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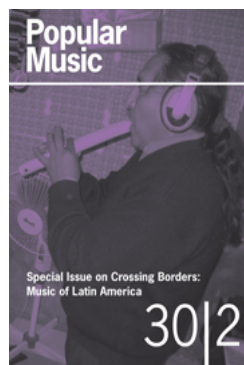
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Hettie Malcomson

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The 'routes' and 'roots' of *danzón*: a critique of the history of a genre

HETTIE MALCOMSON

Department of Sociology, PPSIS, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK
E-mail: hhm22@cam.ac.uk

Abstract

In this article, I examine the history of a genre that spans several continents and several centuries. I bring together material from Mexico, Cuba, France and the UK to create anew, expand upon and critique the 'standard' histories of danzón narrated by Mexico's danzón experts (and others). In these 'standard' histories, origins and nationality are key to the constitution of genres which are racialised and moralised for political ends. Danzón, its antecedents and successors are treated as generic equivalents despite being quite different. From the danzón on, these genres are positioned as being the products of individual, male originators (and their nations). 'Africa' is treated as a conceptual nation, and 'Africanness' as something extra which racialises hegemonic European music-dance forms. Political leanings and strategies determine whether these music-dance forms are interpreted, adopted or co-opted as being 'black' or 'white'.

Introduction

How should we think critically about histories of genres that span several continents and several centuries? What should we make of linear histories of music that follow one 'route', emphasise 'roots', and maintain clear boundaries between regions?¹ To begin this discussion, I set out the prevailing history of *danzón*, a popular Cuban music-dance form, as it was told to me by *danzón* aficionados in Mexico (and Cuba).² These *danzón* aficionados were mostly older men with interests in popular music spanning many decades. They included the masters of ceremonies who pontificate between tracks at Mexican *danzón* events, aficionado investigators, journalists and academics. Aficionado investigators, journalists and academics overlapped in terms of source material and output, particularly in relation to knowledge that was beyond their own memory. Their historical knowledge consisted primarily of data about *danzón* the music, its musicians and generic shifts, with somewhat less attention paid to *danzón* the dance. The authority of numerous older Cuban texts was largely undisputed by these experts: I refer to texts written mostly in or before the 1980s, such as those of the novelist and musicologist. Alejo Carpentier (1946), Fernando Ortiz (1950; 1981), Osvaldo Castillo Faílde (1964), María Antonia Fernández (1974), Natalio Galán (1983), Argeliers León (1984), Raúl Martínez Rodríguez (undated), Helio Orovio (1981), Ezequiel Rodríguez Domínguez (1967) and Odilio Urfé (1976; 1979). In relation to 'Afro-Cuban' music, several scholars (Argyriadis 2006; Moore 2006) have argued that the work and influence of Fernando Ortiz (1881–1969) subsequently inspired a rather standardised body of

'Afro-Cuban' musical and choreographic practice and academic work. This may account for the fact that, while these Cuban authors do not always concur, their material has been sufficiently coherent to form the basis of what I shall call a 'standard' history of *danzón*.




The 'standard' history of *danzón* spans over four centuries and three continents. It follows one 'route' (Clifford 1994). The story goes that the 17th-century *English Country Dance* was transformed into the French *contredanse*; travelled to 'French' Saint Domingue (later Haiti), and then 'Spanish' Cuba, where it became the Cuban *contradanza*; subsequently the *danza*, *danzón*, *danzonete*, *mambo* and *cha-cha-chá*. In this article I bring together data collected in Mexico, Cuba, France and the UK to create anew this 'standard' history of *danzón*.³ I then proceed to deconstruct this narrative, analysing the concepts underpinning it: a 'monumental' history (moving from innovation to innovation) in which individual originators create genres, genres are assigned origins and nationalities, and music and dance are positioned in terms of notions of 'race' and moralities.

The 'standard' history of *danzón*

The 'standard' history of *danzón* (and what has been called 'the *danzón* complex' – *contradanza*, *danza*, *habanera*, *danzón*, *mambo*, *cha-cha-chá* – by among others Alén Rodríguez 1998) has a beginning (the *English Country Dance*), a middle (where *danzón*, the protagonist, appears), and an end (the *cha-cha-chá*). Most *danzón* experts draw on Carpentier (1946) to propound that it all began with the *English Country Dance*, but give little information as to what the music and dance were like. (This is unsurprising, given the lack of sources on 17th-century English dances available in Cuba and Mexico.) The 17th-century *English Country Dance* is often described as a single, rural peasant dance, rather than several dances (the round, the longways, the jig and so forth, danced in circular, square and lengthwise formations), such as those published by Playford from 1650 on (e.g. 1698). Moreover, the predecessors of the *English Country Dance*, such as the *branle*, do not figure in 'standard' histories of *danzón*. Whitlock (1999) suggests that the sources for Playford's dances might have been Ben Jonson's masques and Richard Brome's plays, and that Playford's intention in publishing these dance manuals was politically subversive, i.e. to reassert Royalist court values. However, the *English Country Dance* is understood in 'standard' *danzón* histories as a rural peasant dance where the 'country' of the *English Country Dance* refers to rural England rather than to the English nation. This has contributed to a misconception that these dances were performed merely by the lower classes rather than across English social classes, as Quirey (1993) suggests. Furthermore, it has resulted in renditions of a history of *danzón* in which the dance oscillates between social classes, mostly percolating upwards through the social strata. As Wade (2000) points out in relation to Colombia's '*música tropical*', such renditions do not allow for the complexities of class interaction.


