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**In This Issue**

**Bolt** explores the ways in which "Overseas" or diaspora Chinese have been an economic asset for the development of China in the past two decades, investing substantially in their homeland. At the same time, he investigates the ways in which some of the Asian states that have substantial diasporic Chinese populations have sometimes viewed the process as a potential problem for the hostland. Stressing that the majority of the very considerable foreign investment in China over the past two decades has come from diasporan Chinese, Bolt weighs the factors that have catalyzed this movement of funds, ranging from diasporic sentiment to the reshaping of policies by the still-Communist homeland government to accommodate diasporan capitalism.

**Boscagli** explores the central questions posed by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam in their *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. In her account, these range from "can mass culture be politically correct?" to can it engage and promote multiculturalism without lapsing "into a reified identity politics?" While exploring possible responses, Boscagli also inquires whether older concepts of politically committed art can be recast to address the uses of "committed media" in an era of postcolonial globalization, in and out of the classroom.

**Mountz and Wright** portray the quotidian life of transmigrants in a "locale" they call OP, which includes the village of San Agustin in Mexico's Oaxaca and Poughkeepsie, New York. They argue that the "interconnectedness within" this space "can no longer be conceptualized merely as circulation or exchange." They vividly illustrate the ways in which air travel, the telephone, and the VCR have in some cases transformed practices (e.g., language) and in others have challenged or reinforced existing institutions (e.g., collective labor for the village, or fiestas and the display of wealth accompanying them). They explore the process of "time-space reassignment" by which the village seeks to uphold traditions while sending a significant portion of its adult males to Poughkeepsie, and they examine the personal dilemma of choosing between community service and individual economic pursuits. Finally, they define the forms of dissent by which some (e.g., women migrants, Seventh Day Adventists) challenge the structures of OP.

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## Sound Systems, World Beat and Diasporan Identity in Cartagena, Colombia

Deborah Pacini Hernandez  
Brown University

In the early 1990s, anthropologists such as James Clifford and Arjun Appadurai began examining transnational cultural exchanges, in which people, capital, ideas, and culture flowed freely across boundaries and changed the relationship not only between center and periphery but also between different locations along the fringe. While both Clifford and Appadurai mentioned music and music bearers as examples of such "traveling cultures" and "global culture flows" respectively, neither of them paid any attention to an important transnational cultural phenomenon that was taking shape and becoming increasingly visible as they were writing: the emergence of the world music and world-beat industries.

For music scholars, the term "world music" had long referred to everything that was not Western art music, that is, tribal music, folk music, non-Western classical music, and more recently, some popular music as well; it includes, then, such varied material as songs of the pygmies, Celtic fiddling, classical Indian *ragas*, Colombian *vallenato*, and Louisianan *zydeco*. (By "Western" I refer to those wealthy, powerful, and privileged North American and European countries James Clifford has collectively and appropriately referred to as a "powerful force field.") Before 1980, recordings of these musics, usually released in austere record jackets with rather dense liner notes, were clearly considered to be serious educational documents intended for specialists, rather than entertainment for mass audiences.

By the early 1980s, however, popular musics from diverse regions of the globe had begun appearing in postcolonial metropolises such as London, Paris, and New York, where immigrant populations had introduced the various musics from their home countries. Some of these recordings contained the sort of traditional and folk-oriented music that had been studied by ethnomusicologists as world music, but many of them contained modern, often highly hybridized, and clearly commercially oriented musics that fell beyond the traditional purview of ethnomusicologists. An interlocking commercial infrastructure, composed of record companies, retail and mail order concerns, radio shows, magazines, music festivals, and the like

emerged to market these musics, which they did by cultivating the appetites of First World listeners for exotic sounds from the Third World. The term "world music" was appropriated from ethnomusicology to facilitate the marketing of these diverse musics, most of which did not fit into existing marketing categories. The consumers of this new category of world music were not specialists, however, but lay persons—although on the whole they were urban, affluent, well educated—and in Europe and the U.S., mostly white.

The term "world beat" emerged about the same time, referring to a subset of world music that included the more dance-oriented products of cross-fertilization between First and Third World musical traditions: examples might be the modernized versions of traditional music by the likes of Nigeria's Sunny Ade, Haiti's Boukman Experience, or the work of U.S. rock musicians such as David Byrne and Paul Simon, who draw upon African and Latin American sources. The following definition by Andrew Goodwin and Joe Gore captures the complexity of world beat: "World Beat might be identified as Western pop stars appropriating non-Western sounds, as Third World musicians using Western rock and pop, or as the Western consumption of non-Western folk music" (72).

Since the single most important element of dance music is rhythm, it is no accident that most world-beat musics have originated in areas where percussion has been most consistently and successfully cultivated over time—in Africa and its diaspora. Thus, while the term "world beat" does not refer explicitly to diasporan musics, operationally this clearly is the case because, in creative terms, the most powerful forces behind the world-beat phenomenon have clearly been black musicians. Indeed, even a partial listing of musics marketed as world beat confirms the importance of Africa and its diaspora: *juju* from Nigeria, *soukous* from Congo/Zaire/Senegal, *chimurenga* from Zimbabwe, *zouk* from Martinique and Guadeloupe, *soca* (abbrev. soul calypso) from Trinidad, *punta* from Belize/Honduras, *vodou-jazz* and *misik rasin* from Haiti, and Jamaican *reggae*. Significantly, many world-beat musicians, wherever they are from, explicitly invoke a diasporic identity that transcends national identities, either through song texts or other visual strategies such as adopting dreadlocks or wearing traditional African clothing.

Noting the unequal relationships between Third World musicians and First World record companies, ethnomusicologists and music sociologists began examining the economic, ideological and ethical implications of the world music phenomenon, which has resulted in a growing body of commentary and research (e.g., Wallis and Malm; Laing; Feld; Hamm; Manuel, *Non-Western World*; Goodwin and Gore; Thompson, "Afro Atlantic"; Garofalo; Roberts; Chambers; Guilbault; Pacini Hernandez; Erlmann). However, because these

scholars were concerned primarily with the structural inequalities of the world music industry, their work emphasized the bilateral flow of world musics between First and Third World contexts. In reality, these musics were also circulating multilaterally among various regions of the diaspora themselves.

Interestingly, it was Paul Gilroy, a cultural historian whose primary concerns were the articulation and intersection of racial and national identities in the U.K., who understood and underscored the links between the sort of transnational cultural exchanges described by Appadurai and Clifford, the trajectory of the world music/beat phenomenon, and racial identity. He initiated this discussion in 1987 in "*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*": *The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*, where he examined how *reggae* and the sound systems used to play it in Britain expressed the consciousness and cultural creativity of Caribbean migrants, "providing a living bridge between them and African traditions of music making" (164). Gilroy developed these ideas more comprehensively in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, where he pointed to wider musical exchanges among blacks in the Americas, Europe, and Africa, arguing that the diaspora—the Black Atlantic—constitutes a cultural system, which has encouraged a transnational identity based more on the shared experiences of displacement, exile, and oppression than on the specific experience of slavery.

If the Black Atlantic is indeed a cultural system, then world beat is its sound and the record its principal vehicle of transmission. Here again, Gilroy correctly pointed both to the importance of records in "enact[ing] the ties of affiliation and affect which articulated the discontinuous histories of black settlers in the new world" (*Black Atlantic* 16) and to the importance of the sound systems which have been used in various diasporan settings to play them: "Perhaps the most important effect of sound systems on the contemporary musical culture of black Britain is revealed in the way that it is centered not on live performances by musicians and singers ... but on records.... It is above all in these [sound system] performances that black Britain has expressed the improvisation, spontaneity, and intimacy which are the key characteristics of all new world black musics" (1987: 164).

While ethnomusicologically oriented scholars have taken it for granted that world-beat musics have circulated primarily as records rather than via live performances, few, as Simon Jones has pointed out, have really examined the actual practices and spaces in which records are used (1). In the following essay, I will explore the extent to which Gilroy's emphasis on the importance of musical exchanges and the role of recorded music in the construction of diasporan identity resonates in Cartagena, Colombia, a city located in a region

whose population is primarily of African origin, but which historically had not considered itself part of the black Atlantic world.

### Why Cartagena?

As a graduate student in the early 1980s, I was among those delighted to hear the exciting new musics from Africa and the Caribbean that were appearing on college radio stations and in record stores and were collectively being referred to as "world beat." In 1983, I traveled to Colombia, my father's country, for a visit and took with me cassettes of two of my favorite world-beat recordings, *Sound D'Afrique*, Volumes I and II, both of which were compilations of recent Afropop hits recorded in Paris and released in the United States in 1981 and 1982, respectively. In the Andean capital city of Bogotá, I played the cassettes for a number of friends, all of whom were well educated, cosmopolitan, and were usually up-to-date with musical and cultural developments in Colombia as well as in the United States and Europe. They had never heard world beat before and told me it was not available locally—although they instantly appreciated the music's energy and vitality. Before leaving the country, I stopped in Barranquilla, my father's hometown, which is located on the Caribbean coast. There, I had occasion to play my *Sound D'Afrique* tapes for a young black woman named Teonilda, who worked as a domestic. To my surprise, she informed me that in her hometown, Palenque, a small black community near Cartagena (founded by maroons in the colonial period), people listened to that sort of music all the time. Although she couldn't identify the songs by their African names, she was familiar with several of the songs on my cassette.

In 1990 I returned to the coast of Colombia, this time to the nearby city of Cartagena, to inquire into the development and current manifestations of the *cumbia*, a popular musical genre autochthonous to the coast. There, I discovered that—contrary to my expectations but confirming Teonilda's statements in 1983—the preferred music among that city's black residents was not *cumbia*, nor the regional *vallenato* that at the time dominated the radio airwaves, nor even the long-popular transnational *salsa*, but, rather, music that they referred to as *música africana*, that included a variety of musics from Africa and the Afro-Caribbean—*soukous* from West Africa, *mbaqanga* from South Africa, *zouk* from Martinique and Guadeloupe, *soca* from Trinidad and *reggae* and *dance hall* from Jamaica—all musics that in the United States would fall under the world-beat umbrella.

How was it that a working-class black maid from an isolated village on the coast of Colombia could be knowledgeable about music that was just beginning to be made available in the United

States and was not yet available in the capital city of Bogotá even to the children of the more privileged classes? In northern First World cities such as London, Paris, or New York—cities well endowed with technology and capital and inhabited by numerically significant and diverse immigrant communities from various parts of the diaspora—musics categorized as world beat were circulating freely. In developing countries such as Colombia, however, which lacked both immigrant communities and a world music infrastructure, the availability of recorded music from beyond national borders was restricted by the ability and/or willingness of the local recording and broadcast industries to disseminate foreign musics, and the degree to which local populations were willing to accept music sung in other languages.

