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Can't Beat Me Own Drum in Me Own Native Land: Calypso Music and Tourism in the Panamanian Atlantic Coast¹

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Abstract

The connection between music and identity is especially evident in the African diaspora. In the Caribbean, music is particularly important to the cultural and ethnic identities of black populations. This article discusses the multiple meanings of music for Panamanian Afro-Antillean identity in the Caribbean, by placing musical genres such as calypso, soka, and reggae, in the context of tourism development. I argue that Afro-Antillean musical genres as well as appropriations of “national” musical genres have provided black populations in the Panamanian Caribbean with ways to assert distinctive identities in the Panamanian cultural mosaic. Afro-Antilleans are experiencing a cultural revival of their Antillean identities, through the process of tourism consumption. They are also asserting their identities as a cosmopolitan group, with enough transnational connections to access musical worlds that are not the domain of other ethnic groups in the country. Consequently, Afro-Antilleans are using music to reposition themselves nationally through participation in transnational circuits. [Keywords: music; calypso; identities; Afro-Antilleans; tourism]

SHOWTIME AT LA CANDELITA

It is 6:00 pm on a Friday night in Bocas Town. The party mood can be felt on the streets. Men and women, young and old, prepare for a night of celebration. Some enjoy a heavy meal; others iron their clothes, wash and style their hair, or agonize over which outfit to wear or which discothèque to visit first. At around 10:00 pm, "Follow De Leader," a "catchy sokalypso beat and flowing chant [that] makes this cut an essential dance floor tune," plays loudly at *La Candelita*, a popular bar-discothèque built out over the water. The song, originally from the Trinidadian Soka Boys, promises "pure booty-shakin' ragga fun."² The party has not started yet, but some men are already in the bar ordering beers, *Herrerano* rum, *Caballito* Dry Gin or triple sec with milk, the most popular drink in Bocas. A few women properly order a "lady's drink:" *Sanson* red wine with milk.

The place is filling up quickly, and a few couples venture onto the dance floor. Arthur, the deejay, plays a set of soka, calypso, and merengue. As he observes a group of tourists arriving at the bar, he quickly searches for one of his newly bought techno CDs and plays a techno song. Tourists and locals approve of the choice and jump to the dance floor. The tourists dance in groups but the locals dance in couples. Techno is one of the few dances Bocatoreneans do not dance in close contact with each other. It is, therefore, one of the few dances that Ismael's wife, Diana, allows him to dance with another woman. In Bocas del Toro, dancing is a very sensuous affair and it can be interpreted as an invitation to a sexual encounter. People generally dance with their partners or close friends, for dancing too closely or too long with a person generates immediate rumors and negative commentaries. Diana does not enjoy the party scene; she prefers to stay at home with her children. She understands Ismael's need to go out once in a while and drink a couple of beers with his friends, but she has strictly prohibited him to dance with any woman, particularly if the dance is *típico* or a soft salsa. Ismael knows that if he were to ignore his wife's desires, Diana would find out within hours that he did; he prefers to maintain the harmony of the relationship.

It is time to change the rhythm of the music to *típico*. Some tourists venture to dance to it. A few women tourists are asked by Afro-Antillean men to dance with them. Others prefer to dance alone. Benjamín disapproves of the jokes and commentaries that people make of the tourists who dance

alone. “I think that they are happy that way, and we should respect them.” Jeannette, a North American woman who has lived in Bocas for about two years, arrives at *La Candelita* with a friend. She loves Panamanian music but feels very self-conscious about her dancing skills. “For me, I love it, but I always wish I could dance as well as everybody from here, so it’s a mixture of like enjoying and wishing I could participate more, and I think that’s how tourists feel.” Arthur is happy to see Jeannette and everyone else in the bar dancing and having a good time. “When you have a full dance floor, you feel good; that is being a good deejay. You are doing your job well, because if you play music and only two or three couples dance and everyone else sits, I don’t feel well” (interview A. B., April 26, 2000).

While people are enjoying the ambience and music of *La Candelita*, large numbers of Bocatoreneans are taking the free two-minute boat ride from Bocas to Carenero to party at Ocean Queen, a disco-bar located in Carenero. A large group of tourists are also enjoying the fresh air and loud music of Ocean Queen. John believes many national and international tourists prefer this discothèque because it is right next to the beach and there are no walls or windows anywhere. Kate completely agrees: “All my tourists say: ‘This is the greatest,’ and really enjoy it. The boat ride over is wonderful, I mean, all of it. It’s like a Caribbean experience. It’s lovely” (interview K. S., May 16, 2000).