'Standard' histories of *danzón* go on to recount how the lower-class *English Country Dance* was taken to France, where it was appropriated by French elites and renamed *contredanse* (as a phonetic equivalent or a descriptor for the lines of male and female dancers facing each other). While Carpentier (1946, p. 125) claims that the *contredanse* was not an elite dance, but 'a bourgeois dance that did not get to Versailles', Guilcher (1969) provides evidence that these dances were notated in England by the dancing master André Lorin and performed at Versailles by Louis

XIV and his coterie by 1688.⁴ It seems more plausible that a series of dances, performed across England's social classes and hugely fashionable among London's elites, was taken up in France by several groups, including the influential French court. *Contredanses* soon became popular throughout Europe. Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven all included them in their works (Gadles Mikowsky 1988). They tended to be written in 2/4 or 6/8, with two repeated eight-bar sections (AABB), like the subsequent Cuban *contradanzas*. *Contredanses* were generally danced lengthways by two lines of dancers, with variations incorporated (such as the *cotillion*, a square dance for four couples, being added in France) (Quirey 1993).

'Standard' histories of *danzón* continue with the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697, whereby France acquired 'Saint Domingue' (Hispaniola, later Haiti) from Spain. They contend that by the 18th century, Saint Domingue elites, rich from the sugar plantations and having imported over one million slaves, emulated urban French society, including French music and dance. Carpentier suggests that 'the black musicians of Saint Domingue adopted [the *contredanse*] with enthusiasm, giving it a rhythmic vivacity ignored by the original model. [...] The so-called "tango rhythm" appeared in the bass notes. The percussion accentuated the mischievousness of the black violinists' (1946, p. 126). Following Carpentier, *danzón* experts recount how isorhythms (repeated rhythmic motifs/sequences) such as the *tango* , the *cinquillo*  and the *tresillo*  were incorporated into the *contredanse* in the circum-Caribbean, together with percussion instruments such as the *güiro*. 'African' origins are usually ascribed to these rhythms, either brought to the circum-Caribbean by slaves (Urfé 1976), or via Moorish Spain (Sachs 1937; Fernández 1989), or both (Carpentier 1946; Lapique 1995). While the 'tango rhythm' was also employed in European *contredanses* – for example, Mozart's *Contredanse en Sol*, as Gadles Mikowsky (1988) documents – it was the repeated use of these rhythmic figures, particularly in the bass and in non-notated parts (percussion and improvisations), that distinguished circum-Caribbean performances. Cuban sources on *danzón* (such as León 1976; Urfé 1976; Alén Rodríguez 1998) move swiftly on to Cuba from Saint Domingue without clarifying whether it was in Saint Domingue or in Cuba that profound transformations occurred to the music and the dance.

The Saint Domingue slave revolts of 1791–1804, which culminated in the formation of the Republic of Haiti, prompted elites to flee to the east of Cuba (as well as to Louisiana, New Orleans and beyond). They took with them their domestic slaves and loyal servants, creating a sizeable Afro-Haitian population in eastern Cuba. Most histories of *danzón* (following Carpentier 1946) recount that the *contredanse* travelled with the Saint Domingue exiles to Cuba; and that it was in Cuba that the so-called 'African' rhythms were *significantly* incorporated, giving rise to the Cuban *contradanza*. The *contradanza* (Spanish for *contredanse*) was already being performed in Cuba: 'via the Spanish Court, a small group of the *criollo* aristocracy already knew the *minuet*, *gavotte*, *mazurka*, *polka*, *contradanza* and other square dances' (Martínez Rodríguez, undated).⁵ Moreover, it is possible that 'African' rhythms were also already being incorporated into these *contradanzas*. However, it was not until the Saint Domingue fugitives arrived that the popularity of the *contradanza* (with or without 'African' rhythms) increased.

It is with the Cuban *contradanza* that the 'standard' history of *danzón* begins to refer to concrete sources and describe the music and dance in detail. The first source often used in histories of *danzón* is what Gadles Mikowsky describes as 'the oldest known example, until now, of a Cuban *contradanza*' (Gadles Mikowsky 1988,

p. 39): the anonymous *San Pascual Bailón*, published in Havana in 1803 (a piano score published by Anselmo López is reproduced in Rodríguez Domínguez 1967, p. 29–30).⁶ While the notated score does not tell us exactly how the music might have been performed or sounded (Gadles Mikowsky 1988, p. 39–40), the characteristic marker of the Cuban *contradanza* is persistent: the *tango* isorhythm . In choreographic terms also, transformations had occurred in the *contradanza* by 1800, in particular the incorporation of the *escobilleo* ('sweeping') and the *cedazo* ('sieve'). The *escobilleo* was the shuffling movement of the feet along the ground produced by lateral hip movements, as described by the novelist Cirilio Villaverde in his *Cecilia Valdés* (1882). The *contradanza* already included numerous eight- and four-bar steps of varying degrees of difficulty, including the *alemanda* (allemande), *molino* (mill), *ala* (wing), *latigazo* (whipping), *lazo* (knot), *punte* (bridge), *paseo* (walk), *rodeo* (round-about), *sostenido* (sustained) and *cadena* (chain of dancers coming and going in a serpent of linked arms) (Fernández 1974). It was danced in open position (with the man's left hand usually holding the woman's right), apart from a new step that was now incorporated into the final part: the *cedazo* ('sieve') where a couple danced, in the closed position of the waltz, under the arches of their fellow dancers' arms or flower-adorned branches (Rodríguez Domínguez 1967). The proximity of dancers in the *cedazos*, and the purportedly 'African' hip movements of the *escobilleo*, were the subject of numerous moral tirades, to which I shall return.