In these situations, attitudes toward race can be an important factor in determining whether a world-beat music would be introduced at all and, if so, what degree of success it might encounter. The fact that most of the internationally successful world-beat musics were being made by people of African descent helped these musics transcend national and linguistic boundaries in countries with majority black populations: reggae's immense appeal in communities of African-derived people all over the world, for example, owed as much to its pan-African ideology as to its musical aesthetics. Similarly, multiracial Brazil was far more receptive to Afro-Caribbean music (Crook) than its largely white neighbor, Argentina. In contrast, in countries where racism is a significant factor, it was much less likely that world-beat musics would be welcomed. Colombia, in spite of a racially mixed population—somewhere between 14% and 21% of the population is black<sup>1</sup>—has a long history of actively disparaging its African population and their culture, thereby greatly reducing the appeal of world-beat musics to the Colombian music industry and consumers alike.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, far from being driven by developments in the increasingly transnational music industry that made the world-beat phenomenon possible in other parts of the world, as early as the mid-seventies, black Cartageneros independently developed an alternative, locally constructed system for acquiring, disseminating, and profiting by diasporan musics, centered around portable, locally-constructed sound systems known as *picós*. Cartagena *picós*, specifically designed for playing recorded music to large audiences, were characterized by their extravagant decoration and by customized sound components that greatly magnified their sonic power, thereby providing Cartagena audiences with a fully satisfying substitute for the spectacle of live performance. Over time, these sound systems have become the centerpieces of complex networks of individuals, social practices, and specific contexts that have

allowed black Cartageneros to appropriate commodities produced elsewhere—recordings of diasporan musics—which they have used to transform the local popular music landscape according to their own aesthetic preferences. Thanks to the *picós*, black Cartageneros have overcome the cultural and economic obstacles to the circulation of diasporan musics and developed what is unarguably the most extraordinarily diverse and cosmopolitan musical tastes in the Caribbean. While the sheer range of their musical knowledge is exceptional enough in a region where linguistic boundaries have severely circumscribed musical choices, what is truly remarkable is that black Cartageneros' knowledge of these diverse musics preceded the appearance of world beat in northern contexts by almost a decade. More importantly, the circulation of diasporan musics in Cartagena has encouraged the public affirmation of the city's African and Caribbean cultural identities, where little had existed before.

### Race and racial identity in Cartagena, Colombia: Historical background

Colombia, along with Brazil, is one of the most geographically and culturally diverse countries in Latin America. The people inhabiting the country's Andean mountain ranges are predominantly *mestizo*, the racially mixed descendants of the invading Spaniards and the resident highland Indians. Colombia's vast eastern Amazon lowlands and Orinocan plains are home to the culturally distinct and numerically diminished lowland Indians, as well as to growing numbers of *mestizo* colonists migrating from the Andean highlands. Western Colombia, bordered by the Pacific Ocean, is inhabited primarily by blacks and Indians and has been largely isolated from the rest of the country by the region's dense rain forests. Northern Colombia, on the other hand, bordered by the Caribbean and known simply as *la costa*, is fully tri-ethnic: the majority of *costeños* are either mulatto, *zambo* (the offspring of black and Indian parents), or *mestizo*.

The city of Cartagena was founded in 1533 by the Spanish. Thanks to a series of forts built on several of the surrounding islands, which make Cartagena practically impregnable, the city became the major port of embarkation for the mineral riches plundered from the Andean interior. It was also one of Spain's two official American ports of entry for enslaved Africans, and became a major slave market in the New World (Solaún and Kronus). Over time, Cartagena received over a tenth of the million and a half enslaved Africans brought by Spain into America (Calderón Mosquera), although many of these were then trans-shipped to Spain's other Caribbean colonies, or sent south to the Andes to work in mines or as agricultural laborers in the fertile valleys of the interior. After

emancipation, blacks from Colombia's interior regions, seeking refuge from enforced wage labor, migrated to the inhospitable Pacific coast region, where the dense, wet jungle environment characterizing the Pacific region kept them isolated from the mainstream of Colombian life until the present. Of the estimated 80,000 Africans who remained in Colombia, a large number were kept on the coast, where they were put to work building and maintaining Cartagena's fortifications; or worked as *stevedores* or as boatmen on the nearby Magdalena River (principal thoroughfare to the mineral-rich interior); or were used as workers on coastal cattle and agricultural enterprises (Gutiérrez Azopardo). Today, Colombia's blacks are widely dispersed throughout the country, but there are noticeable cultural differences between Pacific coast Afro-Colombians and black *costeños*, who, unlike the former, are culturally well connected to both the national and international arena.

In spite of significant contributions to Colombia's economy, the coast is one of the nation's poorest regions (Meisel Roca; Posada). Both of Colombia's two major north-coast cities, Cartagena (population 600,000) and Barranquilla (population 2,000,000) have majority black populations; in both of these cities, the black population occupies the lowest rung of the socio-economic ladder (Solaún and Kronus; Romero Jaramillo). Cartagena is one of Colombia's most rapidly urbanizing cities, drawing thousands of rural migrants from the surrounding areas who hope to find work either in the tourist sector or in the numerous factories established around the Bay of Cartagena. Most of these migrants, however, remain structurally unemployed, working instead in the informal sector as market or street vendors, domestic servants, and the like, and residing in the swelling shantytowns that have sprung up around the margins of the city.

While superficially appearing racially tolerant, Cartagena society has inherited many of the racial prejudices and discriminatory practices of both the Spanish colonizers and their white and *mestizo* successors: a pervasive cultural preference for whiteness over blackness, and a subtle but generalized rejection of the coast's African heritage. Race prejudice in Cartagena, however, is mild compared to that emanating from the Andean interior, especially the capital Bogotá, where the country's central government is located. In spite of the country's geographical and cultural diversity, an official ideology has perpetuated the myth that the country is primarily bicultural—*mestizo* and indigenous—rather than multi-racial and multicultural, effectively excluding blacks from the country's national identity (Arocha Rodríguez). Furthermore, the coast's unique character, whose African contributions tie it culturally to the Caribbean rather than to the Andean interior, has been consistently denigrated as backwards and vulgar and has been

negatively contrasted with the supposedly more cultured and refined culture of the interior.<sup>3</sup>

Blacks in Cartagena, then, have been unable to escape the economic and social stigma of slavery: they suffer economic deprivation, political under-representation, and persistent cultural denigration. Moreover, they occupy an incongruous position vis-à-vis the nation to which they belong politically and the Caribbean region to which they belong culturally. While they are the majority in Cartagena itself, they are a racial and cultural minority within a nation that—withstanding an official declaration that the country is “multiethnic and pluricultural” in its 1991 Constitution—still considers itself primarily *mestizo*, and whose cultural orientation is still primarily Andean rather than Caribbean. On a local level, a small number of blacks in Cartagena have attempted to redeem their Afro-Colombian cultural heritage, yet the sort of political or cultural ideologies stressing the positive aspects of connections with Africa and encouraging a pan-African racial identity that appeared in other Caribbean countries decades ago (e.g., pan-Africanism, *négritude*, and black power) have never become a force in Colombia on a national scale.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the occasional efforts to call attention to the problem of racism in Colombia, or to compare the oppression of blacks to that of indigenous people, have been challenged as either reactionary or reverse racism (Friedemann). It is in this historical and social context, then, that we must consider the significance of the links that black Cartageneros purposefully and resolutely formed with diasporan popular music.

### Origins of the Colombian *Picó*

*La costa* has always been a crucible for the production of Colombia's most popular recreational musics. From the very beginnings of the Colombian record industry in the 1940s, black *costeños* participated as musicians as well as composers, providing ingenious lyrics in the rich coastal vernacular and a strong African percussive base to a variety of local styles (e.g., *cumbia*, *porro*, *gaita*, *merecumbé*). Together, these characteristics gave *música costeña*—coastal music—a tremendous appeal both within the region and beyond: *música costeña* was disseminated via recordings and performance tours not only to the Andean interior but to other areas of the Spanish Caribbean, Mexico, and Central America as well. Given black *costeños'* central importance to the national music industry, it was hardly predictable that in the 1970s they would eschew Colombian and other Spanish Caribbean popular musics in favor of diasporan musics—primarily *soukous*, *zouk*, *reggae*, and *soca*—whose rhythms and instrumentation had no direct connections

with coastal traditions, and which, moreover, were sung in languages unintelligible to them. Recordings of these musics were not played on the radio and they were unavailable in record stores. Instead, these musics entered and circulated on the coast only via the large multi-component sound systems that came to be known as *picós*.

Like sound systems developed elsewhere (Manuel, *Caribbean Currents*; Jones), the first *picós* built in Colombia in the 1950s were little more than extensions of the family victrola; small speakers were connected to an ordinary record player and strung up in trees to provide more volume at backyard parties. Over time, these rudimentary sound systems, which were rented out to local families and social clubs for parties, became more elaborate as technicians learned how to adapt speakers to larger amplifiers in order to provide more volume. There is no agreement on the origins of the word *picó*, which has been explained as the Hispanicized pronunciation of the words “pick up,” used alternatively to describe the trucks used to transport the people, the practice of picking up and setting down the tone arm from a record, or the portable record players once known by that name. Neither is there agreement as to whether the first *picós* were built in Cartagena or in the nearby port city of Barranquilla. In both cities, however, the recordings played at these early *picó* parties would include both *música costeña* (e.g., *cumbia*, *porro*, and *merecumbé*) and Cuban music (particularly the *mambo*, *rumba*, and *son*), which was fashionable throughout the Caribbean at the time. These pay-to-enter family or neighborhood dances, which anyone could attend, were integral features of Cartagena's social landscape.

In the mid-1960s, *música costeña* was overpowered by the arrival of *salsa*, a rhythmically complex urban dance music originating among Puerto Rican and other Spanish Caribbean immigrants in New York City but solidly based on Afro-Cuban rhythms—making it the first truly transnational Spanish Caribbean music.<sup>5</sup> *Salsa*, however, unlike the more elegant and refined Cuban genres that preceded it, spoke to the harsh realities of immigration, poverty, and racial discrimination that were being experienced by Spanish Caribbean immigrants in New York.

Local folklore has it that the first *salsa* recordings to enter Cartagena were brought by individual travelers returning from the United States, and sold to *picó* owners, who correctly foresaw that this hot, highly percussive Spanish Caribbean music with lyrics expressing the difficulties of contemporary urban life would appeal to black *costeños*. Not everybody, however, looked favorably upon the hard-edged musical upstart from the *barrio*: many Colombians with middle-class aspirations perceived *salsa* as a vulgar deformation of Cuban music that was associated with marginal, if not

criminal, elements, and would not allow it into their homes; similarly, night clubs and radio stations refused to play it.<sup>6</sup> *Picó* parties, then, initially offered the only means of hearing and dancing to the new rhythms; as a result, they began to be relegated to lower-class neighborhoods and associated with social disreputability.