Back at *Coyabas* in Bocas Town, The Beach Boys are tuning their guitars and preparing for a night of calypso. The bar owner hopes that the place will be filled with Bocatoreneans and tourists. After a year of living in Bocas, Karen—a Canadian resident expatriate—is a bit tired of The Beach Boys³ but she still tries to go to as many live presentations as she can, and she encourages the tourists that stay in her boarding house to attend at least one presentation. “I always try getting my tourists out to see live calypso when it’s happening. We could use a whole lot more live music here; they keep saying a *típico* band is coming, a *típico* band is coming, but it doesn’t come. For me it’s a total treat when, for example, the *feria* [fair] is on and there’s all kinds of live music; it’s just great” (interview K. S., May 16, 2000). As soon as The Beach Boys start playing, Bocatoreneans grab their partners and initiate beautiful encompassed and rhythmic dances. Luisa, a Panamanian tourist, comments: “God at least gave Black people rhythm and good voices, since He didn’t give them anything else

physically.” Her racist comment reminds me that the Jamaican scholar Stuart Hall asks us “to think of how these cultures [of the Black diaspora] have used the body—as if it was, and it often was, the only cultural capital we had. We have worked on ourselves as the canvases of representation” (Hall 1996:470).

Beatriz chose to listen to live calypso tonight, so she invited her dear friend Mike, a US resident expatriate, and María, a Panamanian tourist who is staying at the hostel where she works. They pay the one-dollar per person entrance fee and find a table. The place is already almost full, and people are dancing and enjoying the music. One of the players from The Beach Boys is Beatriz’ friend, so he invites her table to a round of beers. Beatriz also found old friends of hers at another table; they were there to remember their youth parties and “night-a-funs.”⁴ Tonight, The Beach Boys are truly enjoying themselves and playing with *gusto*; they invited Hernán, a local fireman who plays in the Fireman’s Band, to play with them. He is a skilled sax and guitar player, and his presence adds charm to the music. María dances a few pieces with men from different tables, and Beatriz enjoys her time with Mike and her old friends. The Beach Boys are now playing a song by the late Lord Cobra, “Greedy Woman.” Tonight, they are experimenting with the contribution of Hernán, and in future presentations, they may choose to include more of the classic calypso songs in their repertoire. Songs like “Arroz con Pollo,” “Acapulco,” “Last Night,” fill the small air-conditioned bar with excitement. They also notice that there are many “old-timers” in the bar, and they want to please them. An old, white-haired Afro-Antillean man and his wife dominate the floor. He is elegantly dressed with white shirt and pants. She is wearing a beautiful sequin top and a white skirt. They look harmonious and elegant, and Bocatoreneans and tourists admire and cheer their dance. Everyone stops dancing for a while to watch this couple’s skillful performance. While everyone is enjoying this boisterous Friday night, some resident expatriates wish there was less movement at night so that they could rest more peacefully. Perhaps some of them think of the music and cuisine of Bocas as “noise and smell” that upsets them (cf. Gross et al. 1994:121). Few resident expatriates understand that music, noise, and movement are important cultural manifestations of “Afro-Antilleanness.”

Introduction

This is something I am going to explain to you so you will have it very very clear: The Spaniards colonized Panama. Here in Panama people say that the typical vernacular Panamanian music is played with the accordion and such, but to me that is something that needs to be contested. That may be true for the Pacific Littoral where the white races settled; in Panama [City], in Colón and Bocas del Toro the typical music is *calypso*, you see? Just like in Limón, Costa Rica. Because in Panama the black populations settled on the Atlantic Coast, and you are going to see that [pattern] all over America, in the Littoral, the Atlantic, the Caribbean, until you reach the United States. We the Black people are on this side, and our music here is calypso.⁵

With these words, Marcos Warren—a 35-year old man employed in the tourism industry and expert Quadrille dancer—explained to me the position of Afro-Antilleans in the context of Panamanian society, and the role of Afro-Antillean music in the construction of their identities. The opening vignette and Marcos' words interrogate the generally unquestioned construction of Panamanian national identity as a naturalized fact deriving from Panama's Hispanic (Spanish-Indian) roots (cf. Sharp 1996:98; Valencia Chalá 1986:72). This article discusses the multiple meanings of music for Panamanian Afro-Antillean identities in the Caribbean, by placing musical genres (specifically calypso, *soka*, DJ sounds, *típico* and reggae) in the context of tourism development.⁶ I argue that Afro-Antillean musical genres as well as musical appropriations of “national” musical genres, while used as deliberate venues to attract tourists, have also provided black populations, and especially Afro-Antillean men, in the Panamanian Caribbean with ways to assert distinctive identities in the Panamanian cultural mosaic. This is particularly important in the context of a nation that has strived since its formation in 1903 (and even before) to create and maintain a unified, cohesive Hispanic identity.

