Resignifying Danzón:

How Perceptions of Blackness Have Influenced Danzón's Frequent Reimaginings

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Over the course of its nearly 150-year history, the music and dance form *danzón* has been the subject of frequent resignification. Within Cuba and Mexico – the countries with which it is most associated - the danzón has been at times considered lewd, elegant, social, low-class, academic, liberating, conservative, urban, and old-fashioned. When it was new, it was signified as exotic and foreign. Today both Cuba and Mexico claim danzón as a national art form. How did the danzón, which in the nineteenth century was perceived (at least among whites) as indecent, fall out of fashion in the mid-twentieth century yet become an object of nostalgic reverence by the twenty-first? The catalyst in each case was the danzón's association with African heritage – with blackness.

Creolizing the Country Dance

Popular histories of danzón trace its origins to the English country dance of the late sixteenth century.[1] In the following centuries, the country dance was widely exported throughout Europe where it became known by a variety of phonetically similar names. Peter Manuel, in *Creolizing in Contradance in the Caribbean,* reports that "in France, the word 'country' was phonetically adapted, rather than translated, to 'contre'" and this phonetic translation was then reincorporated to English.[2] Thus, in French, the form became known as *contredanse* and in English as *contra dance*. In Spain, and subsequently in Spanish colonies in the Caribbean, the form was called *contradanza*.

[1] Peter Manuel, *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 4.
[2] Manuel, *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean*, 4.

These various country dances were group routines in which the choreography was prescribed either by convention or the direction of a caller.[3] Dancers could be variously arranged in a circle, a square of two to four couples, or, most commonly, with men and women in two lines facing each other.[4] That dancers need not be particularly creative nor familiar with more than a basic repertory of moves in order to participate may have lent the dance form much of its appeal. As Manuel writes, "the traditional country dance offered the pleasure of social dancing to those who were not necessarily skilled or trained as dancers."[5] The highly restricted set of moves available to dancers, the emphasis on prescribed choreography over individual creativity, the hierarchy in which a caller announces the next step and the dancers obediently follow, and the gender segregation and normativity built into the choreography likely also appealed to the conservative sensibilities of the times.[6]

These early ancestors of the danzón were subject to many of the same shifting connotations and cultural critiques that the danzón later would be. In its earliest forms, the country dance (as its name suggests) was associated with rural society and the poor working class, yet the dance quickly cut across class lines. As Manual reports, "while originating in the latter 1500s as a rustic folk dance, [the danzón] was soon being danced at the court of Queen Elizabeth I, by masters and servants together."[7] Country dance soon

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[3] Manuel, *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean,* 5.
[4] Manuel, *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean,* 4.
[5] Manuel, *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean,* 5.
[6] Manuel identifies "revivalist American country and contra dancing," and Alejandro Madrid and Robin Moore identify "the square dance and Virginia reel" as contemporary descendants of the traditional country dance in the United States. That these extant forms are both strongly associated with conservatism provides further testimony to the connection between this highly prescribed dance and the motivations of social conservatism.
[7] Manuel, *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean,* 4.

became popular among the "rising bourgeoisie, especially insofar as this new class borrowed aristocratic forms."[8] Yet for all its connotations of aristocratic elegance, early country dances were embraced in part as an antidote to the stuffy minuet, which prevailed (especially in France) in the years 1650-1750.[9] While in its time the minuet reflected "a sense of aristocratic restraint, propriety, and elegance,"[10] compared to the contredanse, the minuet came to be seen as stiff, formal, pompous, and rigid. As Manuel writes, "Although [the country dance's] prevailing mood could be either genteel or rowdy, in its spirit of collective fun it contrasted dramatically with the ceremonious and dainty minuet, which it increasingly came to replace."[11]

As a result, the dance sometimes met with vocal criticism. Alejandro Madrid and Robin Moore, in *Circum-Caribbean Dialogues in Music and Dance*, quote the newspaper *El Aviso de la Habana* from 1809 which described the contradance (and waltz) as "lascivious" and "diametrically opposed to Christianity."[12] Such objections were only heightened when directed at Cuban practices, which, because of the large African population in Cuba, became increasingly associated with blackness. Madrid and Moore describe the Cuban contradanza as "danced with short, dragging steps and accompanied by considerable hand and arm movement, all of which commentators of the day ascribed to the influence of the black community."[13] Such deviations from established contradanza practice were often met with moralistic panic and accusations of lewdness and impropriety.