Some histories (Sánchez de Fuentes 1928; Grenet 1939; Castillo Faílde 1964) recount that, by the 1830s, the Cuban *contradanza* was displaced by the *danza*, epitomised by the anonymous piece *El Sungambelo* (composed around 1813) (a piano score is reproduced in Rodríguez Domínguez 1967, p. 41). *El Sungambelo* displays many of the markers of the later *danzón*: the A section consists of two four-bar phrases, the second characterised by the *cinquillo*, with clear cadential demarcations; the 16-bar B section also contains numerous *cinquillos* in the melody and the bass. It also contains what Carpentier describes as 'the insistent and characteristic use of thirds', which he maintains occurs 'in all Cuban music [and] originates in the preoccupation that the first nineteenth-century composers had for writing correctly, according to a respectable model' (Carpentier 1946, p. 88).

The *contradanza* was performed at a faster tempo than the later *danza* and maintained a binary structure (AABB), but the transition was not that clear. In Pichardo's 1836 dictionary, the entry for *Danza* states: 'The *Contradanza* as it was formerly called, is considered musically to be of a particular and well-known style' (Pichardo 1953, p. 258). In effect, there was no significant difference between the *contradanza* and the *danza*, at least at first. In other words changes to the music, the dance and the naming of *contradanzas* as *danzas* happened slowly, at different times in different places (so henceforth I use the term (*contra*)*danza* to refer to both). Whatever its name, there was 'musical development and stylization of the form' (Gadles Mikowsky 1988, p. 75): the tempo decreased and the B section gradually became more varied (B1, B2 and so forth) (Galán 1983). Choreographically, the closed-position *cedazo* was prolonged and, with the increased influence of the waltz, the (*contra*)*danza* became a closed position dance throughout (Balbuena 2003).

While the shift from the (*contra*)*danza* to the *danzón* was equally gradual, it is described in many histories of *danzón* as a radical break. What is striking about *danzón* is that it is the first genre in this history to be ascribed an author, an originator. For the majority of commentators (such as Sánchez de Fuentes 1928; Orovio 1994) this originator is Miguel Faílde Pérez (1852–1921). These scholars concur that

Faílde Pérez wrote the first *danzones* in the 1870s, several years before the first 'officially' sanctioned *danzón* performance: his *Las Alturas de Simpson* played at the Club de Matanzas (later *Liceo Artístico y Literario*) in 1879. The *Matanzas Society* took more than two years to license this performance, possibly because of the social status of Afro-Cubans at the time – Faílde Pérez was Afro-Cuban – or because of Faílde Pérez's political affiliations with the Cuban independence movement (Castillo Faílde 1964). *Las Alturas de Simpson* (a piano version created in 1920 for Jorge Anckermann is reproduced in Castillo Faílde 1964, pp. 191–2; see also Floyd Jr. 1999) contains what have become the characteristic markers of *danzón*: the *cinquillo* in the melody and the bass; an A section beginning with an anacrusis clearly demarcated cadentially into two four-bar sections ending in the dominant; and a rondo form (instead of being structured AABB like the *(contra)danza*).⁷

Carpentier blames Sánchez de Fuentes for propagating the widespread myth that *danzón* was 'created' by Miguel Faílde Pérez (1852–1921). Instead, Carpentier assigns another originator: Manuel Saumell Robredo (1817–1870). Carpentier argues that 'the whole of Cuban *danzón* is stated in the first eight bars' of Saumell's *La Tedezco* (Carpentier 1946, p. 193). However, *La Tedezco* does not 'sound' like a *danzón* and was probably written for concert performance rather than for dancing (see reproduction in González 1980, p. 47). If pushed, I would argue, following Acosta (2004), that the earlier *(contra)danza*, *El Sungambelo* (composed around 1813) is a more plausible contender as an early *danzón*, since it contains more instances of the *cinquillo* (♩♩♩♩), the characteristic marker *par excellence* of *danzón*, and *El Sungambelo* 'sounds' like a *danzón* (although it was probably performed faster). So why is it not generally considered a *danzón*? Partly, I would suggest, because of the origin myths of *danzón*, and partly because of the binary (AABB) structure of *El Sungambelo*. *Danzón* is seen by experts as characterised by its *cinquillo* (which often occurs at cadences) and its rondo form (ABACAD). The rondo form was to have a profound impact on the choreography of *danzón* since its A sections (the *descansos* or rests) are usually not 'danced': in Cuba couples walk and greet each other, while in Mexico they stand holding hands (at least for the first iteration of each A section). Without a rondo form, *El Sungambelo* falls outside the ontological definition of a *danzón* proposed by most *danzón* experts (such as León 1976; Urfé 1976).

