were also explored by leading figures such as George Gershwin and Katherine Dunham (Moore 1997, p133).

However, this intensive interaction was reduced in the late 1950s, though diaspora Cuban musicians continued to influence styles in New York and Miami. The rapid orientation of revolutionary Cuba towards the Soviet bloc, its declaration of itself as a Socialist state (from May 1961), and its nationalisation of the assets of American firms led to a permanent rift with Washington and in return the shaping of a firm embargo. The Trading with the Enemy Act meant that the earlier strong interaction among the music and musicians of Cuba and the United States was greatly reduced (Hernández 1998). Likewise, when Castro took control of the Cuban recording studios and resources, such as those owned by RCA, this led to U.S. non-payment for the performance and publishing of Cuban works (Sweeney 2001, p12). In turn, with few exceptions, Cuba viewed emigrating Cuban musicians as defectors and *gusanos* (worms), and banned both their music and the formal study of it within Cuba (Sweeney 2001, p232). One exception is Gonzalo Rubalcaba, who has become a cultural



ambassador travelling between Cuba, the United States and Santo Domingo (Holston 1996; Sweeney 2001, p271).

The importance of the embargo should not be over-emphasised in global terms: Cuban music continued to be important in countries such as Mexico and Colombia, and gained an increasing profile in Europe, especially via Spain once General Franco died in 1976 (Sweeney 2001, p230; Davies 2000), and more recently in France. Bands such Irakere and Mezcla made important tours of Europe from the 1970s through to the early 1990s, becoming virtual ambassadors of Cuban jazz, thereby mobilizing American opinion (especially on the West Coast) against restrictions on visas for Cuban musicians (Sweeney 2001, pp252-255). Likewise, some Cuban residents set up radio antennas on their balconies to receive Miami music stations, allowing them to receive rhythm and blues from the 1980s onwards, and more recently American rap influences (Olivarria 2002, p28).

However, greater access to the United States, as a dominant producer of pop, rock and jazz media, was important for the wider diffusion of Cuban music. From 1988, modifications (through the Betman Amendment) to the Trading with the Enemy Act meant that the ban on cultural materials and cultural exchanges, including music, were eased (for earlier periods of cultural contact under the Carter administration, including the Caribbean jazz cruise, see Hernández 1998; Sweeney 2001, p231). This allowed groups with a strong Afrocuban or cultural orientation, or those that were willing to run workshops and perform at schools, ready access into the American market, though for a time dance bands such as Los Van Van or NG La Banda, viewed as more commercially oriented, were not given U.S. visas (Hernández 1998; Cantor 1998). By 1997 musicians and groups such as Chucho Valdés, Irakere, Issac Delgado and Gonzalo Rubalcaba were able to tour the U.S. (Sweeney 2001, p287). Groups such as Cubanismo were able to secure extended tours for up to three-quarters of a year in the United States (Sweeney 2001, p14). By 1999, the popular Los Van Van was able to win a US Grammy award for their album *Llego Van Van*, i.e. Van Van is Here (Sweeney 2001, p246).

Likewise, Cuban records made by EGREM at first had limited production runs and even more limited world-wide distribution. However, by the 1980s Cuban artists were signing deals with Spanish recording companies, while companies such as Blue Note would produce Cuban albums by using overseas affiliates, e.g. in Japan (Sweeney 2001, pp271-274). Through the late 1990s, as more recording companies and studios, e.g. at Miramar, were built on the island, the number of labels and artists signed to them began to rapidly increase (Fairley 2000, p392). The appointment of a younger and less hard-line Minister of Culture, Abel Prieto, also was viewed as a move in the direction of tolerance of diversity in the music industry, though limits still exist on direct criticism of the government (Sweeney 2001, pp286-287). From 1994 even Rap musicians have found official recognition on the island, with rap festivals starting from 1995, perhaps because their social criticism is not explicitly directed towards the regime (Olivarria 2000, p29; Sweeney 2001, p290). Some 500 rap groups are found in Cuba, and by 2000 there had been visits by Cuban rappers to the U.S., and progressive American rappers have visited the island (Olivarria 2000, p29). Rap and hip-hop soon emerged "as a vehicle for cultural exchange and even detente" (Cantor 2000, p69). Rap in Cuba seems to parallel some of the focus on racial and cultural identity issues that has mobilised it elsewhere in the Americas, e.g. in Colombia, with a strong focus on local social problems (see Wade et al. 1999).

