

## Discourses on *Mestizaje* in the Hispanic Caribbean and Brazil

Music Criticism and National Identity in the Thirties and Forties

Mareia Quintero Rivera

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# Discourses on *Mestizaje* in the Hispanic Caribbean and Brazil : Music Criticism and National Identity in the Thirties and Forties

par Mareia QUINTERO RIVERA  
Master in Latin American Integration Studies,  
Université de São Paulo,  
Brésil

This essay deals with the question of defining national identities in « racially » heterogeneous societies, and the role of cultural discourses within that process <sup>1</sup>. The analysis that I develop here is part of an on-going research that began with a basic concern : the lack of appropriate and operational concepts to define the dynamics of cultural exchanges in the context of Latin America and the Caribbean <sup>2</sup>. I examine, particularly, the idea of *mestizaje* that has had a fundamental relevance in cultural debates in the region, but which I believe is a quite limited term for our contemporary debates. Even though recent social analysis on the Hispanic Caribbean and Brazilian societies has questioned the idea of a « racial democracy » that was based on an interpretation of miscegenation as a harmonic historical process, in the cultural sphere the notion of *mestizaje* is still paradigmatic. Moreover,

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<sup>1</sup>. For a discussion on the problems that heterogeneous social formations poses for analysis see Mary Louis Pratt (1995). According to the author, Occidental social theory has constituted itself around a uniform social subject and a homogeneous concept of collectivities.

<sup>2</sup>. The issues considered in this article are further discussed in my Master's theses : *A Cor e o Som da Nação : A idéia de mestiçagem na crítica musical do Caribe Hispânico Insular e do Brasil (1928-1948)*, Latin American Integration Studies Program, University of São Paulo, Brazil, December, 1996.

I believe that the idea of *mestizaje* underlines other concepts of more contemporary use, like *syncretism*, *transculturation* (introduced by Cuban Fernando Ortiz in 1940), *hybrid cultures* (García Canclini, 1992) and the French word *creolization*. This essay approaches the theoretical and ideological implications of using the notion of *mestizaje* in studying cultural dynamics in Latin America.

I will look at this general question concerning discourses on *mestizaje* particularly as it arises from debates around music in the Hispanic Caribbean and Brazil in the thirties and forties. This research is based on the analysis of writings about music by intellectuals such as Mário de Andrade (Brazil), Alejo Carpentier and Fernando Ortiz (Cuba), Tomás Blanco (Puerto Rico), Enrique de Marchena and Pedro Henriquez Ureña (Dominican Republic), among others. It is worth noting that these were intellectuals of great relevance, well known at a national and continental level for their activity in various spheres such as literary and artistic circles, social and political activity. The aim of this study is to analyze the connections between defining a characteristic « color » for the ethnic formation of the nation, and the search of an expression of sounds for that « color ». Therefore, it is an attempt to explore the relationships between perspectives on nationality and debates on culture, particularly on music.

## **AVANT-GARDE MOVEMENTS AND POPULAR CULTURE**

In 1922, when Alejo Carpentier sent from Paris an article titled « La consagración de nuestros ritmos », in a paraphrase of Stravinsky's composition *Le Sacre du Printemps* (1913), he was envisioning a moment of transformation in the character of dialogues between the Occidental world and the so called « primitives » cultures. Carpentier's article describing the reception in Paris of Cuban popular music, evidenced the emergence of a new order of cultural internationalization where the new world was not only a source of inspiration for European artists, but a producer of modern artistic expressions. Those were the times when Cuban son and rhumba, and of Brazilian samba, were spreading quickly, with interpreters such as Moisés Simons and Rita Montaner from Cuba or Pixinguinha and Carmen Miranda, from

Brazil, among others. In the domain of art music Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos and Cubans Amadeo Roldán and Alejandro García Caturla gained international attention for their combination of modern musical languages and indigenous traditions.