However, what these contentions point to is that, like earlier shifts in this history, the formation of the *danzón* was gradual, and cannot be easily assigned to one person, or even equated with a generic title. Furthermore, Faílde Pérez himself stated that the name '*danzón*' referred to a dance that existed prior to his *danzón* music compositions (Castillo Faílde 1964). This somewhat contradicts the suggestion, made by many commentators (such as Alén Rodríguez 1998) that the increased structural size of *danzón* accounts for its name: a big, or extended, *danza*. That said, its size did grow and further sections were added (up to a record 20 according to Castillo Faílde, 1964).

In the first two decades of the 20th century, elements from Cuban *son* were integrated into *danzones*. In his legendary *El Bombín de Barreto* of 1910, José Urfé (1879–1957) introduced a *montuno* section, common in Cuban *son*, involving (usually two-bar) motivic ostinati. While *El Bombín de Barreto* is structured ABACADAE (where the E section is a *montuno*), and most subsequent *danzones* are structured ABACAD, a standard had been established, and the final section of *danzones* henceforth were *montunos*. The instrumentation changed from the *orquesta típica* (often consisting of a cornet, trombone, ophicleide,⁸ euphonium, two clarinets, two violins,

bass, *timbales* and *güiro*) to the *charanga francesa*: the brass and clarinet sections were diminished, and a wooden five-key flute and piano were included.

In the 1920s, traits of US music began to be integrated (probably relating to the beginnings of mass media): sections of saxophones, trumpets and trombones were slowly added, together with elements from the foxtrot and the Charleston (Torres 1995). The 'standard' history of *danzón* continues with the 'first' piano solo in a *danzón*: Antonio María Romeu's (1876–1955) *Linda Cubana* of 1926. Three years later, in 1929, extensive vocal texts (akin to those of Cuban *son*) were introduced by Aniceto Díaz (1887–1964) in his *Rompiendo la Rutina*, creating the 'first' *danzonete*. In the 1930s, the importance of the vocalist in the *danzonete* began to overshadow the role of the instrumentalists, and the rondo structure of *danzón* – ABACAD – began to disappear (instead being structured, for example, ABCD or ABD, with D as the *montuno*). The popularity of the *danzonete* lasted barely 10 years.

The early 1940s saw the emergence of a new style of *danzón* which became known as the *ritmo nuevo* (new rhythm) and *mambo*. Many of the features of this new style were premiered by Antonio Arcaño (1911–1994) and his group, the *Maravillas* who combined *danzón* with US songs, film music, musical comedy, jazz and French impressionism (Torres 1995). Specifically, more chromatic and extended harmonies, pentatonism, whole-tone and diminished scales were used; one or two single-headed *conga* drums (or *tumbadoras*) were incorporated and featured in the *montuno* section; and 'syncopated' motifs were introduced into the strings, piano and bass of the *montuno* (Torres 1995).

The paternity of the *mambo* has been heatedly contested, usually attributed to either the *charanga*-based performance style and collective efforts of Arcaño y sus *Maravillas* (Torres 1995); to Orestes López (1908–1991), a member of Arcaño y sus *Maravillas*, who notated their performance style in his *danzón* entitled *Mambo* composed in the 1930s (Urfé 1965; Padura Fuentes 1994); or to Dámaso Pérez Prado, who first recorded in Mexico City his big-band *mambos* which were to gain worldwide acclaim. While there are clear differences in sound between the contenders, these contentions reveal the determination to pinpoint the originator of a 'genre'. I hope the difficulties in doing this are by now becoming clear, and they in turn raise the question, should the invention of a genre (such as *mambo*) be characterised by: instrumentation; orchestration; rhythmic, harmonic or melodic strategies; a notated version of these; a name; or other markers? It is these questions which have provoked the heated debates over the originator of the *mambo* and other genres. The paternity of the *cha-cha-chá*, which was to follow, was less disputed but still unclear.

The *cha-cha-chá* combines elements of the *danzonete*, the *ritmo nuevo* and Pérez Prado's *mambo*. The melodies of the *cha-cha-chá* are usually characterised by repeated two-bar motifs, the improvisation being limited to the flute, and with less chromatic harmonies and less 'syncopation' than the *mambo* (Torres 1995): 'the accent on the last quaver of the 2/4 bar in *mambo* was displaced onto the first beat of the *cha-cha-chá*' (Jorrín in interview with Orovio 1994, p. 14–15). Enrique Jorrín (1926–1987) is usually credited with 'creating' the *cha-cha-chá* with *La Engañadora*, recorded in 1953, and probably composed between 1949 and 1953 (Urfé 1965; Orovio 1994). However, Acosta (2004) suggests that this was again a collective effort. When Jorrín joined *Orquesta América*, he brought with him his experience of playing with, and composing for, Arcaño y sus *Maravillas*. He rearranged some of his instrumental pieces to include vocals, and a DJ presenter coined them '*cha-cha-chá*' to promote the

Orquesta América. Drawing on Jorrín's interviews with Martínez (1993), Acosta argues that 'Jorrín accepted the slogan that *Orquesta América* created the *cha-cha-chá* a year before he proclaimed himself the sole creator' (Acosta 2004, p. 97). The *cha-cha-chá* is generally portrayed as the final stage, the ending, of the 'standard' history of *danzón*.