Massive campaigns by promoters based in New York City eventually overcame middle-class Colombians' resistance to *salsa* so that, by the end of the sixties, *salsa* transcended the confines of poor *barrios* and moved into the mainstream of the Colombian music industry, receiving extensive radio play and progressing into the more upscale contexts of fashionable urban nightclubs. Unfortunately, as *salsa* reached the apex of its commercial success in the mid-seventies, the intense Afro-Caribbean percussive character that had been so attractive to *costeño* dancers was increasingly being replaced by an emphasis on lavishly produced, stylized arrangements and insipid romantic lyrics. Henceforth, *salsa* steadily declined from a music characterized by its aggressive and innovative flavor to one that was repetitive, predictable, and increasingly reliant on proven formulas. This new style of flat, lackluster *salsa* was referred to as *salsa romántica* (romantic *salsa*) in order to distinguish it from the *salsa dura* (hard *salsa*) that had preceded it.

At the same time, the Colombian *vallenato* was beginning to transcend its regional origins and to achieve national popularity. While the *vallenato's* origins were in northern Colombia, it was not rooted in the Afro-Caribbean culture of port cities such as Cartagena or Barranquilla but rather in the *mestizo* culture of the primarily cattle-herding coastal backlands. Significantly, the *vallenato* is a lyric-centered rather than rhythm-centered music, whose principal function is storytelling. As *vallenato's* popularity increased (thanks, it is widely rumored, to the economic support of drug dealers hailing from *vallenato's* birthplace, Valle du Par and the Guajira), it began to compete with *salsa* for the dominance of the airwaves. By this time, the danceable *música costeña* had largely fallen into disuse and was considered a relic of the past. These changes in the local musical landscape left black Cartageneros with no locally available dance music meeting their aesthetic priorities—neither a satisfying percussive foundation nor lyrics that spoke to the social and cultural realities of urban under classes. This aesthetic vacuum created the conditions in which diasporan musics were able to take root in a region where otherwise there was no logical reason or structural means for this to happen.

Like other moments in emergent cultural development, it is impossible to know exactly how and when recordings of diasporan musics were first brought into Cartagena, but local wisdom has it that they came by sea. Merchant marine sailors, I was told, had

bought some records of African and Afro-Caribbean music in immigrant neighborhoods of major United States or European port cities and taken them back to Cartagena as curiosities. None of those who recalled sailors as the first to bring diasporan music into Cartagena mentioned their race, but given that boatmen and stevedores along the coast have traditionally been black, it is safe to speculate that these sailors were very likely black. These records were initially played at *picó* parties as novelties, thereby exposing black Cartageneros to music sung in languages they did not recognize and with origins they could not determine—but the music was undeniably great to dance to. *Picó* owners realized that these highly danceable records could fill the vacuum left by the decline of *salsa*, and began commissioning sailors as well as friends and relatives who traveled abroad to bring back more of this music, which was referred to generically as *música africana*, without distinguishing any particular genres or countries of origin. The first such records to enter Colombia were pre-world beat in style; that is, they had not yet been significantly transformed by Western pop influences and recording technology; later arrivals, on the other hand, were the fully modernized offspring of the international world-beat phenomenon.

Exactly what genres of music were contained on the first recordings of *música africana* that arrived in Cartagena is the subject of controversy in Cartagena, even among the more knowledgeable *picó* owners I interviewed, all of whom had been working in the *picó* milieu for years (and each of whom considered himself an expert). Some asserted it was Haitian music that had arrived in Cartagena in the mid-seventies and which had been confused with African music, and that African music didn't arrive until the end of the decade. Supporting this explanation was the fact that a number of *picó* owners, in response to my question concerning the first African records to arrive in Colombia, mentioned Coupé Cloué or Skah Shah, both of which were Haitian dance bands popular in the seventies. Others, however, insisted that while there was indeed a period around the mid-seventies when Haitian music became popular in Cartagena, African music had been introduced to Colombia as early as the late sixties.

The truth probably lies somewhere in between: a small number of African records probably did arrive in the late sixties or early seventies, but African music did not become well established among black Cartageneros until a few years later, in the mid- to late seventies. I venture this opinion because one *picó* owner played me a record he claimed was among the first African records to arrive, which I recognized as acoustic Nigerian *highlife* that clearly predated the slickly produced and modernized Afropop of the early eighties. Another, the owner of one of the oldest and biggest *picós*



in Cartagena, showed me the dog-eared jacket of a record by Expensive Olubi and his Golden Stars—a Nigerian group of minor importance from the seventies—which he said was the first African record to be played on a *picó* (his own, naturally) in Cartagena. This record, produced in Nigeria by Ibukun Orishun Iye Records, also predated world beat by several years. In any case, it is clear that African music had entered Cartagena by the late seventies—well before the world-beat phenomenon had stimulated its mass circulation in northern hemisphere contexts.

Such historical details, however, were of little concern to *picó* owners and their DJs, who until recently did not know—or care—about the exact provenance of the music, and who routinely referred to Afro-Caribbean genres—*reggae*, *soca*, and Haitian *compas*—as *música africana*. It is important to keep in mind that the Cartageneros who listened and danced to *música africana* may have had a generalized knowledge of their various Afro-Caribbean neighbors, but they had no access to an education that included the study of African geography or cultures. They did, however, recognize that the music was neither Hispanic nor Anglo-American, that it had a compelling dance groove, and they knew—from the *picó* owners and their DJs—that the performers were black. Eventually I realized that the term *música africana* referred to all diasporan musics, even in cases when an individual might know that a particular song was from the Caribbean rather than from Africa itself. Far from being a sign of ignorance, the transnational term *música africana* suggests that black Cartageneros tacitly acknowledged the existence of and their participation in an African diasporic community, whose boundaries transcended national borders. Ultimately, the erasure of specific national origins accomplished by the term *música africana* is a problem only for those, such as myself, seeking to reconstruct the early history and trajectory of African and Afro-Caribbean music in Cartagena.

While Cartageneros lacked specific information about the origins of the music played on the *picós*, two major categories of African music were correctly identified, but by local names. The most popular style in the late eighties and early nineties was referred to as *música de guitarra* (guitar music), or *música francesa* (French music), which referred primarily to *soukous* from French-speaking West Africa, in which electric guitars are prominent. Another style, somewhat less popular, was *mbaqanga* from South Africa, which was known in Cartagena as *música bocachiquera*, after the coastal island village of Boca Chica, home of the sailor who first brought it into Cartagena. In contrast, other African popular music styles, such as *juju* from Nigeria or *chimurenga* from Zimbabwe, that have enjoyed considerable success among world-beat fans in Europe and the United States, did not made inroads into Cartagena.

## Customizing Technology

Like sound systems developed in Jamaica and among West Indians in Britain (Jones, Back), the *picó's* principal function was to provide very loud music highlighting a prominent bass line to stimulate the dancers. In order to achieve the desired sound, component parts intended for use in domestic hi-fis were employed in constructing fully customized, multi-component systems specifically designed to amplify and separate sound, of which the amplifier and the bass speakers were the most important parts.

Amplifiers were constructed with vacuum tubes, rather than transistors, long the industry standard for amplification equipment. One must conclude that this represents a cultural preference rather than a necessity, since Colombia is a fully modern nation, and Cartageneros have access to virtually any technology available on the international market. Vacuum tubes became practically obsolete years ago, but *picó* owners still believe that only they are capable of producing the forceful bass punch so highly valued by dancers. As a result, they go to great lengths to obtain vacuum tubes, which are more difficult to find and are more costly than transistors. The number of vacuum tubes used in an average *picó's* amplifier grew from an initial two to an average of about thirty in 1992, although some legendary systems are reputed to have had as many as one hundred and twenty tubes. (As a point of reference, when concert-quality electric guitar amplifiers in the United States still used vacuum tubes, an average amplifier had about a half-dozen tubes.) The customized amplifiers would then be mounted in a large, specially constructed wooden cabinet, on the top of which would be placed at least one but often two record turntables; the entire piece was referred to as a *consola* (console).

In order to ensure a potent low-end bass sound, *picós* had two oversized bass speakers housing multiple (up to twelve) 12-inch to 18-inch bass speakers (usually used and reconditioned) mounted in specially constructed wooden frames. In the eighties, these cabinets were truly immense, each measuring up to eight feet high by ten feet wide; however, after one of these speakers fell on a DJ, killing him instantly, *picó* owners began reducing their size somewhat. Currently, the speaker cabinets of Cartagena's larger *picós* typically measure about six feet high by six feet wide. Additionally, numerous smaller speakers necessary for the higher ranges were placed in specially constructed boxes that could be hung around the dance area; the larger *picós* had up to twenty of these. Called tweeters in the U.S., in Cartagena these were named *jinlansers* after the Jim Lancer brand speakers used in them. Additionally, a horizontal box with mid-range speakers known as a *regadora* would be added if financially possible. Finally, each *picó* included a special box for the

record collection. The concussive sonic power emitted by a fully equipped *picó* is tremendous, capable of literally shaking the entire body of anyone within range.

In terms of the importance given to large bass speakers, the *picós* resemble sound systems developed elsewhere in the diaspora: Jones, for example, has observed that "bass frequencies ... have always been a central aesthetic in Jamaican popular music's 'bass culture'" (3) and that Jamaican sound systems are customized with vacuum tubes for similar aesthetic reasons (personal communication). U.S. sound systems developed for rap music also depend on the ability to convey a prominent bass line. Such cultural preferences for the lower ranges may well reflect continuities with Africa, where preference for percussion in general, and, within percussion ensembles, for low-end instruments, is widespread. Larry Crook, for example, has observed that in many African percussion ensembles, the master drummer is the one who plays the large bass drums (personal communication).

Colombian *picós* differ from their counterparts elsewhere, however, by incorporating an exuberant visual dimension to the system. While early Jamaican sound systems were decorated (cf. photograph in Wallis and Malm 4), contemporary Jamaican and British sound systems are not. In Cartagena, by contrast, decoration is considered indispensable to a *picó's* success. Each *picó* is given a name by its owner, and a local artist is commissioned to represent this name graphically, always in brilliant colors, on the fabric covering the front of both bass-speaker cabinets. Principal motifs (or variations on them) are repeated on other large surfaces (such as the box for the record collection). The painted images invariably evoke either physical or seductive energy and power; for example, one *picó* is called El Guajiro, referring to a group of coastal Colombian Indians with a reputation for fierceness; another, El Diamante (The Diamond), is a comic book hero; El Parrandero (The Carouser) is depicted as an expensively dressed man accompanied by a glamorous blond woman. In addition to its formal name, each *picó* is also given a nickname, which is also painted on the bass speaker cabinets; for example, El Parrandero's nickname is El negro rumbero, which can be loosely translated as "The black party-lover"; El Guajiro's is El Tiraflechas, "The Bowman."