Music in the African Diaspora

Evidence of the importance of music in identity construction has been well researched (Seeger 1987; Averill 1989; Manuel 1994; Gerstin 1998). For the African diaspora, this is clearly the case, given that representations of black-

ness are highly associated by blacks and non-blacks alike with specific musical genres. Hybridization of African and European genres has been a characteristic of popular music both in Africa and the African diaspora, and it has influenced the development of African, European, and diasporic genres (Mitchell 1993; Guilbault et al. 1993). In addition, popular music in the Caribbean has a high degree of social and political value, and a transnational quality that has influenced and transformed the genre as a whole (Guilbault et al. 1993; Grenier and Guilbault 1990; Young 1993; Ho and Nurse 2005).

In the last fifteen years, researchers of globalization have been concerned with the relationships and interactions produced by the encounter between the global and the local (see Friedman 1994; Hall 1991; MacRae 1999; Featherstone 1995; Coronil 2001; Prazniak and Dirlik 2001; Wilson and Dissanayake 1996). Popular music offers the ideal setting for the study of global-local interactions, due to its “unique capacity to cross borders, communicate on multiple planes, and symbolically encode and embody social identities” (Bilby 1999:258). In this regard, Mitchell calls for an analytical framework of popular music that combines “the micro-analyses of local practices [with the] pan-global macro-analyses” (Mitchell 1993:313).

Studies of popular music that focus on the global-local articulations can be divided into two groups. A considerable number of works discuss the reassertion of local identities through music and as a response to globalizing markets (Gross, McMurray, and Swedenburg 1994; Langlois 1996; Mitchell 1993; Bilby 1999; Guilbault et al. 1993). These works address new, hybrid forms of popular music outside the Euro-American mainstream, and have tended to adopt a world music paradigm (Robinson et al. 1991; Post 2006) that focuses on “the pressures exerted by globalizing markets and the kinds of local responses these engender; often such studies focus on the politics and aesthetics of the local as resilient articulations of opposition against Western hegemony” (Bilby 1999:260).

A second set of studies on popular music discusses the contribution of the indigenization of musical genres within the *national* context. These studies center on constructions of identity bridging the local, the global, *and* the national (Averill 1997; Guilbault 1993; Stolzoff 2000; Askew 2002; Scruggs 2004; Vianna 1999; Wade 2000).

My research on popular music in Panama falls into this category. I discuss the global, local, and national relations that result from Afro-Antilleans appropriating ‘transnational’ musical genres and indigenizing them within a national Panamanian context. My contribution to this literature lies in the specific

context in which the global, the local, and the national converge, that of the tourism industry. Post (2006) notes that studies of popular music and tourism are relatively new. In her introduction to the edited volume, *Ethnomusicology: A Contemporary Reader*, Post refers to three main texts that focus on relationships between cultural tourism (specifically) and ethnomusicology: Adrienne Kaeppler's edited volume on the subject of traditional music and tourism published in 1988; an issue of *the Journal of Musicological Research* that focused on the interaction of cultural performances, tourism and ethnicity published in 1998; and Mark DeWitt's edited volume, *The World of Music*, published in 1999, on the topic of "Music, Travel, and Tourism" (2006:5). In the ethnomusicology reader edited by Post, two articles talk about popular music and tourism. Peter Dunbar-Hall addresses music and dance events designed for tourists by local residents in Ubud, Bali, and addresses the high level of organization of cultural tourism in the region. The author talks about the negotiation of musical meaning that takes place when pieces of music and their dances are translated from cultural artifacts to cultural commodities for the tourist (2006:55). Timothy J. Cooley discusses the role of tourism at the International Festival of Mountain Folklore in the Tatra Mountains in Zakopane, Poland. Cooley addresses on how local families use this and other festivals to create, preserve, and represent their identity in a ritualistic manner; he analyses the binary structures represented in the festivals: isolation versus multiculturalism, preservation versus invention, spurious versus authentic, and tourism versus ethnography (2006:68).