Historical standards?

Several points from this 'standard' history of *danzón* are worthy of note. Firstly, changes are marked by newly-named genres which, from *danzón* on, are purportedly created by individual men (originators). However as we have seen, and numerous scholars have pointed out (such as Frith 1996; Neale 1980; Negus 1999; Acosta 2004), defining new 'genres' (such as *danza*, *danzón*, *mambo*, *cha-cha-chá*) and ascribing originators to these is hugely problematic. I will not explore the ontology of genre in depth here, but I must point out that markers characterising genres are rarely initiated or brought together by one person/originator (scholars including Wolff 1981; Becker 1982; Hennion 1982, have discussed the social production of art and music). By emphasising new generic names and originators, a 'monumental' history of *danzón* is created which moves from originator to originator, from named genre to named genre, and neither transformations and diversities within genres, nor the collective nature of creative production are commemorated.

Moreover, this history is not relayed as a straightforward evolutionary process, but instead as a series of plateaus (akin to a staircase) where there is little change; which are then interrupted by innovatory moments when new elements of music combine to 'crystallise' into new genres (Samson 1989). As Samson argues, and as we have seen, 'a genre, working for stability, control and finality of meaning, might be said to oppose the idiomatic diversity and evolutionary tendencies characteristic of both form and style'.⁹ It is notable in this history that it is the initial pieces of each genre that purportedly define the genre, rather than later pieces. These are the pieces which are said to have 'crystallised'. This model of genre formation is reminiscent of early 20th-century Russian Formalist generic theory where new genres emerge through a dialectical process of minor lines challenging major devices: 'newly created devices will crystallise in the work of a major author such that an accumulation of minor changes becomes in that work a single qualitative change' (Samson 1989, p. 215).

Distinct models of genre are useful in different instances, as Samson (1989) has shown in relation to Chopin, and Negus (1999) to '*salsa*', country music and rap. '*Salsa*', for example, is much broader and more dynamic than country music, and the culture industries relating to each are equally distinct (Negus 1999). As Negus asserts, genres are not static or stable, either internally, in relation to each other, or in their social configurations. Genres vary enormously and should not be uncritically grouped together or treated as analytical equivalents (Negus 1999). In the history of *danzón*, many more music-dance forms are grouped under the title 'English Country Dance' than under '*danzón*', and the corresponding social contexts are equally non-equivalent. While genres are treated as equivalents in this history, they are quite distinct.

Secondly, this 'standard' narrative focuses on nation-to-nation transmission where, from the 19th century onwards, the originator's birthplace bestows a

nationality (origin) to each genre. The originator is (arguably), from *danzón* on, a named individual. In colonial Spanish America, a person's place of birth determined whether they were Spanish or *criollo*, whether they could hold power or not; after independence, it became a marker of nationality (see Lomnitz Adler 2001). Both origins and originality are relational, but while origins can be shared and inclusive, originality suggests uniqueness, a model for imitation, exclusivity. Origins and originality became key after independence, as Latin American countries sought to establish their uniqueness within the amorphous ontological boundaries of nationhood. While it is intriguing that the (*contra*)*danza* was not ascribed an originator, 'official' acceptance of *danzón* relates to 19th-century nationalism and the Cuban wars of independence: *danzón* was the first genre to be considered Cuba's national music (Carpentier 1946).

Thirdly, the imaginary of 'Africa' in this nation-to-nation transmission is also striking in 'standard' histories of *danzón*. 'Africa' is mostly treated as a conceptual 'nation', static and unvarying, without geographic and historical multiplicity. While the heterogeneity of the African continent is often acknowledged, there is a tendency to rely on ideas about 'African' groups emanating from just Cuba, ideas of an 'Africa' without agency, with no input into post-slavery transatlantic flows (see Matory 1999, for more on these interchanges). What is more, while the migrations transmitting the music-dance forms in this history are explicit (from Europe to the Americas, from 'Africa', from the Haitian uprisings, and from the Cuban independence wars which brought Cuban migrants to Mexico), the violence of this transmission is rarely brought to the fore in accounts of the history of *danzón*. While this may not be surprising in older accounts – indeed it would be more striking if they were to link the account of the origins and travels of *danzón* with the violence of slavery – in contemporary renditions of this history, the brutality of slavery, imperialism and war are still generally downplayed.