As the names of their *picós* indicate, *picó* owners fetishize the power of their machines, which become symbols and expressions of their own virility and power. As one Cartagenan imaginatively put it, *el picó es la vanidad expresada en tubos y pintura*: "the *picó* is vanity expressed with tubes and paint." Observing the love of dramatic expression displayed in *picó* decoration, especially in the playful self-aggrandizement, one can posit continuities with Africa and other areas of the diaspora: for example, Jamaican, Trinidadian,

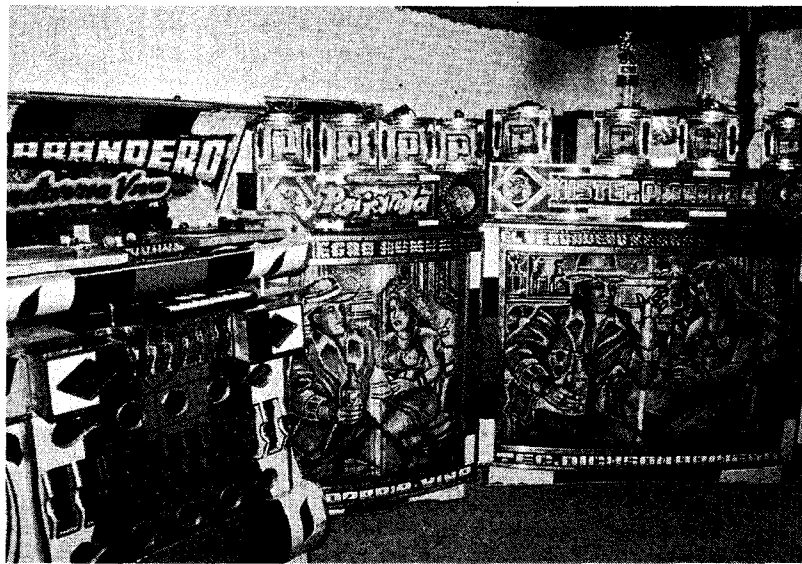
and U.S. musicians and DJs often adopt nicknames using the titles of royalty (king, queen, count, duke, etc.) or other superlatives and exaggerations (e.g., Mighty Sparrow, Lord Invader).

While the pictorial or graphic representations are limited to large surfaces, every other visible surface of the *picó* is also painted and/or decorated with a variety of inventive techniques and materials, including inlays, mirrors, rolled and pleated upholstery, faux fur, padding, fringe, lights, decals, and statues of favorite saints. This spirited artwork clearly reflects the African aesthetic preference for bright colors and shiny surfaces; the African aesthetic can also be seen in the geometric designs that are favored, especially for trim (Thompson, *Flash*). The final results of these decorative efforts are a sensational display of sound, color, and image.<sup>7</sup>

Artistic conventions have changed over time, as new materials, such as day-glo colors, have become available; or new images, such as comic book characters, have been added to the popular iconography. Color combinations also go in and out of style; in the 1980s, the palettes were bright and varied; in the 1990s, extensive use of black became popular. Another development was replacing the pictorial representations with designs in which only the lettering of the *picó's* name is painted. While at first glance this seemed to represent a loss in the richness of the visual imagery, the skill and imagination with which the concept of sonic (and sexual) power were expressed by painted letters alone reflected an increasing sophistication in artistic abstraction.<sup>8</sup> These changes occurred with surprising speed: when I first observed the *picós* in 1990, all of them were decorated with pictorial representations; by 1992, the larger, trend-setting *picós* had replaced their fabric speaker covers with new ones in the lettering-only style.

As in Jamaica and Britain, the construction of sound systems in Cartagena relies on the special skills of local artisans—primarily the sound technicians who build the audio components and the carpenters who build the cabinets housing them, but also including the artists who decorate them. The Jamaican and British West Indian sound systems described by both Jones and Back are customized to some degree, but some of their components (such as amplifiers) are purchased ready for use; Colombian *picós*, in contrast, are almost entirely constructed locally—even the amplifiers—of recycled materials. Colombian *picó* artisans have become specialists in their trade, but they do not independently produce *picós* as a matter of routine; rather, they build *picó* parts only on commission, following the precise instructions (and financial capacity) of their clients.<sup>9</sup>

While *picó* owners are by United States standards poor, they are sufficiently better off economically than their very poor neighbors and clients to be able to invest in a *picó*. Owners usually start with modest systems containing all the essential elements but on a much



One of Cartagena's largest *picós* in 1992 was *El Parrandero*, elaborately decorated in a red, yellow, and black color scheme.

smaller scale—a console, two bass-speaker cabinets, and record box (all painted)—and over time, they re-invest their earnings into bigger and better equipment. Some innovative *picó* owners, for example, have increased the element of spectacle by adding smoke-making machines and sets of colored and blinking lights to their *picós*.<sup>10</sup> The cost of putting together and maintaining a consequential *picó* is significant: in 1992 the larger *picós* cost up to 6,000,000 Colombian pesos (\$12,000 U.S.)—not counting the costs of building a record collection and adding other desirable additions such as smoke machines and light sets.

### Global Music, Local Practices

While *música africana*'s popularity in Cartagena increased dramatically during the 1980s, its dissemination remained virtually independent from the commercial activities of both the national and the international recording companies functioning in Colombia, neither of which was interested in recording or distributing African music. In the absence of any encouragement (or payola) to promote *música africana*, radio stations would not play it and record stores would not stock it. Undaunted by the local music industry's disinterest—in fact, inspired by it—a few black Cartagenan entrepreneurs turned African music's inaccessibility into an asset by capitalizing on its scarcity and controlling its circulation.

*Picó* owners purchased and maintained extensive record collections containing at least several hundred discs—which, needless to say, were kept in a specially designed and decorated box. A good *picó*'s record collection would include a wide variety of music from the Spanish Caribbean, ranging from regional *vallenatos* to Mexican *rancheras* and Puerto Rican *jíbaro* music, to transnational *salsa* and *merengue*, which would be played occasionally throughout a party. While such Spanish Caribbean popular musics could be heard on the radio and easily purchased on records or cassettes, until very recently the only way Cartageneros could hear *música africana* was to attend a *picó* party; therefore, the most important part of a *picó*'s record collection was, without question, its collection of diasporan musics.

It was not simply the quantity of *música africana*, however, that determined what a *picó* could charge for an engagement, but rather the number and quality of its *exclusivos*—a term used to describe a song owned by only one *picó*. If dancers liked a specific *exclusivo*, they would go to that particular *picó*'s dances just to hear it. *Picó* owners, then, sought to obtain a competitive edge over their rivals by owning as many *exclusivos* as possible. In effect, *exclusivos* were “hits” made Cartagena-style—based not on the number of records sold, but on the number of people they could attract to a particular *picó*'s dances. Since the economic value of such popular records resided as much in their exclusivity as in their musical appeal, *picó* owners sought to conceal the identity of their *exclusivos* so that no other *picó* could obtain them. The lyrics, sung in unintelligible languages, could not be used to identify a song, but the record jackets, which might give rival *picó* owners some information about a record's identity, were destroyed or swapped with another record's, and record labels are routinely obliterated by erasing or painting over the label. In effect, these strategies altered the recording's form by stripping it of its commercial identity and rendering it anonymous, thus guaranteeing that the profits made from a particular record would remain in the hands of the *picó* owner responsible for establishing one of its songs as a “hit” in Cartagena.

Since until recently non-Spanish Caribbean records were not imported or sold by mainstream record vendors, obtaining *exclusivos* presented significant challenges. A handful of individual entrepreneurs in Cartagena established stalls in the working-class market that specialized in selling African records to local *picó* owners. Typically only one and seldom more than two or three copies of any given African record would arrive in Cartagena, where they would be sold for anywhere from 15,000 to 75,000 pesos each (\$30 to \$150 U.S.), the exact cost depending both on the number and quality of its potential hit dance cuts and on the number of LPs

thought to exist in Cartagena; a buyer would pay top price only if he was assured that rival *picós* would not obtain that record. Occasionally, when a song became or was considered likely to become a hit, a record vendor might have a limited number of pirate vinyl copies made directly from the original vinyl recording to sell to several *picó* owners, who would buy it even if it was not exclusive because it contained a good dance tune and would enhance their record collections. These pirated records were never sold to individual consumers, however; only after a song had lost all economic value to *picó* owners would vendors sell it to the public on a compilation cassette tape.

While market vendors provided an essential service to owners of smaller *picós*, the owners of larger, more important *picós* who wished to stay ahead of their competitors had to go to greater lengths to obtain *exclusivos*. These owners had at least one designated buyer (often a family member) known as a *corresponsal*, or correspondent, residing in a northern hemisphere city—usually New York—whose job was to cull through record stacks of music stores with African or Caribbean collections, searching for good dance tunes that the Cartagena public would like, and that no other *picó* would be likely to obtain. Buying according to these criteria, their purchases were not necessarily related to any “hit parade” system that might have been operative in Africa, among African expatriate communities, or on world music charts; on the contrary, the more obscure a good record was, the less likely that it would be discovered by rival *picós’* *corresponsales*.

Records purchased by *corresponsales* were sent to Cartagena by mail or with friends. Once a record reached Cartagena, the *picó* owner would select the dance cut(s) he considered might become a hit, and play it repeatedly at dances in an effort to establish it as a successful *exclusivo*. Since the real name of a song could not be divulged, each song was given a Spanish nickname, which quickly passed into the public domain by word of mouth. The local names given to songs had nothing to do with their original titles or lyrical content; rather they were invented, often by the owner, according to any identifiable element in the song. For example, a song with a chorus sounding like *co-co-co-co* would become *El Coco*, “The Coconut.” Or a song in which a synthesizer makes a sound resembling that of a buzz saw would be named *El serrucho*, “The Saw”; a song with a whistle sound became *El Policía*, “The Policeman.” Hundreds of African songs have become known to black Cartageneros in this fashion; and in a sort of mental hit parade existing in the collective memory, fans remember the local names of outstanding *exclusivos*, in what years they were hits, and which *picó* owned them. Unfortunately, since the real song names and their performers have

been obliterated and long forgotten by the *picó* owners, it was impossible for me to determine exactly what songs and styles were popular in the past.