Latin-American avant-garde movements from the twenties reveal a new interest (or at least a curiosity) in popular culture<sup>3</sup>. This attention on the popular was related to the search of a national identity, in the context of the exacerbated nationalism that followed the end of the First World War. These movements (and I refer here particularly to Brazilian *Modernismo*, and Cuban *Minorismo*<sup>4</sup>, but we could also say this about others) synthesized two tendencies that were circulating in the European cultural world : 1) the interest in cultures considered primitive ; and 2) the nationalization of the artistic expression. The combination of these trends represented a challenge to the eurocentrism of Latin American elites of the first decades of the century, the so-called « belle époque ». Alejo Carpentier described this process as follows :

« With the presence of rythms, dances, rites, plastic elements, traditions, that were protracted during a long time because of absurd prejudices, a field for immediate action was opened. It offered the possibility of fighting for things that were much more interesting than an atonal score or a cubist painting [...] The eyes and the ears were opened up to the living and the neighboring [...] The possibility of expressing the *criollo* with new values was imposed in the minds [...] Folkloric values were

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<sup>3</sup>. By « popular culture » here I mean indigenous traditions, or what would be call nowadays « folklore ». These are ambiguous terms which, depending on the historical context, have had different meanings.

<sup>4</sup>. A crucial moment for Brazilian *Modernismo* was the celebration in 1922 of the *Semana de Arte Moderna de São Paulo*, a happening that included concerts, exhibits, conferences and other performances. Composer Heitor Villa-Lobos, poets like Mário and Oswald de Andrade, and painters like Di Cavalcanti, took part in this event. On the other hand, the group of the *Minoristas* was formed in 1923 and published a well known Manifesto in 1927, that was signed by Alejo Carpentier, Roberto Martínez Villena, Jorge Mañach, Juan Marinello and Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, among others.

exalted. **All of a sudden the black man was the center of every sight** »<sup>5</sup>.

In this process of approaching the popular it is possible to examine the construction of an imaginary of what we might call the *Other within*<sup>6</sup> – those groups inside the nation that are identified as different ; in other words, blacks, mulattos, Amerindians, etc... Latin American intellectuals, engaged in the development of an indigenous art, undertook the project of discovering their own traditions as if they made part of a new and unknown world, the realm of that *Other Within*. Even though they valued the cultural expressions of those *Others* in new ways, breaking with the ethnological tradition of the turn of the century<sup>7</sup>, their discourse inherited a concern with progress. In the end, as Renato Ortiz poses, « How can one imagine a modern nation in countries composed by indians and blacks ? [...] How to forge a national identity in the tropics ? » (Ortiz, R. 1993, p. 25).

The question of difference inside a society has a fundamental role in the process of defining an image of the nation in the colonial and post-colonial world. Thus, I believe it is possible to address the analysis of intellectual discourses in the Hispanic Caribbean and Brazil as colonial discourses<sup>8</sup>. Approaching that *Other Within* meant for

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<sup>5</sup>. Carpentier (1988, p. 244). All the translations and emphasis are mine. However for some of the citations I include, in footnotes, the originals in Spanish : [« La presencia de ritmos, danzas, ritos, elementos plásticos, tradiciones, que habían sido postergadas durante demasiado tiempo en virtud de prejuicios absurdos, abría un campo de acción inmediata, que ofrecía posibilidades de luchar por cosas mucho más interesantes que una partitura atonal o un cuadro cubista [...] Los ojos y los oídos se abrieron sobre lo viviente y próximo [...] La posibilidad de expresar lo criollo con una nueva noción de valores se impuso en las mentes [...] Se exaltaron los valores folklóricos. Súbitamente, el negro se hizo eje de todas las miradas »].

<sup>6</sup>. See the use of this term by González Echevarría (1990). In Tzvetan Todorov (1991), this idea is implied in the definition he gives of an exterior *Other*, one which is not contained in a society.

<sup>7</sup>. I refer to the works of Nina Rodríguez, Sílvio Romero and Euclides da Cunha in Brazil, of José Ramón López in the Dominican Republic, and the first writings of Fernando Ortiz in Cuba, among others.