One element that has emerged more rarely in some Cuban songs has been a desire for reconciliation among Cubans. Thus in the album *Distincto, diferente* by Juan de Marcos' Afro Cuban All Stars, we find a *son moderno* (with *timba* components) called *Reconciliation*, written by Juan de Marcos González and Lázaro Villa, with the lyrics such as (in translation): -

If I make you my enemy, what's in it for me?

And what can you gain from suspicion of me?

If we were born under the same sky

If we want to stay as Cuban . . .

Enough hate, enough hate between brothers and sisters!

That the song has an explicitly political message is confirmed in the album's accompanying booklet, noting that the piece "is a call for the restoration of Cuban-ness and national identity transcending political taboos and hypocritical dramatisations" (*Distincto, diferente*, p5). However, the call for reconciliation can still be a dangerous exercise: Manolín's song *Amigos en Miami* seemed to go too far in asking for friendship with Cuban exiles, leading to a freezing out of the performer in the media and public performance for some two years (Sweeney 2001, p287).

### **Beyond the Embargo: Music and Musicians**

From the 1960s and even more intensely in the 1990s, Cuba has made use of its unique cultural legacy as a political and economic strength. Cuba has long had its own distinctive high culture based on a fusion of African, American and European elements. This has involved the creation of unique musical forms, a strong literature, and a very active film industry in part promoted by the socialist concerns of the state. In large measure, the revolutionary struggle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the ongoing struggle to resist first Spain and then the United States has led to a sense of national political struggle, i.e. *cubanía* (August 1999, pp68-69). From 1961 the National Council of Culture has been active in sponsoring a wide range of cultural activities at all levels (MacGaffey & Barnett 1962, p287). The Council supported orchestras, dance troupes, a national theatre, and given grants to artists, writers and composers (MacGaffey & Barnett 1962, p290). From 1962 national music schools gave free tuition in classical European music, with an expansion into jazz and Cuban styles from the late 1970s (Watrous 1997). Cuban musicians were paid by the state, either by salary or contract arrangements, and regularly rated and evaluated on a scale from A to F (Robbins 1991, p231; Sweeney 2001, p222). As a result, Cuba has a comparatively high profile in the fine arts, in international film, and particularly in classical, jazz and modern music. Cuba has its own local musical festivals, as well as the Havana Festival of Latin Jazz, which from the 1980s created increased awareness of Cuban music.

This cultural activity took on a stronger economic meaning during the 1990s. In 1991 a major report by Castro to the Fourth Congress of the Communist Party indicated that there was an urgent need to stimulate foreign earnings, with a strong emphasis on culture, as well as a new need for "self-financing" of enterprises rather than centrally planned "budget financing" (Sweeney 2001, p279). This policy soon impacted on the operation of the music *empresas*, laying the basis for a stronger export of Cuban music and sustained tours of Cuban musicians, though some areas such as *nueva trova* remained centrally funded through Cultural Institutions (Robbins 1991, pp218-220). This export trend intensified through the late 1990s, with the Cuban government holding its first annual music-trade exposition in March 1997, called the Cuban Record Fair, using the event "to promote Cuba's music as both a cultural ambassador to the world and as a way to earn badly needed American dollars" (Watrous 1997). By the 2000 International Record Fair (called *Cuba Disco 2000*), it was possible for some to hope that Cuba might become a regional leader in the Latin music business (Sweeney 2001, p14). The Cuban recording industry, at first controlled by EGREM (operating under the Ministry of Culture from 1962), in the 1980s had difficulties in keeping up with the range of talent on the island, especially during the hardship period of the early 1990s when shortages and lack of local market greatly deflated the industry (Robbins 1991, p221; Sweeney 2001, p223). However, through the late 1990s, foreign and Cuban recordings began to expand, including the construction of new studios and the licensing of archive material from the EGREM archives. In the early 1990s two new record companies emerged: Artex (later renamed Bis) was created by the official artists' touring agency, while the Pablo Milanés Foundation formed PM records (Sweeney 2001, p279).