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[8] Manuel, *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean,* 4.
[9] Manuel, *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean,* 3.
[10] Manuel, *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean,* 3.
[11] Manuel, *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean,* 5.
[12] Alejandro L. Madrid and Robin D. Moore, *Danzón: Circum-Caribbean Dialogues in Music and Dance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 80.
[13] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 80.

A few such deviations popular in Cuba in the first half of the nineteenth century led to the designation of a new style. As Madrid and Moore write, "The term *danza* as of the 1820s represented a new name for contradanza-like repertoire"[14] that incorporated African-derived rhythms and choreography. The danza was characterized by a slower tempo, an increased emphasis on couple dancing, and the *cedazo*, "essentially a 'swing your partner' move in which couples held each other loosely at the waist as they turned."[15] Just as the liberating country dance was popular as an alternative to the rigid minuet, so too was the danza a more relaxed alternative to the contradanza. Manuel describes the shifting attitudes of dancers in the early 1800s:

> Gradually, throughout the Spanish Caribbean and unevenly in the French Caribbean, the practice of collectively performing figures – whether fixed by convention or directed by a caller – came to be seen as old-fashioned and inhibitingly structured. To some extent inspired by the waltz, with which the contradance was often paired in performance, the new format allowed couples to dance independently, embracing loosely – or perhaps intimately – in ballroom posture.[16]

Conservative opposition to the danza was predictable, and the moral outrage it provoked was only heightened by the danza's associations with blackness. Madrid and Moore note that "At least some writers of the 1860s and 1870s continued to criticize the licentious character of the danzón with its extended cedazo section and the perceived African influences it had incorporated."[17] Manuel reports that the danza represented a change to tradition "radical enough to occasion spirited, if unsuccessful, opposition by

[14] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 26.
[15] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 26.
[16] Manuel, *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean,* 14.
[17] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 81.

traditionalists who felt that the new dance style was asocial and indecent, as it allowed intimate embracing and sensual hip-swaying."[18] He continues:

> Much of the scanty documentation of the mid-nineteenth-century contradanza variants consists of bilious condemnations by moralists offended by the new style in which partners could whisper and embrace amorously—perhaps separating by a few inches only if some officious martinet shouted '¡Que haya luz!' ('Let there be light [showing between the two of you]!')[19]

Manuel further notes the irony of conservative critics who attributed the trend away from group dancing and toward couple dancing to African influences, unaware that African slaves and their descendants "tended to regard as vulgar and immoral the European practice of embracing while dancing."[20] These kinds of moralistic concerns, exacerbated by fraught associations with blackness in the minds of critics, would continue to shape public perception of the dance form as it evolved into the danzón and waxed and waned in popularity through nineteenth, twentieth, and into the twenty-first centuries.

Danzón's Origins in Cuba

According to conventional narratives,[21] the danzón was the result of the progressive *creolization* of the European country dance. As the contradanza was increasingly subject to Afro-Cuban influences, it became the danza, the danza habanera, and the habanera before finally emerging as the danzón. The earliest known reference to danzón, according to Madrid and Moore, comes from Havana in 1844. It was a reference,

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[18] Manuel, *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean,* 14.
[19] Manuel, *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean,* 14.
[20] Manuel, *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean,* 15.
[21] For example: Andrew Grant Wood, "Danzón," in *Latin Music: Musicians, Genres, and Themes*, ed. Ilan Stavans (Greenwood, 2014). https://libproxy.library.unt.edu/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/greenwoodlie/danzon/0?institutionId=4982

not to a musical style, but to a "black dance"[22] that involved multi-section group choreography. The first danzón composition is credited to Miguel Faílde Pérez who wrote it to accompany dances of this nature. That composition, *Las Alturas de Simpson*, debuted at the Club de Matanzas on January 1, 1879.[23]

Musically, the danzón is characterized by its rondo form and its use of the Afro-Cuban rhythms shown in Figure 1: the *tresillo*, the *habanera rhythm*, and, especially, the *cinquillo*. The precise order of the sections of a given danzón seems to have been freely interpreted: sections could be repeated as needed or reshuffled to fit the needs of the dance. The first danzones, including *Las Alturas de Simpson*, contained three sections. Later danzones employed four and five sections. By around 1910, danzón composers began incorporating a concluding montuno section, derived from Cuban son. As this musical style developed throughout the twentieth century, it gave birth to new, related forms; the danzón is often considered the ancestor to mambo and cha cha chá.[24]