<sup>8</sup>. Peter Hulme defines colonial discourse as « an ensemble of linguistically-based practices unified by their common deployment in the management of colonial relationships [...]. Underlying the idea of colonial discourse, in other words, is the

Latin-American intellectuals an effort of cognition, as the conquest of America had been for the Europeans. They created through discourse a repertory of metaphors to describe that «new emergent world». Through the use of metaphors, as Homi Bhabha suggests, colonial discourse reveals its ambivalent character. Bhabha calls for the analysis of stereotypical discourse as an ambivalent way of knowledge, «a complex articulation of the tropes of fetishism – metaphor and metonym » – (Bhabha, 1994, p. 77). I will examine next the use of metaphors around music to represent a national identity.

### MUSIC AS A METAPHOR OF THE NATION

In the decade of the thirties, one can identify a trend to value the process of *mestizaje* in the Hispanic Caribbean and Brazil ; process linked to the defense of a possible civilization in the tropics<sup>9</sup>. A positive evaluation of racial tolerance in these regions gained strength when contrasted with the reality of the United States or to experiences from the past, like the Haitian revolution. As a product made out of different elements through new processes of syntheses, Caribbean and Brazilian popular music was considered a **mirror** and at the same time a **herald** of the conformation of new mixed «races ». As a mirror it expressed the idea that the process of «racial » integration was still unfinished ; and as a herald, it proved its capacity to synthesize differences. Hence, this discourses about music reveal the ambivalence of many Caribbean and Brazilian intellectuals in relation to the «racial » question. For the Brazilian case, Renato Ortiz observes : « When the *mestizo* is defined as the idiosyncratic trait of national identity, Brazilians, I mean, the intellectual elite, ended up conferring themselves a contradictory image. The ideal of *mestizaje* had some evident advantages. It allowed them to affirm their own specificity in

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presumption that during the colonial period large parts of the non-European world were *produced* for Europe through discourse [...] » (Hulme, 1986, p. 2). We should also mention that the writings of Edward Said had been fundamental for contemporary debates on colonial discourse.

<sup>9</sup>. See, above all, the writings of Gilberto Freyre in Brazil, of Fernando Ortiz in Cuba and of Tomás Blanco in Puerto Rico.

relationship to the world. But the intellectual paradigm that was used, fundamented on the existence of unequal races, inevitably attributed a negative value to crossings between them. The Brazilians were what they did not like to be » (Ortíz R., 1993, p. 25).

Writings about music express, as I have said, a concern with the process of « racial » integration. Referring to the popular composer Marcelo Tupinambá in an article published in 1924, Brazilian writer Mário de Andrade declares that Tupinamba's music « contains the uncertain heterogeneity of our race », « consecrates the undecided national soul », expresses the « time of ethnic foundation that we go through », and makes reference to the « suffocated and ephemeral character of our growing race » (Andrade, 1963, pp. 115-120). Likewise, in his well-known book *Insularismo*, from 1934, Puerto Rican Antonio S. Pedreira affirms : « It has been said that our *danza* is a musical nonsense [...] but in that 'nonsense' I see the most visible affirmation of what we are. [...] We are a racially mixed people, made out of whites, blacks and *mestizos*. From this fusion comes our confusion »<sup>10</sup>. Another example of this idea of music as a mirror of a still undefined 'race', appears in an article published in 1931 by the Dominican newspaper *Listín Diario*, where the author expresses : « We, Antilleans, constitute a racial conglomerate without ethnic unity : a mixture of races and pigments diluted without any order or arrangement. And our music and our folklore are exactly like us<sup>11</sup> ».

On the other hand, we found texts in which popular music embodied the ideal of synthesis, where differences disappear in a harmonic construction of a new essence. According to Cuban Fernando Ortiz, for example, « music accomplishes that unique *mestizaje* that

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<sup>10</sup>. Pedreira (1934, pp. 206, 36, 22) : [« Se ha dicho muchas veces que nuestra danza es un disparate musical [...] Yo encuentro en ese 'disparate' la más visible afirmación de lo que somos. [...] Somos un pueblo racialmente heterogéneo, compuesto de blancos, de negros y de mestizos. [...] De esta  *fusión*  parte nuestra  *confusión* . »].