Fourthly, influences and transformations are rarely conveyed as multiple processes in this history. Carpentier, a key source in 'standard' histories, commented that:

Danzón, as it was played from 1880, is merely an amplification of the *contradanza*, with open doors to all the musical elements circulating on the island [Cuba], whatever their origin. [...] There were *danzones* made with famous opera and *zarzuela* themes. From 1910, you could say that all the exploitable musical material was used in *danzón*. Fashionable boleros, American ragtimes, the Tipperary, street-vendor's calls, Rossini arias, Spanish ditties, and even Chinese melodies, like the one that opens the long-famous *Bombín de Barreto* by José Urfé (Carpentier 1946, pp. 238, 239).¹⁰

Yet while Carpentier illustrates the sponge-like possibilities of *danzón*, it is merely in Cuba that he sees the multiplying of its 'musical elements'. Carpentier continues:

the English Country Dance, passed through France, taken to Saint Domingue, introduced to Santiago [de Cuba], re-baptised and amplified in Matanzas [to become the *danzón*], enriched in Havana with mulatto, black, and Chinese contributions, had achieved a degree of *mestizaje* that gave one vertigo (Carpentier 1946, p. 240).¹¹

While by 1910 its *mestizaje* ('racial' and cultural intermixture) may well have been construed as vertiginous, I am suggesting that the 'origins' of this music-dance form were always multiple. For example, 17th-century French *minuets*, and music and dances from other lands, impacted on the various English Country Dances

(dances in the plural, as we have seen). Moreover, as Philip Tagg illustrated in his open letter about 'black music', 'Afro-American' and 'European' music (Tagg 1989), traits associated with 'black music' (such as blue notes, syncopation, call-and-response and improvisation) occur in some African *and* some European music, and not others. The purported traits of 'black music' cannot be generalised as being either 'black' or 'white'. Likewise, a history of danzón cannot focus on 'roots' while ignoring the 'routes' and ruptures of transmission processes (Clifford 1994). People continually travelled between and within the circum-Caribbean, Europe and colonial African territories – territories where English Country Dances and *contredanses* were also being performed and transformed. At every stage of this history, there were multiple origins and influences.

The 'standard' history of *danzón* is summarised in Figure 1 where filled arrowheads with black lines indicate the most prevalent history of *danzón*: a unidirectional route from England to France to Saint Domingue (Haiti) to Cuba. Some of the routes which are usually excluded from 'standard' histories of *danzón* are also depicted (white arrowheads with dotted lines). This diagram is in no way exhaustive, and focuses only on countries generally mentioned in these histories. I have, however, included Spain, whose absence from some histories is particularly notable. Mexico is also included, not only because it was the focus of my ethnographic research, but because *danzón* travelled there, as its precursors had, from before the 1880s.

When Mexico is mentioned in histories of *danzón*, it is often treated as a place to which a 'crystallised' genre travelled and where subsequent transformations do not figure. Yet Mexican *danzón* music sounds very different from Cuban *danzón* with its distinct compositions, orchestration and instrumentation. For example, while the flute-based *charanga* emerged from the *orquesta típica* in Cuba, in Mexico the brass sound of the *orquesta típica* was maintained and, with the influence of US jazz bands, saxophones and trumpets were incorporated to create the 'standard' Mexican *danzón* ensemble, the '*danzonera*'. At the beginning of the 21st century, *danzoneras* often consisted of at least two saxophones and/or clarinets, one or more trumpets, trombone, *timbales*, *güiro*, keyboard and bass (see Figures 2–3).¹² The way *danzón* was danced in Mexico and Cuba was also quite different (see Figures 4–5): Mexican *danzón* dancers usually 'marked' the first beat of the bar, while Cubans did not; Cubans danced *danzón* in closer embrace; and Mexicans stood, while Cubans walked and greeted other couples during the *descansos* ('non-danceable' A section 'rests'). Such differences and transformations between (and within) Mexico and Cuba (and beyond) are not mentioned in 'standard' histories of *danzón*, nor is originality accorded to them. Yet throughout the 'history' of *danzón* there were myriad origins, myriad exchanges within and between countries, exchanges that were at

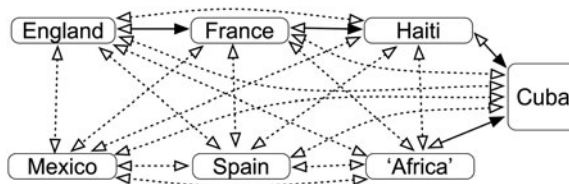


Figure 1. A mapping of the 'standard' history of *danzón*.



Figure 2. Hipólito González Peña Polo of the *Danzonera 'Acerina'* playing the timbales at the *Sociales Romo*, Mexico City, 17 June 2007. Photograph by Hettie Malcomson.

once cultural, commercial, political, religious, reproductive and violent, but which rarely figure in 'standard' histories.

Moreover, as we have seen, the 'standard' history of *danzón* is portrayed as something linear, something purportedly constant and persistently present which is continually hybridised, moving to new places and at that point being transformed.



Figure 3. *Danzonera 'Manzanita y su son 4'* performing in the *Plazuela de la Campana*, Port of Veracruz, 15 April 2007. Photograph by Hettie Malcomson.



Figure 4. Daniel Rergis Aguiler (who played Carmelo in María Novaro's film 'Danzón' (1991)) dancing danzón with Natalia Pineda Burgos in the Plaza de Armas, Port of Veracruz, 29 April 2007. Photograph by Hettie Malcomson.