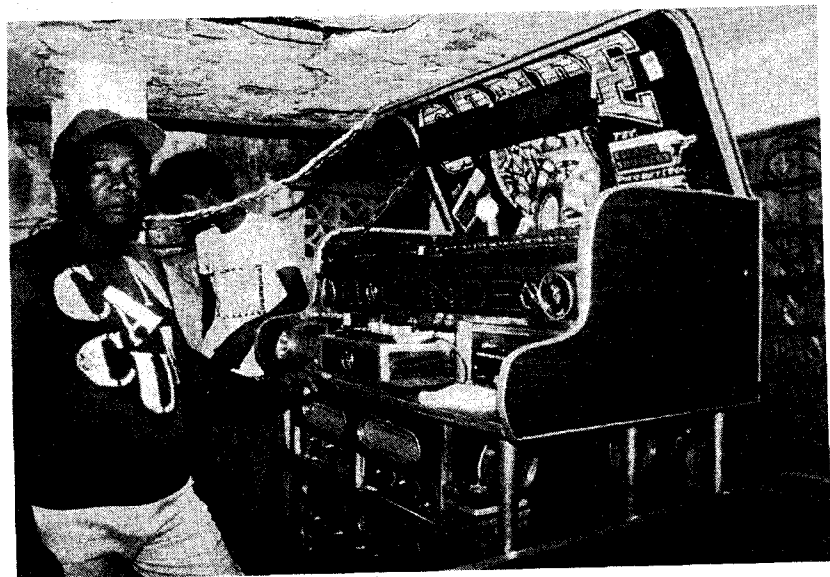
Occasionally the owner of a *picó* might serve as DJ, but more commonly he would hire a young man to operate the turntable at a party. Like their counterparts in Jamaica and Britain, Cartagena DJs were valued for their ability to select the right music at the right time as the party progressed; unlike their counterparts, however, they did not contribute verbally to the event. Smaller *picós* were not equipped with a microphone, but even if a larger *picó* had one, the DJ did not use it to engage with the music or the audience; as a result, neither their oral skills nor their individual identities were considered essential ingredients to a *picó’s* success. This contrasts dramatically to DJs in Jamaica and Britain, where oral practices such as “toasting” and “rapping” and other ways of embellishing the lyrics of the recorded music are highly developed, and indeed are responsible for adding a “live” dimension to an event otherwise based on recorded music. The silence of Cartagena DJs does not reflect the level of Cartageneros’ verbal creativity, which in vernacular speech is as rich and expressive as anywhere else; more likely, the impossibility of engaging with lyrics in a foreign language precluded verbal interactions with the music.

Limited verbal pronouncements to the audience were made, however, using a method unique to Cartagena’s sound systems: pre-recorded rhymed jingles either praising the *picó* and its music or insulting rival *picós*, which are called *placa*—an interesting, if highly controlled, variation on the African-derived oral tradition of exchanging insults. The following examples of *placas* belonging to the *picó* *El Parrandero* illustrate the style and content of these *placas*:

*El Parrandero les envía un mensaje  
a todas esas chatarras de tina  
para que se quiten la idea de competir conmigo  
porque yo no me presto para levantar picós caídos  
Oyelo! Caidos! Bien caidos!*

The Parrandero sends a message  
to all those pieces of junk  
who can forget about competing with me  
because there’s no way I’m going to mess with those wrecks  
Listen up! Wrecks! Total wrecks!

*Prepárate negramenta  
que llegó tu rey, El Parrandero  
el que te suelta la música bacana y sin aguero*



Pico El Conde's DJ at the console.

*y cuando estoy con ustedes  
me siento todo un negro rumbero  
por eso soy el famoso Parrandero*

Prepare yourselves, blackies  
your king, The Parrandero (the carouser) has arrived  
the one who lets loose cool music  
and when I'm with all of you  
I'm a black party-lover  
that's why I'm the famous Parrandero

A typical *placa* is composed by the owner but recorded by a professional announcer in a studio. Amazingly, *placas* are recorded and played on easily degradable master acetates rather than on the convenient and sturdy cartridge tape loops commonly used by radio stations for their station identification jingles and ads. Each acetate contains about a dozen *placas*, which are played always at very high volume in between songs. The larger *picós*, which have two turntables, intermittently superimpose a *placa* on top of whatever is playing, partly to prevent anyone from taping the song, but also to firmly establish the association of the *picó* with each song, particularly the *exclusivos*. These one-of-a-kind acetates are not treated with any special care and quickly become scratched. Again, Cartagena is a modern city, and *picó* owners will choose to invest

in expensive equipment if they find it desirable; therefore, the use of costly and impermanent acetates rather than sturdy and durable cartridge tape loops can only be explained as an aesthetic preference for the disc over the tape format.

While vinyl records were the industry standard when the first *picós* began to function, cassette technology has long since displaced vinyl in most other Third World countries because of its low cost and its facility for reproducing music (Manuel, *Cassette Culture*). In a system that relies on exclusivity, however, the cassette's reproducibility is clearly a disadvantage rather than an advantage. But more importantly, vinyl records provide the ability to easily and quickly select and repeat a single song or a danceable segment of a song from a vinyl record. Significantly, a common characteristic of contemporary world-beat musics, particularly *soukous*, is a highly danceable instrumental section in the middle of the song (structurally similar to the *descarga* and *jaleo* sections in *salsa* and *merengue*, respectively). Cartagena DJs often pass over the introductory sections of a song and go straight to the danceable segment. CD technology, on the other hand, has been more difficult for *picó* owners to ignore, since many record companies are no longer producing vinyl at all. In fact, *picó* owners have regarded the shift to CD technology with some anxiety, since it has increased the difficulty of obtaining vinyl records. CDs do indeed allow a DJ to select a particular song, but it makes finding an exact section of a song more difficult; they are also substantially more expensive than vinyl recordings.

Cartagena's *picós*, of which there are dozens of modest ones and approximately a dozen of the very large ones, all compete with each other for the admiration and loyalty of their public, who become fans of a particular *picó* as they might become fans of a baseball team. In fact, competition and rivalry are integral parts of the *picó* phenomenon, and the staged "duels" between *picós* attract followers of both contenders. The winner is the *picó* that sonically overwhelms its rival: both *picós* play simultaneously, at full volume, until the weaker *picó's* amplifier gives out.

To summarize, then, a *picó's* economic value and social prestige are determined by a combination of elements, which are listed in order of importance:

1. sheer volume, particularly in the bass range;
2. the number of *exclusivos* and the overall quality of the record collection;
3. the skill of the DJ in selecting songs and creating an exciting ambiance on the dance floor;
4. the *picó's* overall design and decoration.

By the eighties, while both the *picó* and its related social practices had become increasingly elaborate, the range of recreational spaces for *picó* events had become greatly restricted. The denigration of *salsa* in the late sixties had pushed the *picós* out of family contexts, within humble but still "respectable" neighborhoods, into the city's poorest *barrios*, where good dance music was valued more highly than conforming to middle-class norms of social decorum. In the seventies, however, these *barrios* began to swell with migrants from the surrounding rural areas, many of whom were unable to find adequate work. Unable to accommodate the influx, both the physical environment and the social climate of the poor *barrios* began to deteriorate. While the general decline of urban life was typical of cities all over Latin America during that era, in Cartagena it happened to coincide with the arrival of *música africana*. Colombia's long tradition of denigrating anything associated with blackness or Africa fed a growing social disreputability not only of *picó* parties but of African music itself. The city's middle and upper classes began to associate the *picós* with violence and immorality, and to refer to *música africana* by a derogatory name, *música champeta*. The term refers to a small, handmade machete called a *champeta*, commonly used by black agricultural workers—an obvious attempt to invoke the stereotype of blacks as prone to violence, and to impose an unsavory image on the music.

Like black recreational spaces elsewhere (Jones 12), *picós* were not allowed in socially sanctioned venues, such as clubs, because their fans were believed to engage in violence and other forms of deviant if not criminal behavior. As a result, *picó* parties were largely restricted to the very poorest sectors of Cartagena, taking place either in occasional block parties or in pay-to-enter dances held at specially built structures called *casetas*, semi-permanent, open-sided, tin-roofed structures with a ticket booth, a place for selling beer, a concrete dance floor, a few rustic tables and chairs, and urinals. *Casetas* were not permanent establishments like bars, but rather were rented out on a per-event basis to individual entrepreneurs, who would hire a *picó*, advertise the event, and earn a profit by charging admission and selling beer. Their patrons were mostly men, and women unconcerned about the effects of attendance on their reputations.<sup>11</sup> Everyone within earshot, however, could hear the music.

### *Caribe Si! Si! The Impact of the Festival de Música del Caribe*

While *música africana* proliferated within Cartagena's poorest neighborhoods, the rest of the city willfully ignored this extraordinary phenomenon, most noticeably those in the music business who

might have been expected to at least take note of its economic potential. But since neither the Colombian music industry nor the multinationals operating in Colombia had any vested economic interests in marketing diasporan musics at the time, there was no incentive to capitalize on its growing importance in Cartagena, much less to promote it nationally. Indeed, Colombian racism, which disparaged black culture as a matter of course, ensured the continued marginalization of *música africana*, keeping it contained within the poor, black community.

In 1983, two upper-class, Cartagena-based entrepreneurs equipped with the musical savvy to sense both the cultural importance and the economic potential of the emerging world-beat phenomenon in the north, organized what was to become an annual music festival showcasing representative, commercially popular groups from all over the Caribbean, including English Caribbean popular music—primarily *reggae* and *soca*; French Caribbean popular music—primarily *zouk* and *compas*; and Spanish Caribbean dance musics such as Cuban *son*, Dominican *merengue*, Puerto Rican *plena*, and, of course, Colombian *salsa* and *vallenato*.<sup>12</sup> The *Festival de Música del Caribe* was deliberately scheduled for the third weekend in March in order to coincide with Easter vacation, during which thousands of tourists from the Andean interior flock to the *costa* for a Caribbean holiday.

The Colombian audiences of all social classes who attended the festival were initially attracted by the Spanish Caribbean acts, but once in the arena, they were exposed to top-notch live performances by outstanding black musicians from throughout the Caribbean. By putting Colombian music on the same stage with diverse Afro-Caribbean musics, the Festival dramatically highlighted their common origins, providing a powerful visual and aural manifesto to the effect that *la costa's* cultural affinities lay not with the Andean interior but with the Caribbean to its north. The Festival's hymn, *Colombia Caribe*, written by Francisco Zumaqué, celebrated the coast's Caribbean identity by including Cartagena and its emblematic music, the *cumbia*, within a roster of quintessential Caribbean musics and other cultural icons. For example, by mixing Spanish, English, and French with vernacular *costeño* throughout the text, and by invoking key elements of Afro-Caribbean culture, such as the African gods Changó and Yemayá (and in between, the Catholic St. Joseph), the song ignored formerly impassable linguistic and cultural boundaries and established a common multicultural regional identity whose character was unequivocally transnational.