<sup>11</sup>. Luis Padilla D'Onis, « El folklorismo antillano tal y como debe interpretarse, es algo común a todos los antillanos », *Listín Diario*, April 8, 1931, p. 9 : [« Nosotros los antillanos constituimos un conglomerado racial sin unidad étnica : mezcla de razas y pigmentos [...] diluidos sin orden ni concierto. [...] Y nuestra música y nuestro folklore son igual a nosotros »].

because of social conventions is still reproved by the bodies »<sup>12</sup>. Writing about *plena*, the genre that he considered more representative of the Puerto Rican soul, Tomás Blanco claims in 1934 : « Our *plena* overcomes the *burundanga* [local word for confusion] of the environment. Without denying its surroundings, it chooses, doses and coordinates its materials. From heterogeneity it creates a homogeneity that is typical. It creates harmony between the most different racial influences »<sup>13</sup>. As these examples demonstrate, in facing the dilemma of national integration, Brazilian and Caribbean intellectuals have turned their attention to the dynamics of culture. Thus, we can say that music and culture have had a central role in the process of imagining a national unity.

Another salient aspect in these writings about popular music is the reference to elements of the tropical climate – the sun, the rain, the sea, warm weather – operating in discourse a symbolic « naturalization » of *mestizaje*. We see an exaltation of fecundity, embodied in the figures of woman and land, seen as the locus for the fusion of the multiple elements that would create a **national color**. The soil of the new continent was seen as the ideal space for a racial and cultural synthesis. As we see in the following description of the *plena*, by Puerto Rican writer Tomás Blanco, music served as an example of a natural process of syntheses :

« The *plena* is a wild flower with deep roots in the soil. It is the result of a profound evolutionary process – crossing of pollen, mixture of germs, transmutation of secretions – it appears as a spontaneous mutation »<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup>. Ortíz F., (1965, p. 172) : [« Allí en la música se consuma ese mestizaje único que por las costumbres todavía suele ser reprobado en los cuerpos »].

<sup>13</sup>. Blanco (1953, p. 48-49) : [« La plena supera la burundanga ambiente. Sin renegar del medio selecciona, dosifica y coordina sus materiales. De lo heterogéneo crea una homogénea diversidad típica. [...] armoniza las influencias raciales disímiles »].

<sup>14</sup>. Blanco (op. cit, p. 50) : [« La plena, es flor silvestre con hondas raigambres en el subsuelo. Resultado de un profundo proceso evolutivo — cruzamiento de pólenes, conjugación de gérmenes, transmutación de jugos — surge como aparente mutación espontánea »].



A common symbol in the repertory of metaphors of the nation contained in these writings about music is the **mulatta**. A link was made between the music, the soil and the woman, as we see in an article called « La Rumba », where Puerto Rican José S. Alegría declares : « there are contortions in the legs of a mulatta, in the notes of the bongo and in the trunks of a palm tree<sup>15</sup> ». Likewise, in Tomás Blanco's description of *plena* , that we have already quoted, the author creates an image of a woman completely in tune with the tropical climate.

« Mulatrisse of golden skin like the rum, of strait hair and vivid eyes, [...] agility in its step, as a small beast from the jungle. Serpentine like and full of vitality, has the smell of the soil and the taste of shellfish »<sup>16</sup>.

As it is represented here, the mulatta is an ambivalent image ; in the borderline between an uncivilized *Other* and an attractive indigenous element. It expresses the desire of 'domesticating' the *Other*. Like American nature, women are characterized metaphorically as a virgin territory, open to be discovered and fecundated. According to Homi K. Bhabha, « The construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference – racial and sexual » (1994, p. 67). A special instance to examine this connection in the Hispanic Caribbean and Brazil is the imaginary around *mestizaje*. As we have seen through these examples, the idea of *mestizaje* strengthens the link between **nation** and **nature**. It also created an illusion of communion, through the representation of an original inter-racial marriage. Describing music as a metaphor of the nation, these texts express the idea of a fraternal community, of an extended family, of the creation of a new and homogeneous « race ».