In the area of modern Afro-Cuban music and Latin jazz, Cuba has made a world-wide impact with a recent international revival, bringing forward stars such as Ruben Gonzales, Ibrahim Ferrer, Eliades Ochoa and Omara Portuondo, as well as master pianists including Chucho Valdés. In part this was done through the production and promotion efforts of Ry Cooder, and via Wim Wenders' film *The*

*Buena Vista Social Club*, in the end leading to seven spin-off albums and over US\$7 million in sales worldwide (Sweeney 2001, p284). In part, the success of the project was aided by the fact that it presented itself as a kind of "humanistic reclamation project" (White 2000), though its long-term reception was based on its strong musical qualities. The *Buena Vista Social Club* album itself sold some two million copies, won a Grammy, the film was screened on American PBS television (Shoemaker 2000), and the project formed the basis of numerous ensembles that went on tours to Europe, the United States and Australia. Other films and documentaries such as *Calle 54, Spirits of Havana* (2000) and the 1992 *Cachao . . . Como Su Ritmo No Hay Dos* (Hays 2001; McKissack 1999) reached smaller audiences but continued the wider promotion of Cuban and Latin Jazz. Cuban musicians and groups soon emerged as major names in the international music circuit. Big names include the Los Van Van group, Isaac Delgado, Gonzalo Rubalcaba, Manolín, Compay Segundo, Irakere, Cubanismo, the Afro Cuban All Stars, the Vieja Trova group, Sierra Maestra, NG La Banda and La Charanga Habanera (Tremlett 1998; Sweeney 2001; Fairley 2000a).

The Cuban government encouraged Cuban artists and musicians to work overseas, allowing them to keep "a large proportion of their earnings from concert tours and sales of artwork," thereby reducing the likelihood of their emigrating (Robinson 2000, p121). The music industry has become one of its principal exports, with about 3,500-4,000 of the 11,600 state-registered musicians performing abroad in 1996-1997 (Tremlett 1998; Watrous 1997). This brings both needed revenue, with the state taking up to 50% of earnings from the musicians that go overseas (Watrous 1997), but also aids the prestige of Cuba as a rich source of culture.

These trends have taken place in the context of the conscious development of tourism to boost revenue and the acceptance of Cuba internationally. Efforts to promote Cuba as a major tourist venue, in spite of U.S. efforts to reduce visits by its own citizens, has resulted in tourism becoming the second top earner in the Cuban economy by 1999 (bringing in \$600 million, with sugar providing \$540 million, and remittances from overseas \$700 million, Robinson 2000, p120). Tourism, in fact, was the first effective strategy in re-linking Cuba into the world economy (Monreal & Hammond 1999). Several major European hotel chains, including Spanish companies such as Sol Melia, have been involved in upgrading Cuba's facilities (Falcoff 2000). Musicians worked out of the bars and cabarets of these new venues, while clubs such as the Cecilia, Palcio de la Salsa, the Café Cantante, and the Casa de la Música provided relatively high paying spots for Cuban musicians (Sweeney 2001, p286).

However, tourism is a two-edged sword, increasing reliance on dollars and creating a certain resentment among ordinary Cubans at the special services and food that tourists can access ("tourism apartheid"), as least through the mid-1990s (Landau 1999; Fernández 2000, p95). Likewise, there is a certainty irony in the operations of the tourist industry in Cuba over the last decade: at the same time as Afrocuban music is promoted, 'blacks' find themselves poorly represented in most areas of the lucrative tourist industry (de la Fuente 2001, pp32-33; de la Fuente 1998, p6). Exclusion here is sometime explained on the basis of aesthetic and cultural factors, with the loose criteria of *buena presencia* (good appearance) acting as little more than a rationalisation of prejudice against those of dark appearance, even though up to 60% of Cubans have a "significant" degree of African ancestry (Hansing 2001, pp743-744; de la Fuente 1998, p7; Moore 1997, p13). Tourism combined with economic hardship has also boosted prostitution on the island, another factor going against revolutionary ideals, and with somewhat different political views of female (*jinetera*) and male (*pinguero*) prostitutes (see Hodge 2001).