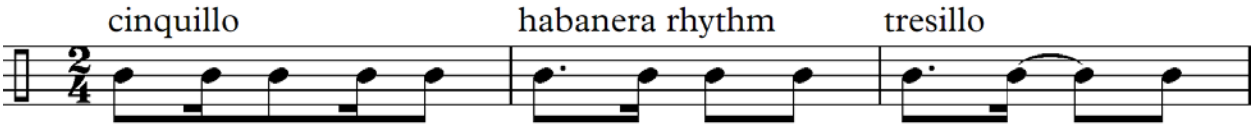

Figure 1. Afro-Cuban rhythms used in danzón

While the rhythms shown in Figure 1 are often coded as African (and by association Cuban), there is reason to doubt the convenience of this narrative. About the tresillo, for example, Manuel notes that "the rhythm is far too basic and abundant in world music to be

[22] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 33.
[23] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 36.
[24] William Gradante, and Jan Fairley, "Danzón," *Grove Music Online* (2001). http://libproxy.library.unt.edu:2173/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000007204.

attributed to Cuban provenance."[25] Hettie Malcomson argues in "The Expediency of Blackness: Racial Logics and Danzón in the Port of Veracruz, Mexico" that "the markers which are used to stereotype music as black and African ('blue notes', call and response, syncopation and improvisation) exist in some African musics and not others, and also in some European musics and not others."[26] While both authors agree that the cinquillo, for example, has African origins, Malcolmson notes that the conventional unilinear narrative of danzón history, which depicts African influences as "additional and secondary,"[27] serves to racialize the danzón. She notes that "African-derived rhythms make race appear in this story, as does the darker-skin of many of the musicians and dancers who performed these musics (and their purportedly African-derived movements)."[28] Malcolmson objects to this framing, suggesting instead that "There is no evidence to back up assertions that any music is exclusively black or white."[29] Nevertheless, from its inception, the danzón has been signified as black – a signification that it retains even today, and which has made it the frequent target of moralistic concerns.

Madrid and Moore report that "Much of the ever-present discussion of wantonness, vulgarity, and indecency associated with dances seems to have been code for black influence, whether choreographic or musical."[30] They note comments of several critics of

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[25] Manuel, *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean,* 21.
[26] Hettie Malcolmson, "The Expediency of Blackness: Racial Logics and Danzón in the Port of Veracruz, Mexico," in *Afro-Latin@s in Movement: Critical Approaches to Blackness and Transnationalism in the Americas*, ed. Petra R. Rivera-Rideau, Jennifer A. Jones, and Tianna S. Paschel (New York: Palgrave MacMillan US, 2016), 4.
[27] Malcolmson, "The Expediency of Blackness," 3.
[28] Malcolmson, "The Expediency of Blackness," 4.
[29] Malcolmson, "The Expediency of Blackness," 4.
[30] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 86.

the Cuban Danzón during the late 1800s, observing that many such criticisms underscored the danzón's "perceived sexual or licentious nature."[31] They write:

> One anonymous author in the *Diario de Matanzas* described danzones as involving too close an embrace and too much butt movement; another in the *Aurora del Yumurí* drew attention to the 'unbridled passion' ostensibly associated with its turns and spins, and a third referenced the 'lewd thoughts' awakened by the dancers' flexible waists.[32]

Critics took offense to danzón titles that employed "black working-class culture or street slang,"[33] and suggested that danzones represented a threat to the "honor, purity, and virginity"[34] of white women. So negative were the danzón's connotations that "even some elite black clubs considered banning the music entirely, and many newspapers avoided even printing the word 'danzón' in their articles."[35] Nevertheless, the continued growth in popularity of the danzón suggests that these "conservative critics did not speak for everyone."[36]

Danzón in Pre-Revolutionary Mexico

Blackface theater played a large role in popularizing and disseminating danzón both within Cuba and overseas.[37] Among the earliest references to danzón in Mexico come from descriptions of concerts and blackface performances in the 1880s.[38] Cuban immigrants and exiles fleeing the Cuban Wars of Independence brought the danzón with them to Mexico where it was well-received, in part because, as Madrid and Moore note, "it was similar to

[31] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 83.
[32] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 84.
[33] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 85.
[34] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 85.
[35] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 79.
[36] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 83.
[37] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 85.
[38] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 89.