This constant something is depicted in this 'standard' history as primarily European rather than 'African': a notated Anglo-French music-dance form that journeys through the Caribbean and to which 'African' rhythms (the *tango* and the *cinquillo*) are added. While the European emphasis *already* racialises these musics within a logic of invisible 'white' privilege (Nayak 2007), that is the point of reference in the 'standard' history of *danzón*. 'African' rhythms, and in particular the *cinquillo*, are portrayed as though it is they which racialise this hegemonic, 'semi-classical', European music-dance form. It is 'African' rhythms which make 'race' appear within this context, as did the 'blackness' of musicians and dancers who performed them (and their 'African' movements). Moreover, while these rhythms are generally portrayed as accompaniments to this Anglo-French music-dance form, an alternative



Figure 5. Armando Valdés Abreu and Adolfina de Valdés dancing *danzón* at a monthly *danzón* *peña* in Havana, Cuba, 1 April 2007. Photograph by Hettie Malcomson.

is to see them as musically organising forces. The *cinquillo* might be construed as a rhythmic foundation, rather than an addition, which determines melodic and accompanying figures, together with its overarching *clave* pattern (in simplified terms 3 + 3 + 2 | 2 + 2 + 2 + 2 in 3-2 *clave*).

I am not arguing for the dominance of certain elements over others, but it is important to be aware of the extent to which the 'Afro-Cuban' elements are portrayed as secondary in the 'standard' history of *danzón*. While commentators have disputed the route by which the *cinquillo* arrived – coming to the Caribbean with the slave trade and/or via Moorish Spain – it is not described as a primary element to which equivalent or secondary European elements were added. The 'Africanness' of *danzón* is depicted as merely augmenting its primary European origins. This is very different from the histories of music of the Colombian coastal regions described by Wade, where change is often interpreted as the local tradition dominating new influences (European instrumentation, for instance), which are 'subordinated to existing styles' (Wade 2000, p. 65).

What is also striking in 'standard' histories of *danzón* is that, while the transformations to the Anglo-French music-dance form are clearly manifest (particularly in its changing names), the 'African' *cinquillo* appears as a static and unvarying rhythmic cell without performative, geographic or historical multiplicity, despite its prevalence throughout the circum-Caribbean. This may in part be due to an inevitable reliance on music and dance notations in tracing this history, a reliance which not only downplays the sounds, complexities and dynamism of non-notated elements, but is inadequate in notating rhythmic complexities. However, there are also parallels here with the way in which 'Africa' is portrayed in these histories (as a static, unvarying mass without geographic or historical multiplicity).

To further complicate this scenario, power dynamics were manifest in attitudes towards these music-dance forms. Like *flamenco* (Washabaugh 1996) and *tango*

(Savigliano 1995), the (*contra*)*danza* and *danzón* were the subject of numerous tirades, accused of vulgarity, lasciviousness and immorality. Critiques of these music-dance forms were almost always political, and often highly racialised. For example, in 1809, the *contradanza* and waltz brought by the Saint Domingue exiles were described as 'French libertinism' in the *Aviso de La Habana*, in what Carpentier (1946, p. 134) describes as 'colonial "chauvinism"'. Castillo Faílde (1964) demonstrates how, during the wars of independence, pro-Spain Cuban conservative newspapers denigrated *danzón* as an immoral 'African' music-dance form, while more liberal, pro-independence newspapers emphasised the 'Cuban' characteristics of *danzón*. *Danzón* was adopted (or co-opted, Acosta 2004) by pro-independence Cuban *criollo* elites in their spontaneous parties (*asaltos*) to which Spaniards were not invited (Chasteen 2004). While patriotic *contradanza* lovers were outraged by the new *orquestas típicas* because of their 'louder, livelier instrumentation taken from the Spanish bands' (León 1991, p. 20), racial hierarchies were retained and slavery persisted (finally to be abolished only in 1886).

By the 1920s, Cuban racial moralities had been reconfigured: according to Martínez Furé (1991, p. 33), conservative columnists 'attempted to establish the *danzón* – rather ironically – as an example of *white* Cuban music, without any African influence'; nationalists such as Sánchez de Fuentes (1928) suggested that *danzón* had hardly any 'black' influence and was European, unlike *rumba*, *son* and the jazz bands he condemned. Meanwhile, *afrocubanismo* was in vogue, the cultural movement, critical of the politics of post-independence Cuba, that promoted 'African-influenced' expression as representative of the Cuban nation (Carpentier's work falls into this category) (see Moore 1997).

The *flexibility* of the (*contra*)*danza* and *danzón* should by now be apparent. Political leanings played into interpreting, adopting and co-opting these music-dance forms as more or less 'black', 'white', 'African', 'Cuban', 'African-influenced', 'European' or 'Spanish'. As Wade points out, racist outbursts were often an attempt by national elites to construct 'otherness', 'remaking difference because it was fundamental to the reproduction of their own position' (Wade 2001, p. 855). Power played into *whose* opinions were publicised and how these music-dance forms were performed, but also into the very creation of these 'genres'. For example, both Louis XIV and the Matanzas Society, in their different contexts, authorised and provided authoritative exemplars and standards of what new genres would consist of, participating in their invention.