These trends were played out under the impact of the economic crisis brought on by changing Soviet policies under Gorbachev, leading to an immediate shrinkage in the Cuban economy as protected markets in the COMECON system disappeared (especially important for sugar), as well as an end to subsidised oil imports. A serious crisis in the Cuban economy down to 1993 led to the declaration of austerity measures under a special period, in turn causing a reduction of sponsorship for Cuban musicians, as well as a shrinkage in the real value of state salaries (Hernández 1998). On this basis, many musicians were indeed forced to turn outwards, either in playing to the expanding tourist

industry, or finding more lucrative deals with the overseas record companies that were beginning to enter the island. This led to a change in Cuban music, with local musicians aware that they sometimes have to slow down and simplify their rhythmical structures in order to appeal to overseas buyers (Hernández 1998). Combined with modest growth in the Cuban economy between 1994-1998, estimated between 2 and 4% (Hernández-Cáta 2000), this somewhat alleviated the economic crisis in Cuba. After an initial 35% reduction in the economy in 1993 (Monreal & Hammond 1999), growth returned during 1995-1999, with 6-6.2% growth achieved in 1999 (Robinson 2000, p116; Amaro 2000, p285).

### **World Music: The Depoliticisation of Culture**

'World Music' has been criticised as a dangerously misleading term which robs various musics of their unique national and ethnic origin, locating them in a decentred 'other' category which is at best a marketing strategy, at worst, an appropriation and watering down of authentic music styles. Likewise, by relegating music to the 'status of the exotic' can place such music into a peripheral and secondary position (Bohlmann 2002). In this sense, there is no such thing as 'world music', though various new fusion forms have emerged within the frame of the internationalization of musical activities and the globalization of music markets (see Henderson 2001).

However, in a very real sense, something that we might regard as an approach to music has developed under the aegis of World Music. This is the willingness to search out new types of music and music experience, even if this is sometimes little more than a search for the exotic. Likewise, some genuine forms of fusion have occurred among different styles, leading to a musical interplay among diverse musical forms. The term 'world beat' has been used to describe the mix of First and Third World styles that has led to a "more modernised, dance-oriented" product (Hernández 1998).

World Music in these senses, however, is not just a product of the last two decades. On the contrary, the mining of the world cultures for the exotic took place throughout the building of European empires, and was therefore positioned at first within the contexts of colonialism and orientalism. In an explicit sense, world music as a commodity had already emerged by the time of the world fairs held in Paris (1889), Chicago (1893), and St Louis (1904): -

The world's fairs from the turn of the last century exploited the musicians and dancers assembled from colonial holdings throughout the world to put their acquisition of power on display. The performances that took place at the fair were emulated and domesticated precisely because they were deemed so extraordinarily exotic. Coeval with the colonial moment of the world's fair, a new historical moment for world music arrived, and with it a new impetus for inventing world music. World's fairs also attracted the diverse lot of early comparative musicologists and anthropologists who employed nascent recording technologies to inscribe the performances of musicians at world's fairs on wax cylinders, thereby transforming those performances for study and replication as historical documents. World music emerged in yet another form at such moments of encounter between the exoticism of 'people without history' and the historical narratives of those commanding technology. (Bohlmann 2002, p16)

Cuban music was also popularised through the performances of the Ignacio Piñero group at major international fairs, e.g. in Seville at the 1926 Ibero-American Exhibition, and in a major Exhibition in Chicago in 1930 (Sweeney 2001, p69). Cuban dancers and musicians also appeared at the 1933 Chicago World Fair, generating further interest among U.S. audiences, even if the acts performed were not "traditional" (see Moore 1997, p186). This was also the period when the first wave of Cuban music began to seriously impinge on American jazz and dance music (see above).