the contradanzas and danzas already in vogue."[39] The danzón's popularity in Mexico was also boosted by the growing availability of piano sheet music published in the weekly music magazine *J. Jacinto Cuevas*.[40]

Oddly, the danzón's associations with blackness did not impede its initial popularity in Mexico. This was partly because the Cuban exile community that popularized the danzón in Mexico was largely affluent and educated.[41] As a result, the danzón in Mexico came to be adopted uncritically by the country's largely white/Hispanic middle and upper classes, who thought of it as refined and aristocratic,[42] and overlooked its racial overtones.[43] By the 1910s and 1920s, however, the danzón's associations with blackness caught back up with it. Madrid and Moore attribute this shift in signification to "the increasing visibility of black Cuban danzón musicians in Mexico, combined with the sudden success of touring blackface companies."[44] As a result, and as it grew in popularity among the working classes, the danzón became once again signified as black. Madrid and Moore note that the danzón's resignification as black seemed to create room for dances previously coded as black to shed that association. They write that the danzón's reemphasized blackness "allowed Cuban musical styles previously considered black such as the habanera and contradanza to be whitened and naturalized as 'Mexican.'"[45]

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[39] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 89.
[40] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 90.
[41] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 92.
[42] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 107.
[43] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 97.
[44] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 97.
[45] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 97.

Danzón in Post-Revolutionary Mexico

After the Mexican revolution between 1910 and 1921, Mexico underwent a period of dramatic urbanization. The population of Mexico City – following the trend of cities elsewhere in the country – more than quadrupled between 1900 and 1930. In part fueled by the efforts of political leaders, the people of Mexico began to reconceptualize their country as modern and cosmopolitan. As Madrid and Moore write, this "necessitated greater recognition of the nascent urban working class within the public imaginary, and new roles for women as workers." They continue, "discourses of mestizaje and an at least rhetorical valorization of indigenous heritage became the official doctrine of the post-revolutionary regime."[46] The danzón at this time was perfectly situated to become a symbol of Mexico's new cultural reimagining.

In part, the danzón offered an alternative to Mexican musical styles more strongly associated with rural life. As Mark Pedelty notes in *Musical Ritual in Mexico City: from the Aztec to NAFTA*, during Mexico's post-revolutionary period of urbanization, "previous forms like the corrido no longer spoke to the lives and needs of these urban neophytes. Bolero and its dance complement, danzón, did."[47] The coding of danzón as black perhaps strengthened its associations with cosmopolitan modernity. That danzón was the result of creolization – the blending of African and European influences – further aligned the form with Mexico's new celebration of mestizaje.

The danzón thrived in Mexico City in the 1920s through the 1940s. It became an integral part of Mexico's dancehall culture. Salón Colonia opened in 1922 and erected a

[46] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 106.
[47] Mark Pedelty, *Musical Ritual in Mexico City: From the Aztec to NAFTA* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 140.

large model of a black face on one wall. This, Madrid and Moore write, "became the trademark of this hall and an icon of the danzón-dominated 1930s-1940s Mexican nightlife, further reinforcing the associations between the dance and blackness developed in those decades."[48] Dancing danzón in salones served, as Pedelty puts it, as an urban rite of passage which taught youths socialized during the violent revolution modern social skills. Pedelty writes, "Signs asked young men not to toss burning cigarettes on the floor, so as not to burn the ladies' feet. Rigid rules regarding the nature of the dance and dress were also enforced, signaling a more urbanized and 'civilized' way of life for the ex-warriors."[49] So popular was the danzón during this time that, according to Pedelty, "Almost every bar with a bit of extra floor space provided room for couples to dance the danzón."[50]

The emerging values of modernity were threatening to many who came to see urban life as decadent. The danzón (like the boleros of Agustín Lara) came to be associated with prostitution, a profession itself tied to ideas of Mexico's modernity. Sergio de la Mora argues in *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film* that "the figure of the prostitute, along with the nightlife milieu of cabarets and brothels," stood in Mexican films like María Novaro's *Danzón* (1991) "as allegories for Mexico's modernization project."[51] Madrid and Moore report that in "cabaretera, rumbera, and fichera films of the 1940s and 1950s," danzones (and boleros) provided "the soundtrack to immorality and prostitution." The danzón's associations with the Caribbean – with blackness – made it "the perfect repositor[y] of 'otherness,' in opposition to local mariachi and ranchera music."[52]

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[48] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 107.
[49] Pedelty, *Musical Ritual in Mexico City,* 149.
[50] Pedelty, *Musical Ritual in Mexico City,* 147.
[51] Sergio de la Mora, *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 13.
[52] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 109.