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<sup>15</sup>. *Puerto Rico Ilustrado*, June 4, 1938, p. 21.

<sup>16</sup>. Blanco (op. cit., p. 52) : [« Mulatica de tez dorada como ron añejo ; de pelo lacio y ojos pícaros que pueden pasar por andaluces ; de parla castellana, un poco arcaica ; y, de ágil paso sensitivo, como de bestezuela selvática. Sinuosa y llena de vigor, tiene olores de tierra y sabor de marisco »].

### « VULGAR » MUSIC : THE SOUNDS OF THE *OTHER*

The rise of a music industry, with the development of recordings and radio broadcasting techniques, took place in the context of an urban explosion, where the emergent masses, seen as an ambiguous social subject, became a fundamental concern for intellectuals. Writings about this new « commercial » music bring a whole set of new questions to the issues that we have been discussing here. As I will try to demonstrate, most of these writings reveal a negative vision of *mestizaje*. In Latin America, debates on urban popular music not only present some of the concerns that we can identify in the European cultural world – like the commercialization of Art, in Theodor Adorno, or the descharacterization of folklore in Béla Bartók – but also manifest a great uneasiness with the racial heterogeneity of the population and the dilemma of national integration. They reveal, as well, concerns with mechanical reproduction of music, the phenomena of vogue, the immorality of lyrics and dance, and the influence of foreign genres. Our analysis aims to point out the ways in which these writings, speaking about music, created images of the *Other*.

A first element that strikes our attention in these debates is the concern with morality and with the transformations in the public and private spheres, particularly the growing participation of women in public life. Criticism over these commercial musical genres did not place its emphasis in the rejection of certain aesthetic qualities, but in music's appeal to sexuality. A link was made between music and sin, as it becomes evident in phrases like : « infernal screams » « epileptic orgy of deafening noises », « adulterated phrases », « bastard effects », « lyrics of a vulgar nudity », « rhythms dedicated to the omnipresent sex », etc<sup>17</sup>. An analysis of these debates around the immorality of music, make me believe that they convey an aversion to the idea of racial mixture.

It should be noted that musical genres in vogue since the 1920 – jazz, fox-trot, tango, rhumba, guaracha, son, bolero, samba, plena, merengue, begine – were all influenced by African elements. This

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<sup>17</sup>. Expressions from articles published in the newspapers *Listín Diario* (Dominican Republic) and *El Mundo* (Puerto Rico), during the period under study.

visible fact conveys a history of biological miscegenation. In an evolutionist conception of culture in which *mestizaje* was seen as a degenerative process, this visibility of the *Other* was a disturbing fact. On the other hand, characterized as lascivious, this music was also seen as an element that promoted the continuity of a process of miscegenation. We can observe, for example, the frequent use of adjectives like « bastard », « adulterated », « impure progeny », referring to the music. As I have suggested before, we can read these metaphors as containing negative visions of *mestizaje*. Descriptions of these new dances emphasize a link between blacks, sexual freedom and barbarity, as we see in an article published in 1928 by the Dominican journal *Listín Diario* :

« North Americans have the African melodies, that we found in one-steps, fox-trots, charlestons, black-bottons, and other extravagant dance genres, some kind of a crowd of dissonances invented to torture the ear and to transforme the couple of dancers in a **pair of monkeys** »<sup>18</sup>.

The tension between unity and diversity is of fundamental importance to understand the Caribbean region, as many social studies have suggested<sup>19</sup>. In this context, the Hispanic Antilles, (Cuba, Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico), share processes of social and cultural formation with significant parallels. However, the texts we have examined here about commercial popular music in the 30 and 40 draw a picture of the Antillean neighbors that represented an image of the *Other*. By opposing this *Other*, a definition of national identity was intended. This definition of the Antillean *Other* seems to be related to the racial question. Most writings reveal racist visions that underline national discourses in the Caribbean.