In this article, I discuss how the tourism industry in Panama has become a major force through which local, national, and global representations of Panamanian identities connect. I analyze marginal genres (calypso and soka) characteristic of marginal ethnic groups (Afro-Antilleans) within the context of the nation, and show how they become temporary and localized representative genres for the nation.

Music and the Panamanian Nation

As mentioned above, there is a body of scholarship on popular music that focuses on the connections among local, national, and global representations of identity through music. In varying degrees, these scholars discuss on the role of popular culture (popular music, in these cases) in the construction of national identities. For instance, Guilbault (1993) addresses the role of *zouk*, a popular music genre of the Creole-speaking Caribbean, in the development of

national identities in nations whose culture has been largely defined and influenced by colonialism. Averill (1997) focuses on the interaction of popular music (rara and other musical genres) and power in Haiti, or what he calls the “musicopolitical signification” of these genres in Haiti and the Haitian diaspora (1997:xiv-xv). Stolzoff (2000) offers insights into dancehall music and Jamaican identity, concentrating on the global/local intersections of dancehall music (2000:xxi). Stolzoff emphasizes that music and identity do not need to be confined to records, artists, and concerts, or what he calls the RAP paradigm (records-artists-producers paradigm).

In his work *The Mystery of Samba* (1999), Brazilian anthropologist Hermano Vianna details the transformation of samba into Brazil’s national music. This process occurred in Rio de Janeiro, a city that has long been “utterly central to representations of Brazilian national unity” (1999:xvii). A “racially hybrid national essence” was invented in the 1930s by middle- and upper-class intellectuals (such as Gilberto Freyre) and perpetuated in popular representations, including music and literature (1999). Once samba was “discovered” by these intellectuals, it was adopted in Brazil as the defining element of *brasilidade* (1999:10).

Similarly, Peter Wade’s sophisticated work (1995; 1998; 1999; 2000) addresses cultural hybridity, race, and multiculturalism in Colombia through the study of musical expressions. In *Music, Race, and Nation* (2000), Wade notes that “a master narrative for Colombian nationhood has been that of *mestizaje*, or ‘mixture,’ generally conceived in terms of race but also in terms of culture” (2000:1). He traces the transformation of “folkloric” and “black” music (*música costeña*) into national representative genres in mid-twentieth century, “despite its apparent incompatibility with the dominant version of national identity and despite the initial resistance of some sectors of the population, which saw the music as vulgar, common, and sexually licentious” (2000:2).

The concepts of “national essence” and ‘master narrative of nationhood’ are clearly applicable to the Isthmus of Panama. Historically, since its formation as an independent republic in 1903, Panama’s authorities have emphasized the importance of preserving specific components of its heritage, those that trace the nation’s ancestry directly to Spain, and are thus perceived by Panama’s dominant elites as “legitimate culture” (cf. Scher 2002:474). The “master narrative of nationhood” prevalent in Panama has been “Hispanic” (Spanish-Indian), and “rural” in nature. A racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse nation became represented almost exclusively by cultural and social values presumably inherited from “the motherland” (Mendieta and Husband 1997:204) and

more deeply manifested in the central provinces [*el interior*]⁷ of Panama. The symbols chosen to represent the Panamanian nation derived directly from a Spanish or Mestizo heritage, in order to identify the nation as one having roots in Latin America in evident opposition to the United States presence but also as a result of internal struggles that influenced definitions of legitimacy, under the premise that “the problem of culture is [...] one of freedom” (Moncada Vargas 1990:12, 76).⁸ For the most part, this project was gendered, racialized and class-specific: the future of the country was seen to lie in Hispanic male middle-class intellectuals. Cultural and social values included romanticized “peasant” traditions exemplified in Panama’s folklore, music, and cuisine. Accompanying what was considered the “typical” Panamanian female dress, the *pollera* (Hegenbarth de Testa 2000), music and dance were important components of this Panamanian national imagery, and the *cantaderas*, *mejoranas*, *murgas*, and the *típico* music of the interior provinces were used by successive administrations as unifying symbols of a Hispanic identity.⁹