In terms of the 'rediscovery' of Cuban music, which in global terms picked up through the late 1980s and accelerated from the early 1990s, there was a particular linkage with the marketing genre of World Music. Although interactions among Cuban and Latin music had continued through the 1980s, it was the 1990s re-marketing of Cuban styles as 'world music' that helped its popularity with a largely non-Latino audience (Hernández 1998). This program of discovery hinged on the "ideologies

of race and cultural authenticity" (Hernández 1998), as well as on the alternative and counter-cultural ambience that remains part of the world market scene, even if this audience is largely de-politicised in terms of real political action. If the audience may often be apolitical, the context is not: -

World music thrives in that great hothouse of education and propaganda known as entertainment, watered by the stern disciplines of leisure. It expands our field of cultural perception only by narrowing it, forcing us to admire artefacts that were made slowly and finely under irreducible conditions, but whose power to awe is then nullified by a uniformity of reception. (Brennan 2001)

It is ironic that this music is largely distributed globally by Western (often European) firms, but World Music does form a counterbalance both to the hegemony of American pop and to the dominance of transnational media companies: -

Common - and indispensable - to both world music and world beat is a production, promotion, and distribution infrastructure for marketing these musics owned and maintained primarily by Western-based entrepreneurs who have carved out a niche for musics from the Third World within an international music industry otherwise dominated by U.S. pop. This infrastructure, which began to emerge in the early 1980s, is composed of a loosely connected network of small, independent record labels, mail-order houses, concert and music festival presenters, radio programs, performance venues, magazines, and newsletters - and, more recently, websites - specializing in disseminating world music. (Hernández 1998; see also Van Peer 1999, p112)

However, from the political perspective, there are key transnational aspects in this trajectory of music forms through the open window of World Music. It allows a given ethnic, local or national music a long reach into remote parts of the world, and creates a willingness to engage with new styles and messages, to cross cultural boundaries and circumvent former prejudices (Brennan 2001). On this basis, people who may oppose Communism, view Castro as an autocrat, and even intellectually support the embargo, may still be able to enjoy and buy Cuban music. More importantly, those whose opinions are not fully formed on the Cuba question, will listen with sympathy to the overt nationalism of many Cuban songs, and regard the type of life lived in Cuba today under a new light. For many young people in American and Europe, the issue of whether to be for or against Castro is irrelevant (Sweeney 2001, p195), allowing them a de-politicised exploration of Cuban culture. Cuban music, like many world musics, has the ability to create "the conditions that collapse the geographical and ontological distance between different musical practices, at once mediating and problematizing the distance between Self and Other" (Bohlman 2002, p1).

In this sense, peripheral cultures, in their new role of 'other', can begin to use the forces of globalization and transnational activity to develop intellectual capital (see Davies 2000), negotiate modernization, and build relationships in which they are at least a partner, if not a dominant player. Rap and reggae youth cultures in Colombia, for example, use transnational images that circulate as "global commodities" to develop a space for a contested black identity within the country (Wade 2002). Cultural factors can also change the receptivity of otherwise mainstream audiences. Just as the strong interest by young American whites in black music (blues, rhythm and blues, soul) helped create a "biculturally receptive audience" (McMichael 1998), so too the flow of Cuban musical styles through the medium of World Music has created a cultural space in which Cuba can be re-appraised free of the straight-jacket of past ideological conflicts. That such a trend may also involve a secondary transculturation (Garofalo 1999; Benitez-Rojo 1998; Franco 1996) of musical production and styles does not necessarily rob the music or its reception of authenticity, though these may need to be considered as layers of differentiated meaning attached to the music form.

The exploration of World Music, ironically, shows one of the contradictions of globalization: -

More than just expanding tastes, world music characterizes a longing in metropolitan centers of Europe and North America for what is not Europe or North America: a general, usually positive, interest in the cultural life of other parts of the world found in all of the major media - in film, television, literature in translation, as well as in music. It represents a flight from the Euro-self at

the very moment of that self's suffocating hegemony, as though people were driven away by the image stalking them in the mirror. The hunger for the cultural practices of the third world is occurring just when one finds declarations far and wide that a single global culture is emerging, that nationstates are an obsolete form, and that a common cultural currency already exists - or has begun to exist among teenagers from Beijing to Santiago de Chile. Two sides of a contradiction come together without being recognized as contradictory: the appeal to difference and the announcement that differences are happily disappearing. (Brennan 2001)