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<sup>18</sup>. « Notas de arte. El Folk-lore musical », *Listín Diario*, August 4, 1928, p. 11 : [« Los americanos del norte poseen [...] las melodías africanas, gérmenes que encontramos en las últimas producciones musicales norteamericanas y especialmente en la música de bailes : one-steps, fox-trots, charlestons, black-bottons y demás danzas extravagantes, especie de amontonamiento de estridencias y disonancias musicales inventadas para torturar el oído y convertir una pareja de baile en un par de monos. »]

<sup>19</sup>. See, for example, Benítez Rojo (1989).

Afro-Cuban genres dominated the new market of commercial music in the Caribbean from the twenties to the forties, and spread internationally with great success. However, in the intellectual circles of neighboring islands this music was object of debate and criticism because of the visible influence of African elements and its rapid dissemination and popularity, seen as a threat to indigenous traditions. Music traditions in Cuba, Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico had great similarities, and the kind of rejection of Cuban genres that we find in numerous writings is an interesting element for analysis. The rejection of Cuban music by the intellectual circles of the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico seems to have been related to a desire to whiten the image of the nation. It evidences the difficulty to recognizing the African heritage, an important part of their own traditions. By criticizing Cuban genres they strived to demonstrate that music of African influence was not « authentic », but that it was foreign, imported.

« It is impossible not to see the superiority of the Puerto Rican *danza* over the Cuban *danzón* and other Afro-Caribbean genres of popular music. The last decade has seen an artistic **degeneration of the masses**, who seem to have preference for these Negroid musical compositions ; with the pretext of an **impure traditional flavor**, they attempt to hide and give prestige to a **pure African scream** »<sup>20</sup>.

A long time ago, we could hear refined Cuban danzones, but then a different type started to circulate, like the one called « El Volumen de Carlota » and others of that kind. Afterwards came the Rhumba with **vulgar lyrics** that **degenerated** in the Conga, which denotes The Congo, an African region

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<sup>20</sup>. Ernesto Arjona, « Juan Morel Campos : Biografía », Ponce, *Puerto Rico : Tipografía Morel Campos*, 1937, p. 7 : [«No puede escapar, a un enjuiciador desapasionado la superioridad indudable de la ‘danza puertorriqueña’ sobre el ‘danzón’ y ‘danzonete cubano’ y sobre otros géneros afro antillanos de música popular. La última década ha presenciado una lenta pero segura degeneración artística de las masas, en su predilección manifiesta por estas composiciones de arte musical negroide, en que, so pretexto de un colorido impuro sabor criollo, se trata de encubrir y prestigiar el mero alarido africano. »]

characterized by **lack of civism and moral and intellectual development, savagery, no civilization, sensualism and nudity**<sup>21</sup>.

In the Dominican Republic we observe that the anti-Haitian discourse that gained strength during Trujillo's dictatorship was also related to an uneasiness in accepting their own African heritage. An article that appeared in 1932 criticizing some carnival traditions, exemplifies this kind of argument that opposed the Dominican identity to the Haitian or Cuban *Other*.

« Barbarism, scandalous liturgies, savage practices that in other places demanded sanitary campaigns, are unknown in our country. Here, sorcery, immolation of victims, black rituals, that were imported from Africa, are non existent. By fortune, in Santo Domingo, these things never created roots. We are free of these morbose and unsane influences »<sup>22</sup>.

With these examples I have tried to show the ways in which debates around commercial popular music define a repertory of *Others* whose presence was difficult for the construction of national

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21. José Enrique Pedreira, « Buena y mala música », *El Mundo*, January 13, 1946, p. 20 : [« En época muy lejana se tocaban danzones cubanos de corte fino y cadencioso ; más tarde empezaron a circular otros del tipo aquél que se llamó « El Volumen de Carlota » y muchos otros de su especie. Esta clase de música, en lugar de conservar el grado de refinamiento que tenía el pueblo en el arte coreográfico, lo fue, poco a poco, sensualizando musicalmente. Vino después la Rumba, parte integral de un danzón, y con letra de vulgar desnudez, se hizo de por sí una canción. Degeneró ésta hasta llegar a la Conga, lo cual significa El Congo, región del Africa ecuatorial que de por sí quiere decir salvajismo, no civilización, sensualismo y desnudez, falta de civismo y desarrollo moral e intelectual. »]