Unsurprisingly, conservative moralistic concerns that linked blackness to sexuality were fueled in part by the autonomy that danzón culture was perceived to have given women. Madrid and Moore write that the danzón "provided Mexican women with a space to negotiate their new status, from individuals largely restricted to domestic spaces to increasingly independent and public actors."[53] They argue that cabaretera and ranchera films of the 1930s and 1940s suggested that "by abandoning the private sphere where men protect and control them, women enter a realm of unbridled sensuality that can only lead them to ruin."[54] In other words, women's emancipation from traditional gender roles was perceived by some as indicative of the corrupting influence of danzón as it gained popularity among post-revolutionary Mexican working-class women.

The 1950s saw the introduction to Mexico of new musical forms whose growing popularity led to the waning of that of danzón. Rock 'n' roll became popular at a time when Mexico City's mayor Ernesto Uruchurtu came to see ballroom dance culture as "a token of the decadent past."[55] Uruchurtu enacted policies to speed the dancehall's decline: he prohibited alcohol sales in dance establishments, and "enacted nighttime curfews that forced them to close early."[56] In the ensuing decades, danzón was also largely replaced by other Afro-Caribbean genres such as mambo, cha cha chá, rumba, and cumbia.

Just as the danzón's arrival in Mexico shifted Mexican anxiety about blackness from contradanza and danza onto this newcomer, so too did the arrival of the mambo, cha cha chá, and rumba shift Mexican anxiety about blackness from danzón onto these newer

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[53] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 108.
[54] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 112.
[55] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 155.
[56] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 155.

musical forms. As Madrid and Moore write, "Notions of blackness associated with the new dances (especially the rumba and mambo) facilitated the transfer of the danzón's blackness onto them."[57] As a result, within the shrinking population of danzón aficionados during the 1950s through the 1980s, the danzón was again resignified as restrained and civilized.[58] Its associations with blackness were minimized, and the danzón "became a symbol of the mestizo working class."[59]

Danzón Repopularized

After a decades-long lull, the danzón experienced a resurgence of popularity in the 1980s and 1990s. This was spurred in part by celebrations in 1979 of the centennial of Miguel Faílde's debut of *Las Alturas de Simpson*. For example, Salón Colonia held a dance competition billed as "Centenario del Danzón,"[60] and, in Cuba, as Madrid and Moore report, "a dizzying succession of centenary concerts, exhibitions, and commemorations took place… in Havana's Museum of Fine Arts, National Music Museum, and Karl Marx Theater."[61] María Novaro's 1991 film *Danzón* also helped reignite public imagination by offering a glamourous representation of the music and dance form and featuring a young, attractive heroine.[62]

Much of the danzón's growth in popularity in the final decades of the twentieth century can be attributed to the many dance schools that opened during this time, many of which have made one of their primary goals "rescuing" danzón by teaching it to younger generations and organizing public danzón dances. Hettie Malcolmson reports in "New

[57] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 113.
[58] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 114.
[59] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 116.
[60] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 167.
[61] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 160.
[62] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 169.

Generations, Older Bodies: Danzón, Age, and 'Cultural Rescue' in the Port of Veracruz, Mexico" that in the 1980s "a form of revival movement began to emerge. People talked about 'rescuing' danzón (from its imminent downfall), formalizing its transmission and choreography, and ritualizing its performance in spectacles."[63] Danzón aficionados created organizations devoted to the preservation and celebration of danzón in Mexico: in 1989, Rosa Abdulá founded Tres Generaciones del Danzón Veracruzano;[64] in 1998, Rosa's son Miguel Zamudio Abdalá founded the Centro Nacional para la Investigación y Difusión del Danzón (CNIDDAC);[65] the Academia Nacional del Danzón was founded in 1993;[66] and Miguel Velasco and Maru Ayala founded the dance troupe El Patio del Danzón in 2004.[67]

Although danzón's associations with blackness are, perhaps, less central to its identity today than they were one hundred years ago (and such associations inspire less hostility), Hettie Malcolmson argues that they still form part of the danzón's identity. The Port of Veracruz, (which shares with Mexico City a close affiliation with danzón) has historical and geographic ties to Cuba. This lends the danzón cultivated in Veracruz an air of authenticity within Mexico. Malcolmson writes that "Cuba is correlated with blackness in Mexico" and that "both Veracruz's danzón and its blackness are linked to Cuba."[68] Though Mexican danzón aficionados recognize the danzón as having been born in Cuba, many argue that it was in Mexico that the danzón was raised, and "danzón aficionado investigators concur that Veracruz was an *appropriate* surrogate parent for danzón