Conclusion

In this article I have followed the 'route' of the 'standard' history of *danzón* propounded by Mexican (and other) *danzón* experts, contextualising it with material from Mexico, Cuba, France and the UK, and drawing attention to its multiplicity and complexity. As we have seen, the generic names in this history propose a fixedness and originality which disguise their diversity, and racialisation and racism pervade this story. *Danzón*, its antecedents and successors, were treated as generic equivalents despite being distinct. It was the initial pieces within each genre that supposedly 'crystallised' to define each genre, rather than later works. The 'standard' history of *danzón* centred around newly-named genres where origins, originators, originality and nationality were key. From the *danzón* onward, these genres were

portrayed as being the products of individual men (and consequently their nations). 'Africa' was treated as a static and unvarying conceptual 'nation'; as a place without historical and geographic multiplicity. The ongoing commercial, cultural, political, religious, reproductive and violent movements and exchanges between and within Europe, Africa and the circum-Caribbean were downplayed. The brutality of slavery was brushed aside. 'Africanness' was treated as something extra which racialises: a homogeneous and static 'African' *cinquillo* was portrayed as racialising an evolving hegemonic European music-dance form in Cuba. Political leanings and strategies determined whether the (*contra*)*danza* and *danzón* were interpreted, adopted or co-opted as being 'white', 'black', 'African', 'Cuban', 'European' or 'Spanish' music or dance forms. There remains much archival work to be done to document the 'routes' and ruptures of these histories. To conclude, I want to suggest that such research might start with what Gilroy, following Leroi Jones (aka Amiri Baraka 1966), calls a 'changing same':

the reproduction of cultural traditions not in the unproblematic transmission of a fixed essence through time but in the breaks and interruptions that suggest that the invocation of tradition may itself be a distinct, though covert, response to the destabilising flux of the post-contemporary world. (Gilroy 1991, p. 126)

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Endnotes

1. The title of this article borrows from James Clifford's (1994) essay *Diasporas*, which in turn builds on Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993).
2. I conducted fieldwork in the Port of Veracruz, Mexico in 2006–2008 (with contextual fieldwork in Mexico City and Cuba). Mexican *danzón* experts are discussed in more depth in my doctoral thesis, 'Creative standardization: *danzón* and the Port of Veracruz, Mexico'.
3. Peter Manuel's excellent anthology, *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean* (2009: Philadelphia, Temple University Press) was published while this article was under review and adds significantly to the discussion.
4. All translations are the author's own.
5. The term '*criollo*' was applied to people born in the circum-Caribbean, especially those of European descent.
6. In terms of instrumentation, Cuban *contradanzas* were usually performed by ensembles of flute (or piccolo), clarinet, violin, bass and *timbales* in early 19th-century Cuba (Gadles Mikowsky 1988, p. 45).
7. According to Odilio Urfé, the *orquestas típicas* ('typical orchestras') that played early *danzones* consisted of 'a cornet, a valve trombone, an ophicleide, two clarinets in C, two violins, a bass, two *timbales* and a *güiro*' (Urfé 1976, p. 11). This was the line-up of Miguel Faílde's orchestra (Castillo Faílde 1964). Orchestrations changed considerably in the following decades with the changes to the structure of *danzón*, the introduction of further instruments, the formation of *charangas*, solo improvisatory passages (for flute, piano), and so forth.
8. An ophicleide was a keyed, bass brass instrument. *Timbales* are two small timpani (often 20" and 22"), played with straight wooden (drum) sticks. Rather confusingly, the term *timbales* is used in Mexico to refer to both these small timpani and the more portable *tarolas* (two single-headed drums

- mounted on a stand, famously played by Tito Puente) which are sometimes used as substitutes.
9. Samson, J. 'Genre', *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy. <http://www.grovemusic.com> (accessed 20 May 2009).
 10. With the disappearance of Cuban slavery at the end of the 19th century, indentured labourers were brought from China (sometimes via Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula) to work on Cuban sugar plantations (Chomsky *et al.* 2003).
 11. *Mestizaje* denotes 'mixture'. *Mulata/o* refers to people of Afro-Caribbean/'African' and Spanish/European parentage. Both are used in relation to 'racial' and cultural intermixture.
 12. At the beginning of the 21st century, there were substantial differences in *danzón* performance within Mexico, particularly between Mexico City and the Port of Veracruz. Musical differences included: instrumentation (Mexico City's *danzoneras* tended to be larger; Veracruz's *danzoneras* tended to include *congas* (like the Cubans) and a cowbell on the *timbales*, whereas Mexico City's *danzón* had no *congas*, and a bass drum rather than cowbell was included in the *timbales* kit); cadential (Veracruz's *danzoneras* usually inserted

a one-bar rest before the end of a piece, for example the end of Gus Moreno's *Pulque Para Dos* would be played as written



in Mexico City (and Cuba), but in Veracruz); and rhythmic (Mexico City's *timbales* players often used the Cuban *son* pattern played on *congas* in Cuba and Veracruz as a base from which to improvise, with the *cinquillo* performed by the *güiro*; and Veracruz's *timbales* and *güiro* patterns were usually founded on the *cinquillo*). Veracruz was described as more 'black' or more 'Cuban' than the capital because *congas* were employed and the *cinquillo* provided the rhythmic base of Veracruz's *timbales* patterns (as it did in Cuban *charangas*). Yet the Cuban *son* pattern employed by Mexico City's *timbales* players might be construed as equally 'Cuban', being first incorporated into Mexico City's *danzón* performance by the Cuban *timbales* player Consejo Valiente Robert Acerina (according to Hipólito González Peña Polo, Interview, 17 June 2007).

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