22. « Las mascaradas que no deben ser permitidas », *Listín Diario*, March 11, 1932, p. 7 : [« Entre nosotros esos espectáculos no tienen ni siquiera la atenuante de que reproducen costumbres pasadas, por que, la verdad es que en nuestro país, los barbarismos, las liturgias escandalosas, las prácticas salvajes, que en otros lugares hicieron necesarias campañas de saneamiento social, emprendidas para extinguir tales resabios del pasado, son desconocidos. Aquí no existe la brujería, la inmolación de víctimas, las misas negras, los ritualismos bárbaros, en una palabra, importados a la América desde la época de la colonización, por la gente africana. En Santo Domingo, por fortuna, esas cosas jamás han arraigado. Estamos exentos de tales influencias morbosas y malsanas. »]

paradigms in the thirties and forties. These debates reveal some of the contradictions of nationalist and populist projects (both in the political and cultural spheres)<sup>23</sup>. How to conciliate a paradigm based on exclusion with the metaphor of the nation as an extended family? From this analysis I would suggest that the tensions between music and power in Caribbean and Latin American societies have been marked by the quest for new hegemonic agreements and control of marginal groups, whose ethnicity has been a central element of these debates.

## CONCLUSION

The idea of *mestizaje* in the Hispanic Caribbean and Brazil, can be interpreted as a modern myth of national foundation. As a concept based on a positivist relationship between the biological and the cultural spheres, it legitimized in nature the historicity of a political and cultural institution which is the modern nation.

According to Anibal Quijano, modernity is a process which has been historically developed within a tension between a libertarian rationality and a dominating rationality. I propose that the idea of *mestizaje* is a modern symbolic construction in the sense that it contains that contradiction. On the one hand, it was appropriated by populist ideologies in their construction of social legitimacy. But on the other, it is also possible to read the idea of *mestizaje* as a herald or a promise of a new humanity. Using Quijano's conception of utopia as a project of reconstruction of society, I would think that the notion of *mestizaje* as subversion had a central role in the Brazilian and Hispanic Caribbean avant-garde movements of the twenties. In this sense, *mestizaje* was seen as a revolt against the colonial order. As Cuban thinker Antonio Benítez Rojo writes of Nicolás Guillén's poetry: « It is to construct – even though in a symbolic level – a space for racial, social and cultural coexistence. » The analysis of discourses on *mestizaje* in the cultural debates of the thirties and forties leads me to believe that it became a founding myth, anchored in subversive

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<sup>23</sup>. It is worth noting that these debates provoked a series of censorship policies against musical practices and recordings.

projects (like that of the avant-garde movements) as well as in the discourses of order (like the populist and authoritarian regimes of Getulio Vargas in Brazil and Rafael Leónidas Trujillo in the Dominican Republic). That probably explains its symbolic strength in the construction of the social imaginary in the Hispanic Caribbean and Brazil.



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### Résumé

Cet article examine les rapports entre les discours nationaux et les débats sur la culture, particulièrement sur la musique. Il analyse des écrits de critique musicale par des intellectuels comme Mário de Andrade (Brésil), Alejo Carpentier (Cuba) et Tomás Blanco (Porto Rico), pour montrer comment la musique a été utilisée comme métaphore de la Nation. On aborde aussi l'idée de métissage et les implications idéologiques et théoriques de son utilisation pour la recherche sur les dynamiques culturelles en Amérique Latine.

### Abstract

*This essay explores the relationships between national discourses and debates on culture, particularly on music. Through an analysis of writings about music by intellectuals such as Mário de Andrade (Brazil), Alejo Carpentier (Cuba) and Tomás Blanco (Puerto Rico), among others, it attempts to show the ways in which music has served as a metaphorical image of the Nation. It addresses particularly the idea of mestizaje and approaches the theoretical and ideological implications of using that concept in studying cultural dynamics in Latin America.*

### Mots-clés

Critique musicale - Discours national - Métissage

### Keys-words

Music criticism - National discourse - Mestizaje