These messages, however, can cut both ways, especially in relation to youth culture. During the 1997 international trade-music fair in Havana: -

. . . all over town, musicians, business people and Government officials talked about America and the relationship between the United States and Cuba. American flags were in evidence on many people's clothes, and among musicians around town and backstage at La Tropical there was a sense that America was the next frontier. Music, it was hoped, would help end the blockade, and there were signs that it has already begun to happen. Cuban music is making its way into the United States, like smoke curling under a door. (Watrous 1997)

From the 1970's onward the Cuban government had begun to be concerned about the emergence of the *desvinculados*, "unconnected teenagers" with behavioral, motivational and educational problems (Fernández 2000, pp91-92). This concern deepened through the 1990s as economic pressures and outside influences deepened this trend. The Cuban government worried about outside influences shaping and undermining youth culture, and through the early and mid-1990s had moved to deepen its instruments of social control (see Aguirre 2002). Thus, the wearing of the U.S. flag on the cloths of young Cubans was viewed by the Cuban Communist Party as a lack of patriotism (Aguirre 2002). Even *nueva trova* artists such as Carlos Varela have engaged in the problem of a youth that is largely kept outside the circles of political power (Fairley 2000b, p408). Carlos Varela's song *Guillermo Tell* suggests the dangers of excluding youth from power: "William Tell/ Your son has grown up/ And now he wants to shoot the arrow/ It's his turn now to prove his valour/ Using your very own bow!" (in Fairley 2000b, p410).

Likewise, the strong re-emergence of religious groups within Cuba, including even a small but active Rastafari movement (see Hansing 2001), goes well beyond the polite public accord between Castro and the Pope, pushing for a greater civil space than that accorded for the current activities of the Catholic Church. Among the young, Santería and its related Afro-Cuban cultural forms may be more popular than Catholic or Protestant Christianity, at least in part due to the mobilization of African symbols and personal style, including Afro-Cuban music and the creation of various drumming groups (Hansing 2001, p735).

However, these patterns of youth disenchantment and subtle protest may be part of a larger problem, as noted by Cuban essayist Enrique Hernandez Busto: -

Skepticism in Cuba . . . is due to the failure to materialize of the Marxist utopian telos, the happy ending to the Cuban story; it is always displaced and deferred. The elusive product of scientific socialism has been replaced by public spectacle and rhetoric, "the theatricality inherent in the crisis of political representation". This results in ritualized carnival; the revolution institutionalizes carnival, appropriates and disarms alterity: "the carnival return to the Father, it loses its disseminating condition". This position voices the disenchantment with modernization and, more dramatically, as the Chilean Roberto Lechner suggests, the disenchantment with redemption itself. (paraphrased in Davies 2000, p111)

These conditions can be seen in a number of cases, and at the very least has lead to partial de-regulation of "national-revolutionary discourse" and some dispersal of heterodox values (Davies 2000). Some of these trends the Cuban leadership has tried to accommodate, but certain dangers for authoritarian governance can be glimpsed as this process develops: -

Postmodern aesthetics in Cuba privilege heterogeneity and subjectivity; a critical awareness of sexuality, sexual preference, and sexual discrimination; a reassessment of existing "minority"

cultures (women, gay culture); the creation of new styles ("freakies," *roqueros*); an engagement with concomitant issues (private sex life of individuals, domestic life, AIDS); a reencounter with belief systems other than Marxism (primarily Catholicism and radical Christian sects); a deconstruction of sacred myths (syncretisms); and, most important and most dangerous for the present government, a querying of national borders in order to incorporate the (Miami) diaspora. (Davies 2000, pp112-113; see also Aguirre 2002)

Recent studies have suggested that national identity and the construction of nationhood are "contested processes in which those 'below' have their own voices" (de la Fuente 2000, p203). Specific national expressions often "exists in a hierarchical world in which some visions of culture are hegemonic" (Wade et al. 1999). On this basis, current discontent and the voices of the young, blacks, and women may well find their place in an emerging reconstruction about the meaning of *Cubanidad* and the place of Cuba in the world, a discourse which has already begun to diverge from the official memory of the island. In the first half of the twentieth century, popular music was one means whereby the African legacy and "blackness" could be added into the conception of *Cubanidad* (de la Fuente 2000, p204).