[63] Hettie Malcolmson, "New Generations, Older Bodies: Danzón, Age, and 'Cultural Rescue' in the Port of Veracruz, Mexico," *Popular Music* 31, no. 2 (2012): 219, doi:10.1017/S0261143012000062.
[64] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 168.
[65] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 169.
[66] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 170.
[67] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 166.
[68] Malcolmson, "The Expediency of Blackness," 2.

because of its Caribbeanness."[69] Some light-skinned Veracruzano danzón aficionados happily adopt stereotypes of blackness when doing so lends them credibility – like, as Malcolmson reports, to promote tourism,[70] or when "blackness is equated with being good at dancing, sexually 'hot', happy, rhythmically adept and so forth."[71] She is quick to note, however, that darker-skinned Veracruzanos are not afforded the privilege to selectively adopt only those stereotypes of blackness they find helpful.

Today danzón culture reflects a deep nostalgia for Mexico's "Golden Age" – the decades following the revolution in which Mexico was modernizing rapidly and danzón was danced in dancehalls by elegant, sophisticated urbanites. Nostalgia, however, is often built from an inaccurate representation of the past. As Pedelty puts it, danzón aficionados constructed "a new culture, drawing partly from invented memories of a world that never was."[72] Madrid and Moore offer an example: modern danzón culture's embrace of the persona of the zoot-suit-clad *pachuco*. The pachuco, they write, "is a dandy character imported into Mexico from 1940s Chicano culture" who "symbolized a new type of urban cosmopolitan masculinity"[73] and who exhibited "a courteous but domineering masculinity."[74] In the 1940s, a pachuco carried the somewhat negative connotation of a "man raised or living in the United States who had lost touch with his Mexican cultural heritage and whose hypermasculinity represented a hostile reaction to the discrimination experienced there."[75] Yet in modern danzón's "nostalgic, retro-reinterpretation,"[76]

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[69] Malcolmson, "The Expediency of Blackness," 7.
[70] Malcolmson, "The Expediency of Blackness," 14.
[71] Malcolmson, "The Expediency of Blackness," 14.
[72] Pedelty, *Musical Ritual in Mexico City,* 142.
[73] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 179.
[74] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 178.
[75] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 180.
[76] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 179.

pachucos have been resignified "from a threat to Mexican identity into virile national symbols"[77] intimately related to the danzón subculture in Mexico.

Malcolmson goes so far as to describe contemporary danzón practice as an "invented tradition."[78] She observes that danzón is today practiced mostly by older people, a fact sometimes invoked to connect current practice with that of the past. However, she writes, "Danzón is something that these newly recruited older people now do, and sometimes did when they were young (especially those aged above 70), rather than the frequently heard myth that it is something people have done *all* their lives."[79] Instead, she suggests that older people enjoy danzón perhaps because "the music is slow enough to dance with ease"[80] or perhaps because danzón events provide "a sexualized arena" in which older people can meet, dance, socialize, flirt, and sometimes find new partners.[81] In any case, the popularity of danzón among older people is not an indication that modern practices reflect an unchanging tradition.

Conclusion

Today, as throughout its history, danzón has taken on the significations that were relevant to it at the time. In many of those times, the danzón's associations with blackness were primary. This led to predictable criticism from conservatives of the day, who frequently associated the danzón with licentiousness and immorality. Such criticisms were especially pronounced when the danzón was seen as a threat to the "purity" of women. The racial coding of danzón diminished somewhat when new Afro-Cuban genres took on those

[77] Madrid and Moore, *Danzón*, 187.
[78] Malcolmson, "New Generations, Older Bodies," 222.
[79] Malcolmson, "New Generations, Older Bodies," 222.
[80] Malcolmson, "New Generations, Older Bodies," 220.
[81] Malcolmson, "The Expediency of Blackness," 6.

associations. Still, even today the perceived authenticity of danzón locals, styles, and practitioners is connected to ideas of blackness. That the danzón has been the subject of frequent resignification should come as no surprise. People have only the vantage point of the present from which to reflect on a tradition. Danzón, like every part of culture, has been – and will likely continue to be – continually reimagined to fit the needs of the present.

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