*Sí Sí Colombia*  
*Sí Sí Caribe*  
*La música del Caribe*

*Yes yes Colombia*  
*Yes yes Caribe*  
*Caribbean music*

Ya tiene su Festival en  
Cartagena de Indias  
Lo vamos a celebrar....

Jamaica trajo su reggae  
Panamá su tamborito  
Trinidad nos da el calypso  
Y la bomba, Puerto Rico

Merengue Dominicano  
De Cuba, rumba y son  
La beguine de Martinica  
Alegran el corazón

Cumbia pá gozar—El Caribe  
en Festival  
Plena pá bailar—El Caribe  
en Festival  
Vamos a vacilá—El Caribe  
en Festival  
¡He! Música y sabó—El Caribe  
en Festival

La gaita margariteña  
Y la cadencia de Haiti  
El soca de Monserrat  
Todo es para tí

Viva Eleguá y Changó  
Y que viva San José  
Babalú y Yemayá  
Y el culto Mayombé

El Caribe en Festival  
Hey yeh, Cadance maman  
Come on, get down now!  
Shake your boom boom now!

Oye Rastaman, te gusta  
Colombia Caribe?  
Yeah, man!

Now has its Festival in  
Cartagena de Indias  
We're going to celebrate it

Jamaica brought her reggae  
Panama its tamborito  
Trinidad gives us its calypso  
The bomba, from Puerto Rico

Dominican merengue  
From Cuba the rumba and son  
The beguine from Martinique  
Gladden the heart

Cumbia to enjoy—the  
Caribbean in Festival  
Plena to dance—the Caribbean  
in Festival  
Let's have a good time—the  
Caribbean in Festival  
¡He! music and zest—the  
Caribbean in Festival

The gaita from Margarita  
Island  
And the cadence from Haiti  
The soca from Monserrat  
All of it is for you

Long live Eleguá and Changó  
And long live Saint Joseph  
Babalú and Yemeyá  
And the Mayombé cult

The Caribbean in Festival  
Hey yeh, cadance maman  
Come on, get down now!  
Shake your boom boom now!

Hey Rastaman, do you like  
Colombia Caribe?  
Yeah man!

These invocations of coastal Colombia's Caribbean identity were enthusiastically echoed in Cartagena's media. One editorial in a Cartagena daily, for example, commended the Festival for "plant[ing]

the seeds for seeking our ethnic and cultural roots.... By figuring out our Caribbean identity, we could locate ourselves more firmly in the daily living of life in this world, without complexes or fears" (*El Universal*, March 18, 1993).<sup>13</sup>

More significantly, the Festival also placed the coast's African heritage into bold relief, particularly when it began including outstanding Afropop bands—such as the Paris-based Loketo and Kanda Bongo Man—in the lineup in 1986. Their appearance on the Festival's prestigious stage immediately gave a new respectability to *música africana* and exposed those middle-class Cartageneros—who had previously scorned it—to the full energy and vitality of contemporary Afropop. It also gave black Cartageneros their first glimpse of African music in live performance. Here, then, was an additional subtext: not only were Cartagena and the coast Caribbean rather than Andean and *mestizo*, they were part of the pan-African world as well.

While the ticket prices for entering the Festival's arena were beyond the means of most black Cartageneros, the Festival's impact did reach into the black community in numerous ways. The three nights of Festival performances in the arena were broadcast on regional television, but additionally, on the last day of the four-day event, a free concert featuring some of the bands was held at an outdoor location for the general public. In addition to these officially sanctioned activities, during the four days of the Festival, temporary *casetas* catering to poor Cartageneros were set up next to the arena and along the avenue leading to the arena, each of which enticed passersby to enjoy a cornucopia of fried food and liquor with a loud and flamboyant *picó*. This conglomeration of *picós*, locally known as *picolandia*, provided an alternative public space for poor, black Cartageneros to celebrate *música africana*.

### **Música Africana: From the Margins to the Mainstream**

By the mid-eighties, the Caribbean music festival in Cartagena began to be perceived in Colombia as part of the emerging world-beat phenomenon in the U.S. and Europe, where pop superstars such as Paul Simon and David Byrne were achieving considerable success with their experiments with African and Afro-Caribbean popular music styles. In the wake of these developments, *música africana* slowly began to gain legitimacy. The growing demand for *música africana* was easily satisfied by the increasingly well-organized world-beat infrastructure in the north, making it inevitable that more information about African and Afro-Caribbean musics—for example, via world-beat publications such as *Beat* magazine and the extensive liner notes on world-beat recordings—would find its way into Cartagena and into the black community.

One of the more significant conduits through which this information reached the black community were the half-hour or hour-long radio shows introduced by several of Cartagena's smaller AM radio stations dedicated exclusively to airing *música africana*. Typically the DJs for these shows came from the lower middle classes, so they had received some exposure to *música africana* from living in proximity to Cartagena's poorer neighborhoods, but they had also received at least a modest education, and a few had a basic command of English, allowing them read the liner notes, magazines, and other world-beat by-products that were arriving in Cartagena. As a result, black Cartageneros, particularly those most closely involved in the *picó* milieu, began to acquire basic knowledge about the music they had been listening to, allowing them to grasp the subtleties of stylistic differences: to distinguish, for example, *soukous* and *mbaqanga* by name, where they came from, and to recognize various artists' personal styles.

Unlike *picó* DJs, however, these DJs did not simply spin records, but, rather, they tried to provide their listeners with information about Africa as well, and to initiate a dialogue on issues of race. For example, in 1993 one of these shows was called, in English, "African Soweto Beat," not because the music the DJ played was from South Africa, but because the word "Soweto" was already familiar from news stories about the anti-apartheid struggle and, therefore, could best symbolize the imagined Africa. The DJ began one particular show by invoking *Madre Africa* (Mother Africa); he stressed Africa's generative role in all the music he would play, and then pointed out that all blacks had their origins in Africa, that blacks should be proud of this heritage, and that there were important black leaders such as Marcus Garvey. Such ideas had never been articulated publicly prior to the appearance of these programs on the air.

The growing legitimacy of *música africana* also stimulated the importation of African and Afro-Caribbean records into Cartagena through traditional commercial channels, which began to be sold in downtown record stores (as opposed to market stalls), with record jackets properly identifying musicians, songs, genres, and countries of origin. Taking advantage of the new respectability and success of these musics, a new breed of elite record pirates emerged, specializing in African and Afro-Caribbean music. Using sophisticated (and expensive) equipment to locally remaster CDs or records purchased abroad, these well-financed entrepreneurs began producing high-quality vinyl pirate compilation discs of African and Afro-Caribbean songs, which were sold to the public in mainstream record stores. Unlike the pirate records produced for sale to *picó* owners, which included no information on their plain cardboard jackets, these records had glossy, professional-looking record jackets, on which each original cut and artist were named side by side with

the local name of the song, as well as the companies from which they are supposedly licensed—"supposedly" because opinion was almost unanimous among people in a position to know, those who worked in the local music business, that most of the Colombian-produced world-beat records were not legally licensed. Given Cartagena's distance from Paris and New York, and the fact that most of the companies holding the rights to the "borrowed" music were small independents rather than major multinationals, these entrepreneurs had little fear of legal reprisals.

So that middle-class consumers needn't be embarrassed to have *música champeta* in their homes, these entrepreneurs renamed it with the catchy and innocuous term *música terapia*, "therapy music," suggesting that the music had a "feel-good" quality. The slickly produced *terapia* record jackets invoked an upper-class social context, typically with photographs of blond women, whose market value as attractive sex objects was not diminished by clothing. Occasionally, when a picture or design invoking Africa appeared on a jacket, it reflected stereotyped representations of Africa and Africans: fierce black warriors in tribal garb, and wild animals—particularly lions—were favorite images.

By the end of the eighties, the interest in *música africana* had increased dramatically. Particularly in the months preceding the *Festival de Música del Caribe*, newspaper and magazine articles intended primarily to generate or exploit interest in the Festival were appearing with in-depth information about the musicians and genres that would be appearing in the Festival. Additionally, now that the financial interests of the new, middle-class entrepreneurs in marketing recordings of African and Afro-Caribbean music were at stake, *terapia* songs began to be included along with other popular music (such as *vallenato* and *salsa*) in radio programming. While such intense media attention was seasonal, it did succeed in further exposing a cross section of Colombian society to world-beat musics.

While these developments undeniably made African music more accessible (and more comprehensible) to poor Cartageneros as well as rich ones, the practice of mass distributing and disseminating music that was formerly "exclusive" hurt the *picó* owners, who found that a song they might have paid \$50 for appeared only a few weeks later on a *terapia* compilation record. Moreover, no longer being the sole source of *música africana*, they feared losing the ability to attract audiences on the basis of music available only from them. In response, *picó* owners organized themselves into a union, the *Asociación de Picóteros*, and, in an interesting twist, they allied themselves with legitimate record companies in their public campaign against piracy.

Eventually, however, the more enterprising *picó* owners responded to the new conditions created by the well-heeled and



financed upstart pirates, and began to compete in the record market by issuing pirate compilations of their own, using music from their own collections. On these recordings, owners took advantage of the record jackets to promote their *picós* by featuring photographs of the *picó*, a list of related personnel, from the sound technician to the DJ, as well as a telephone and address for contracting the *picó*. Additionally, these record jackets provided detailed lists of the component parts of the *picó*, from the number of tubes to the type of light and smoke-making machines; they even touted the quality of the *picó's* generator, an indispensable device in a region with chronic power shortages. Finally, they included brief histories of the *picó*, a local variation on the didactic liner notes typical of northern world-beat recordings.

Yet if the legitimization of *música africana* was seen as a welcome change, some observers feared that the increasing flow of world-beat records into Cartagena could undermine the black community's tradition of live musical performance. Much of the appeal of world-beat recordings produced in the north resided in their superior production quality, which could only be obtained through sophisticated recording technology that did not exist in Cartagena. A few black Cartagenero musicians attempted to imitate the sound of African music, particularly that of the widely-popular *soukous*, but since neither Cartagena nor the Spanish Caribbean in general have a comparable tradition of using electric guitars in dance music, they have been unable to produce comparably professional-sounding imitations or reinterpretations.