Likewise, a range of emergent social problems, ranging from prostitution through to scarcity of daily resources in poor households have begun to find some reflection in music and popular culture (see Hodge 2001; Wilkinson 1998). Thus modern songs speak of the prostitutes as 'witches', while Rap group *Reyes de la Calle* has sung about double-standards and racism (Olavarria 2000, p30). In this sense, new forms of Cuban music contain elements of social criticism and little-concealed street-codes that hint at a stronger sense of resistance, even if not the rebellion found in many popular musics from blues to punk (for the latter, see Brennan 2001). Here there is a parallel with the use of humor, mockery (*choteo*) and private satire, which is widely if anonymously used as a form of political dissent in Cuba (see Aguirre 2002, pp71-72; Fernández 2000, pp30-31). It is in this context that youth can view the speeches of the leadership as little more than ritualized harangues known in Cuba as *teque* (Fernández 2000, p83), with political ideals undercut by the reality of life in Cuba's poorer areas.

In these senses, the range of popular music now developing in Cuba, partly under international market pressures, does correlate with the slow emergence of civil society structures in Cuba. The growth of semi-autonomous NGOs has been notable since 1989, as the government comes to realise that self-help organisations are needed to help resolve local problems and mobilise financial resources that can no longer be provided by government (Gunn 1995). By 1995 some 2,200 NGO's had been registered with the Cuban government, though it is true that only some of these are genuinely independent organisations (Gunn 1995). Among these is the *Asociación Cultural Yoruba de Cuba* and the *Pablo Milanés Foundation*, formed in 1990 by a black singer and aimed at supporting young Cuban musicians and other independent cultural activities, especially those focusing on Afro-Cuban culture (Gunn 1995). The Yoruba Cultural Association's registration is significant, since although Yoruba ceremonies had been legalised by Castro in 1959, the cult itself was strongly discouraged and viewed by the Cuban Communist Party as a superstitious practice that should be left behind (Gunn 1995). The *Confradía de la Negritud* (Black Brotherhood) has been formed to fight racism (de la Fuente 2001, p34), while other organisations focus on human rights or religious activities. Nonetheless, it useful to distinguish in Cuba among *congos* (controlled government organisations), *gongos* (government-oriented non-government organisations), and more autonomous NGOs in the definitional sense (Fernández 2000, p133). Cuba currently has a wide spectrum of top-down and bottom-up forms of organisation.

It is possible to argue that although a strong, autonomous civil society has not emerged in Cuba, there are signs of a sizeable economy working outside the normal legal structures of the state. Likewise, though overt resistance or rebellion is extremely rare due to the strong tools of control available to the Cuban state, on occasion riots have broken out, indicating a floating anger with harsh conditions. The most extreme of these events was the August 5, 1994 Malecón riot in Havana, with rioters throwing rocks at the elite hard-currency stores (Aguirre 2002). It seems that many of these rioters may have been blacks and mulattoes, the very group many had thought were the mainstay of support for the

Castro government (de la Fuente 1998, p10). The meaning of these trends are not so much a direct political challenge to Castro as a failure of the state to meet the wider demands of poor Cuban communities. As the Cuban economy crashed in the early 1990s, and slowly grew under conditions of partial deregulation from 1994, many Cubans had to mobilise other patterns of economic survival and social cooperation. In part this was through existing affective, personal and family networks: -

One response has been an increase in people's interdependence with members of their intimate circles, friends, neighbors, and family members residing nearby. Neighborhood identity and relationships thus become more important and, in some instances, facilitate the mobilization of people against official actions. The special period is thus marked by greater surveillance as well as by an increase in the importance of private life as a means of surviving the crisis, resulting in an increased tension between the private and the public spheres . . . set by the government. (Aguirre 2002, p71)

Likewise, Cubans are aware that economic necessity drove many of their brethren onto the rafts, leading to a softer social view of these exiles that the government had promoted. A 1994 survey (by CID-Gallup) showed that "75% of respondents referred to Cuban-Americans in affectionate terms" (de la Fuente 1998, p11). Bearing in mind the strong role of remittances of hard currency from overseas in keeping the Cuban economy afloat, it is not surprising that government has recently softened its position, representing most exiles as "economic migrants" (de la Fuente 1998, p11). In turn, thousands of Cubans overseas send money home, or visit the island with medicines and other needed items (Fernández 2000, p145), indicating affective networks that are not undermined by ongoing criticism of the Castro government.

However, these emerging trends should not be viewed as a direct attack on the Cuban revolution, nor an attempt to undermine Cuban nationalism *per se*. On the contrary, even rap groups such as the *Orishas* are willing to reinvoke images of blood and love of homeland. As suggested by Margot Olavarria: -

These strong expressions of *cubanidad* could be interpreted as attempts to placate government paranoia that Cuba is losing its youth to globalized consumer culture. But they must also be understood as coming from an awareness of Cuba's marginalization within the global order and the consciousness that they represent Cuba in the cosmopolitan youth culture they also strive to be part of. (Olavarria 2000, p30).

Indeed, it is the strong sense of identity and reworking of traditional musical elements that make a band such as the *Orishas* popular with international audiences (Cantor 2000, p69). Here contemporary uses of traditional Afro-Cuban forms such as the *son* gesture towards a pre-modern era, as well as intentionally avoid excessive fusion with modern world music styles (Brennan 2001; Moore 1997, pp88-94). This timelessness, however, is compatible with postmodern trends, using the ancient, pre-modern and contemporary in a mix which transcends modernism. In this setting, the issue is not so much a direct physical challenge to the Cuban regime, but rather a differing usage of national symbols, e.g. as in the alternative use of José Martí as a "rallying point of civil society and the dissidents" (Aguirre 2002, pp72-73) and changing affective associations. From this point of view, it has been argued that many ordinary people have moved from support for socialism to support for 'sociolismo', i.e. "social interaction based on mutual trust and self-interest" (Aguirre 2002). In the worst sense, this *sociolismo* can be viewed as cronyism (Fernández 2000, pp108-110), but more pragmatically it can be seen as a common strategy of social networking under conditions of scarcity and poverty, as found in developing countries from Mexico to Kazakhstan (de la Rocha 2001; Werner 1998).

### **The Global Message of Cuban Musicians**

The long-term question is whether these trends will support the emergence of a genuinely diverse civil society, or simply a society which has become less democratic and less governable (Fernández 2000, pp120-121). It is unfortunate that international and economic pressures through 2002-2003 seem to have triggered a further effort by the Cuban government to forcefully suppress dissent and



control civil society (for possible motivations, see Bond 2003). This exploration of Cuban culture suggests that such efforts will not benefit Cuba, nor retain popular adherence for Cuba's vision of a socialist state surviving through a strategic balancing of diverse globalization pressures.

Over the last decade it has become clear that the meaning of *Cubanidad* and its social construction are no longer affairs conducted just in Cuba, nor even by Cubans alone. In its musical setting, Cuban culture has become a 'pan-American' cultural legacy in the widest sense, influencing both Latin America and North America. As a unique fusion of cultural influences, Cuban music also speaks with great vitality to European and African audiences, and to an emerging transnational youth culture. Although not overtly providing a means of propaganda and politicisation, its affective content nonetheless suggests that Cuba is here to stay as a vigorous and independent nation (with or without Castro), but not without a revolutionary sense that Cuban culture has something unique to offer its global audience.

## Endnotes

(1) Although various forms of racism and discrimination would develop, especially against the descendants of black slaves, there was no formal apartheid. Discrimination in most public places, schools and the public service were outlawed by 1893 (Thomas 1971, p293). Through the early 1980s Cuba had made serious headway in reducing racial inequality in a number of areas, but this could not be sustained through the mid-1990s (see de la Fuente 1998). For the difficulty in ending racial prejudice in contemporary Cuba even as the government consciously explores linkages with Africa, see Landau 1999; de la Fuente 2001. In large measure, due to economic pressures experienced by the island from the early 1990s, these and other "prerevolutionary social problems" have reappeared (de la Fuente 2000, p200).

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