On the other hand, a handful of musicians were stimulated by the new interest in African rhythms to revitalize the African elements in still-active coastal genres such as *cumbia*. The most notable example is Joe Arroyo, born and raised in Cartagena's poor, black *barrios* listening to *música africana*, who successfully combined *salsa* and *música costeña* with various Afro-Caribbean and African genres. Other musicians have sought to recover largely forgotten Afro-derived coastal folk music; one example was a group called Anne Zwing, from the ex-maroon village of Palenque, who recorded a modernized version of the traditional *chandé*. While the efforts of groups such as Anne Zwing were recognized for their cultural importance, most of them lacked the professional quality of imported records and did not have a significant commercial impact.

Like popular culture everywhere, the *picó* phenomenon changed rapidly as new opportunities for embellishment appeared. In approximately the early nineties, for example, Casio keyboards were introduced to the *picó* as a novelty: DJs played with the Casios' sampling feature, creating humorous effects by speaking phrases into its microphone and playing them back with the delay function. As DJs became more familiar with the keyboard's functions, however,

they began using the Casio as a musical instrument, laying simple keyboard riffs over whatever was playing on the turntable. More sophisticated DJs entered specific riffs into the Casio's memory and laid these over a record rather than playing the keyboard "live." It is important to note that in both these cases, DJs used the keyboard as a percussion instrument rather than for adding melody. This technique was more adaptable to those musical genres relying on drum machines to produce a steady beat—such as *rap*, dance-hall *reggae*, or high-tech *Afropop*—than it was to more melodic music such as *soukous*. In March 1993, I observed a preponderance of these genres being played on *picós*, whereas a year or two before that, *soukous* had dominated *picó* repertoires. The role of the DJ, then, was metamorphosing from simply spinning discs to participating actively as a musician. Changes also took place in the *picó's* basic configuration as well as its decoration: in one newer style, reportedly originating in Barranquilla, the *picó's* two large decorated bass-speaker cabinets were broken down into multiple smaller speaker cabinets, which were barely decorated at all.

Another significant—if short-lived—alteration in *picó* practices occurred in 1990, when changes in Colombia's political system unexpectedly provoked an increase in the dissemination of diasporan musics in Cartagena. Cartagena's first elected (rather than politically appointed) mayor—in an attempt to curry favor with local voters—announced that if residents along unpaved streets were able to raise enough money to pay for supplies and assist with labor, the city would provide engineers and heavy equipment. Dozens of block organizations known as *comités de pavimentación* (paving committees) sprang up in poor neighborhoods throughout the city to take advantage of this opportunity—perceived as golden by people frustrated but accustomed to total neglect by the authorities. These *comités* were composed largely of women, who as housewives and mothers suffered most from the dust and filth caused by lack of pavement and drainage. Through these *comités*, barrio residents sought to raise money through a variety of means—including raffles, food sales, marathons, and such—but primarily through block parties, with music provided by the *picós*, as the easiest, cheapest, and most effective way to attract a paying crowd. Typically scheduled for weekend afternoons, streets were blocked off, admission was charged, and beer, food, and soft drinks were sold. The *picós*, whose owners recognized the publicity benefits of playing in new contexts to wider audiences, provided their services at reduced prices or free. Unlike the privately organized dances held at *casetas*, these block parties were communally organized and family oriented, making the *picós* and *música africana* accessible to people—principally married women and children—who for years had been excluded by social propriety from dances and parties at

the notorious *casetas*. These block parties became enormously successful, as residents throughout the city, observing the efforts of neighborhood *comités* paying off with paved streets, hastened to organize their own committees and *picó* parties. One *picó* owner told me he was so busy playing at the *fiestas de pavimentación* that he rarely played in *casetas* anymore. It is ironic indeed that the streets of Cartagena were literally being paved by *música africana*.

In addition to their importance in further disseminating *música africana* throughout the barrios, the *fiestas de pavimentación* often represented the first experience many residents had with collective action. (A number of the women I interviewed observed that as a result of the fundraising activities, they had gotten acquainted with their neighbors for the first time, and commented on the new sense of solidarity that had emerged in the neighborhood.) Sadly, however, the money collected from some of these *fiestas* was misused or stolen by unscrupulous participants, thereby discouraging others from initiating similar fundraising efforts. As a result, the *fiestas de pavimentación*, which in 1992 had been ubiquitous in Cartagena's poor *barrios* every weekend afternoon, had virtually disappeared by 1993.

Another significant milestone in the *picó* landscape appeared in March 1992. Since its inception in 1981, the *Festival de Música del Caribe's* president and principal organizer, Antonio Escobar, has tried to expand the Festival's scope beyond the musical performances themselves to include other non-musical activities highlighting Caribbean culture. In 1983 the *Foro Cultural* (Cultural Forum) was added, followed a few years later by a *sancochódromo* (featuring the typical costeñan *sancocho* soup and other regional cooking) and a *caballódromo* (a display of *pasofino* horses). In 1992, in an effort to recognize the significance of the *picós'* role in disseminating Afro-Caribbean and African music on the coast, Escobar introduced a *picotódromo* to the Festival's roster of activities, and designated it the centerpiece of the Festival's opening ceremonies.<sup>14</sup> A number of *picós* were invited to set up along the wharf outside the walls of the old city, a highly visible and popular spot for tourists as well as for natives. The event was complemented by a mock battle between pirate vessels in the bay, and a fireworks display, all of which attracted a huge public, including middle- and upper-class people, and gave everyone the opportunity to observe the formerly socially marginalized *picós* in action. The *Asociación de Picoteros*, sensitive to the importance of presenting a favorable image to the general public, decided that only medium-sized *picós* should participate in the *picotódromo*, reasoning that the larger *picós*, while more visually and musically impressive, would have increased the possibility that ardently loyal fans might become combative and preclude the possibility of future *picotódromos*. The first *picotódromo* proved to be a success, however, and was repeated in later festivals.

While the Festival was successful in attracting tourist revenues to Cartagena, some quarters of Cartagena society were less pleased with an event that so publicly celebrated black culture. The Festival's organizers were constantly assailed by criticisms of all sorts, from financial mismanagement to charges of featuring too many non-Spanish Caribbean acts. There was opposition to the *picotódromo* for attracting thousands of poor, black Cartageneros into the center of town for an evening of revelry. Complaints were also raised that the free outdoor concert, for which the city's colonial walls served as a stage, was causing damage to the walls; as a result, permission for the free concert was denied in 1991 and 1992. In short, while the Festival did give *música africana* a certain level of cultural legitimacy and new contexts for public visibility, it was not able to overcome white and *mestizo* resistance to the public expression of black culture.

### Conclusions

The *picós* and the cultural changes they ushered in—first among black Cartageneros and later in Cartagena at large—address a number of the theoretical questions about diasporan music and cultural identity raised by Gilroy and invite further comparisons with sound system practices in diasporan communities elsewhere. Comparing the socioeconomic situation of Cartagena's blacks to that of Jamaicans and West Indians in Britain, it is clear that all of them shared the experiences Gilroy noted were common to the Black Atlantic world: displacement, economic marginalization, and racial discrimination. Confronted with racist and discriminatory practices that restricted black sociability to largely unauthorized spaces, they sought to satisfy their aesthetic needs and cultural priorities by developing a set of practices revolving around recorded music rather than live performance.

In all three cases, sound systems have become, as Simon Jones has argued, "the central activity of publicly reproducing and transforming recorded music by means of various socializing rituals and practices" (20). These rituals and practices include customizing technology intended primarily for use in domestic space (record players) so that they can be used for public performance; a social and economic network of artisans, owners, record producers/buyers; DJs and other support personnel, who together comprise a small-scale, informal economy generated specifically to construct, transport and operate sound systems; and the practice of using sound systems to create what Jones calls "mobile cultural spaces" (10). In Britain, such mobile cultural spaces are created in venues such as night clubs, bars, and empty warehouses; in Cartagena they include *casetas*, block parties, and, during the *Festival de Música del Caribe*, *picolandia* and the *picotódromo*. Sound system cultures

also appear to share certain aesthetics, such as clear sound separation and an enhanced and magnified bass range; sound system DJs' skills in the arts of record selection and mixing to create and sustain a mood for dancers are also highly esteemed. Cartagena DJs differ from their counterparts elsewhere, however, in that their oral skills are not essential to their effectiveness.

Sound systems in Cartagena, like their counterparts in Britain, have played a key role in constructing and affirming a collective diasporan identity. In terms of the *contexts* in which these identities have been formed, however, the experience of black Cartageneros is, in significant ways, unique to Colombia. Their minority status and their subordinate racial and economic position within the larger nation resembles those of African Americans; African Americans, however, have been far less inclined to delve into the musical repertoires of other diasporan communities in their sound-system practices. West Indians in Britain, like Cartageneros, are a subordinated minority who have used sound systems to establish spaces for listening and dancing to their preferred musics; but unlike Cartageneros (and Jamaicans), they are recent immigrants, and the music they listen to comes from or closely resembles that of their home countries. Cartageneros' and Jamaicans' displacement from Africa, in contrast, occurred hundreds of years ago, so that their contemporary popular music has developed independently from music in the original sending areas of Africa. Black Cartageneros differ from black Jamaicans, however, in that the latter are numerically the majority in Jamaica, and as a result, it has been easier for them to influence the national soundscape than it has been for black Cartageneros in predominantly *mestizo* Colombia.

Given these differing historical and cultural contexts, it is not surprising that the evolution of the Colombian *picó* system has been distinct in many ways from that of sound systems elsewhere. Jamaican sound systems, for example, were originally built to play U.S. rhythm and blues, which local radio stations would not play (Back 205); but contemporary U.S., Jamaican and West Indian sound systems all rely on their own musical idioms—*rap* in the case of US sound systems, and *reggae* (and its derivative styles) in the case of Jamaican and British sound systems—although the latter also incorporate other English-language black music such as rap. Like Jamaicans, black Cartageneros originally developed *picós* in order to play music—*salsa*—that could not be obtained or heard locally. When *salsa* no longer satisfied their aesthetic preferences, they turned to records and musical styles that originated neither within their own communities nor even within the Spanish Caribbean region, but rather from diasporan communities with whom they had only indirect—if any—contact. Moreover, they turned the inherent limitation accompanying this choice of music—

the local unavailability of recordings and the lack of local musicians able to perform the music live—into an opportunity, constructing a small-scale but highly complex economic system for acquiring, disseminating, and profiting by *música africana* built around the concept of “exclusivity,” which functioned virtually independently from Colombia's national recording and broadcast industry. A new vocabulary was invented to describe the various component parts of this new musical system.

Cartageneros also obliterated the individual identities of the records' original creators and rendered them anonymous; selected songs, however, were renamed and used according to entirely local conventions and aesthetics. In the past, Jamaican DJs also tried to obscure the identity of certain records in order to ensure exclusivity, but the records whose labels they defaced had been locally produced by Jamaican musicians. Cartageneros, in contrast, incorporated records that had been produced throughout the diaspora into new local practices, and invested them with local meanings. In short, they transformed mass-mediated consumer goods into a local “folk” music culture (i.e., one that is vernacular and community based)—turning on its head the common belief that folk culture is destroyed when it substitutes mass-mediated consumer goods for its own traditional forms of expression. Their autonomy and success in accomplishing this also challenge the conventional wisdom that musical dissemination from First to Third World is necessarily controlled by the First World music industry.

On another level, black Cartageneros' preference for tube technology, vinyl records, and acetate *placas* speaks powerfully to the relative autonomy of culture, in the sense that they challenge the notion that economically determined functions will always take precedence over culturally determined aesthetics. On yet another level, the selectivity with which only some genres of African music are valued and appropriated raises important questions concerning the transmission of African culture. Could Cartageneros' preference for *soukous* be explained as a response to something familiar in its musical groove—possibly vestiges of Cuban rhythms that made a profound impact upon the popular music on francophone West African popular music in the 1950s?

The arrival and integration of world beat into Cartagena's musical landscape in the eighties, as reflected both in the Festival and in the *terapia* music business, was a two-edged sword. On the one hand, *música africana* was legitimized and made more accessible to black as well as non-black Cartageneros. The Festival in particular focused attention on the commonalities between the many musical genres featured on its stage, and in the process, encouraged *costeños* to acknowledge with pride that their cultural identity was Caribbean. For the first time in the country's history—

on a truly popular level and through the mass media—the coast's African heritage was also accentuated and legitimated. On the other hand, the growing strength and influence of the *terapia* industry, owned and promoted by people belonging to the elite classes in Cartagena, and the world-beat industry located in the U.S. and Europe, threatened to destabilize Cartagena's locally organized and controlled *picó* system.

In conclusion, it is clear that world beat is more than just a marketing category for certain cultural artifacts (recordings); in Cartagena, the circulation of *música africana* seems to indicate participation in a larger, ongoing process in which disparate diasporan communities, long separated by geography, are acknowledging the common African heritage underpinning their diverse musics. If, as Simon Frith says, "music both creates and articulates the very idea of community" and helps people "to make sense of their social world and their place in it" (177), then black Cartageneros' insistence on listening and dancing to *música africana* surely must reflect profound changes in their concepts of local, national, and racial identities. The community being articulated through listening and dancing to *música africana* is not defined by shared geographical space or shared language, but rather by the region's common African musical roots. Clearly, this is an imagined community (cf. Anderson) but a symbolically powerful one nevertheless, one which hopefully will exert a positive influence upon a region long fractured by racial and cultural cleavages inherited from its colonial past.

#### Notes

1. These figures can be misleading, however, because of discrepancies in the terms used to classify people with varying degrees of African ancestry; see, for example, Monge Oviedo.
2. Colombian anthropologist Nina de Friedemann has amply documented the deep roots of Colombian racism and how it has been perpetuated by the Andean elites through their manipulation of the country's written history. She has observed that in spite of blacks' presence on the coast since the arrival of the first Spanish vessels, even the Spanish notaries scarcely mentioned blacks, paying far more attention to the indigenous population; when blacks were discussed, it was as property, not as culture-bearing persons. In the Republican era, when Colombian intellectuals tried to establish an independent American identity through a creole literature, the country's African population and its cultural heritage continued to be ignored: blacks remained virtually invisible in published texts (both fictional and nonfictional); or, in the few cases when they did appear, they were negatively stereotyped as infantile, lazy, and/or immoral (Friedemann). While a handful of intellectual Afro-Colombians have resisted the consistent denigration of their African heritage (e.g., author and activist Manuel Zapata Olivella, and *costeño* poets Candelario Obeso and Jorge Artele), textbooks as well as the media continue to disparage or discount African contributions to the country's cultural identity.

The establishment of the social sciences in Colombia in the 1940s did not correct this situation; blacks continued to be ignored by Colombian anthropologists and sociologists, who directed their attention towards the nation's indigenous populations. Studies of Afro-Colombians, a similarly oppressed group and proportionately far larger, were noticeable by their absence: the

first study of Colombia's blacks, an article by José Rafael Arboleda entitled *Nuevas investigaciones Afro-Colombianas*, did not appear until 1952. Arboleda's calls for more work on the subject were not heeded: Friedemann notes that of 271 anthropology graduates receiving their degrees by 1978, only five had done any work on Afro-Colombians, and she cites the response of a colleague to her own research interests on Afro-Colombians—*estudiar negros no es antropología* ("studying blacks isn't anthropology"). It was not until the late seventies that a coherent body of scholarly work on Afro-Colombian society and culture began to appear in print. In the wake of these publications, Colombia finally saw the emergence of organizations, journals, and conferences dedicated to the enormous task of reconstructing Afro-Colombian social history and culture (Friedemann). Not surprisingly, these efforts were largely concerned with the country's homogeneous black populations, and tended to focus on issues of African retentions in traditional folk culture; accordingly, most of these studies concentrated on either the Pacific-coast region, where blacks, isolated by geography for centuries, make up 90% of the population; or on ex-maroon enclaves such as Palenque on the Caribbean coast. With the exception of a few studies of carnival dances and masks (e.g., Friedemann), however, little work was done on blacks in urban environments, nor on their contributions to contemporary popular culture. Recently, British social scientist Peter Wade has begun to fill in these gaps by including material on urban popular music and culture in his studies of blackness in Colombia (*Blackness*; "Cultural Politics").

3. García Márquez aptly illustrates the disdain felt by the people from the interior highlands towards *costeños* in his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*: the aristocratic Fernanda del Carpio, brought from the highland capital to Macondo by her husband, Aureliano Segundo, is appalled at what she perceives as the rudeness and vulgarity of coastal people and culture.
4. When Colombia's new National Constitution, ratified in 1991, acknowledged the nation's "multi-ethnic and pluri-cultural" character, black communities residing in the Pacific-coast region (descendants of escaped and former slaves) organized themselves in order to obtain official recognition as an "ethnic" group entitled to collective property rights based on their long-term occupation of rural riverine zones and their traditional production practices (see Wade, "Cultural Politics"). This social movement has obtained such recognition but has not broadened its agenda to include issues that might affect urbanized blacks elsewhere in the country; neither has it sought any solidarity with black social movements elsewhere in the Americas.
5. For more on *salsa*, see Rondón; Boggs; Calvo Ospina; and Manuel, *Caribbean Currents*.
6. *Salsa* was similarly rejected by the middle classes elsewhere in Latin America; see, for example, Manuel's observations on the Venezuelan bourgeoisie's initial disparagement of *salsa* (*Caribbean Currents* 78–79).
7. The same changes in decorative styles can be seen in coastal bus painting; years ago, buses were decorated with pictures of bucolic themes; later these were replaced by more modern images (such as Rambo or space vehicles), and more recently, by abstract, geometric designs.
8. The practice of decorating the surfaces of functional objects such as vehicles and walls is typical in many parts of Latin America. For example, until recently Colombian buses (locally known as *chivas*) were always painted with colorful geometric designs and representational images on the exterior, while the front interior of the bus was embellished with a variety of materials including faux fur, streamers, decals, pennants, mirrors, statues, and so on. (For a description of bus painting in Colombia as well as elsewhere in Latin America, see Moira F. Harris's *Art on the Road: Painted Vehicles of the Americas*.) Newer buses, on the other hand, are seldom painted as elaborately as in the past; owners tend to use a more subdued, corporate lettering style, although dashboards are still highly decorated. Brightly painted ceramic models of *chivas*, however, are still sold as tourist souvenirs.
9. The music business in Colombia as a whole is male dominated, and the *picó* system is no exception. This is not too surprising; the immense *picós'* size and the technical expertise they require, not to mention the potential difficulties of the social context in which they are used, discourage women from participating as owners.
10. When a *picó* has these accouterments, it is sometimes called a *miniteca*.

11. The high ratio of men to women at *picó* parties was typical of other male-dominated recreational settings such as bars, brothels, and sporting events. As a result of this gender imbalance, men standing on the periphery of the dance floor sometimes would break into dance by themselves, executing a variety of elaborate dance moves engaging the entire body. The dancing style of couples, in contrast, was practically motionless, consisting only of a subtle grinding of hips as the couple remained locked in an extremely close embrace, barely moving their feet.
12. One organizer, Francisco de Onis, is of U.S. and Spanish descent but was residing in Cartagena at the time. The other organizer, Antonio Escobar Duque, is a native of Cartagena.
13. The original reads: ... *plante una semilla de búsqueda en nuestras raíces étnicas y culturales. Desentrañando la identidad caribeña, podremos ubicarnos con mayor firmeza en el diario vivir del mundo, sin complejos ni temores.*
14. In 1993 two new "ódromos" were added: a *fundangódromo*, celebrating the coast's traditional village musical bands, and a *brujódromo*, which acknowledged the importance of popular religion and medicine in the Caribbean, albeit in a culturally inappropriate fashion.

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## Looking to the Diaspora: The Overseas Chinese and China's Economic Development, 1978–1994

Paul J. Bolt<sup>1</sup>  
United States Air Force Academy<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the second half of this century, many forces have come to erode the autonomy and sovereignty of states, both at the supranational and the subnational levels. At the supranational level, transnational organizations, both official and non-governmental, exert pressure on states to conform to their collective policies and standards. Multinational growth triangles also reject the nation-state as a fundamental economic unit. At the subnational level, the state faces the challenge of managing various regions in a manner that allows regional governments the flexibility to form policies corresponding to local conditions while the center continues to maintain sufficient power to deal with national problems.

Another force that challenges the state and threatens to undermine our traditional conception of it is the growing volume of transnational activity involving ethnic groups, diasporas, and their homelands. Diasporas, which Gabriel Sheffer defines as "ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin—their homeland," can challenge the very conception of the "nation-state" (3). In addition, it is clear that ethnicity is playing an increasingly important role in the global economy, with some claiming that ethnicity is bypassing the state as a fundamental organizing unit. Joel Kotkin, for instance, stresses that ethnic groups are crucial to the evolution of the global economy. In examining what he calls five global "tribes"—the Jews, British, Japanese, Chinese, and Indians—Kotkin explains their economic success largely in terms of their ethnic identity, which enables them to maintain unity through global changes and provides a worldwide network based on mutual trust that facilitates the expansion of business activity around the world. Kotkin claims: "The power of global tribes derives from ... an intrinsic 'tribal' sense of a unique historical and ethnic identity and the ability to adapt to a cosmopolitan global economy" (16). Similarly, Lever-Tracy and Ip demonstrate the importance of networks and trust for Chinese Australian entrepreneurs seeking to do business in China.