The ascendance of General Omar Torrijos to power in 1968 marked the beginning of a “creolization” campaign that reinforced the presence of these symbols as Panama’s “national essence.”¹⁰ Undoubtedly, as it has occurred in other parts of the world, this nationalist protection of heritage excluded “both an understanding of the historical participation of certain groups within their nation, and their contemporary participation in the ongoing evolution of such cultural forms” (Scher 2002:455). In fact, in the 1970 Carnival, Torrijos prohibited hiring international orchestras for the annual celebrations, which motivated people in the music business to hire Panamanian *combos* or *típico* bands (INAC 1990:9). The only exceptions to this normative view were the Kuna indigenous peoples,¹¹ acknowledged for decades as “the exotic Other” in Panama (Guerrón-Montero 2004b). Certainly, although Torrijos’ government provided tangible opportunities for Afro-Panamanian and indigenous peoples to enter and participate in the social life of the country, he also fostered a particular way of “being Panamanian.”

Nations are imagined and invented through texts but also through performance (Anderson 1991; Askew 2002). In Panama, Caribbean music (with the exception of tropical music, particularly salsa) has not been considered a fundamental cornerstone of its national identity. Evident connections of musical representations related to blackness, and more specifically Antilleanness, have been either ignored or erased from genres rendered representative of this legitimate culture (cf. Austerlitz 1997), until the onset of tourism as one of Panama’s major industries.

The Tourism Industry in Panama

Since the 1990s, Panamanian administrations have made serious attempts to establish tourism as a main industry.¹² In the quest to enhance economic development in the country, the government of Guillermo Endara (1989-1994) declared tourism a national priority (IPAT 1993:i), and in an effort to develop new destinations, Endara signed an agreement with the Organization of American States (OAS) to develop a tourism plan for the country. The result of this agreement was the creation of the Tourism Development Master Plan (TDMP) known as the “Master Plan.” The plan was a framework for the industry’s future growth (Anicetti 1998:70), and it was meant to become a guiding document for the Panamanian tourism industry, and to be fully implemented by the year 2002. The Master Plan divided Panama into ten tourism sections or *zones*. The Archipelago of Bocas del Toro, where a large number of Panamanian Afro-Antilleans live, was identified as Zone No. 2 (Bastimentos).

Currently, the Archipelago of Bocas del Toro is one of the most visited tourism areas in the country by national and international tourists. Tourism has become a permanent fixture in the region. The Panamanian Bureau of Tourism (*Instituto Panameño de Turismo*, IPAT) markets the islands as the finest example of ecotourism, although more recently, “residential tourism” has become the business of choice.¹³ National parks and reserves, pristine beaches, water sports, rare flora and fauna, and traditional Caribbean architecture are highlighted as major attractions of the islands. Although less prominently, a Caribbean “flair” and “carefree lifestyle” (represented by Afro-Antillean culture) are also advertised.

The Archipelago has approximately 18,000 inhabitants distributed in nine inhabited islands. It represents a microcosm of the multicultural elements found in Panama, with Afro-Antilleans, Chinese, indigenous groups (particularly Ngöbe and some Kuna), Panamanian Latinos, and resident expatriates, mostly from Europe and North America.

Afro-Antilleans in Bocas del Toro are descendants of black slaves from the British West Indies and more recent waves of migration. The first settlers arrived in Bocas in the early 1800s as slave workers for Irish, English and Scottish families who migrated to the area from the West Indies, particularly from Jamaica and Barbados. There were also migrations of Afro-Antilleans to plantations. Most Afro-Antilleans in the Archipelago speak Creole English (Guerrón-Montero 2002:116; 140-145). From the nineteenth to the late twentieth century, Afro-Antilleans in the Archipelago worked mainly for the United Fruit Company, in agriculture and fishing activities for self-subsistence, and in

bureaucratic service jobs. This structure changed considerably with the development of tourism in the Archipelago in the mid-1990s.

Tourism experiences often involve transactions that include purchasing a token of remembrance, regardless of its value or “authenticity” (Mintz 2004:189). The Archipelago of Bocas del Toro is no exception. Traditionally, handicraft production has not been an important identity marker for Afro-Antilleans. When tourism was in its beginning stages in the Archipelago in the late 1990s, the only souvenirs available were wood-carved plaques depicting marine scenes made by a Haitian migrant. Currently, a few souvenir stores for tourists have opened up, offering wood-carved items (most distinctively wooden turtles) with the words “Bocas del Toro” inscribed on them. More often, the items sold at these stores are items made in other Latin American countries (Guatemala, Ecuador, Venezuela) with the words “Bocas del Toro” hand-written in ink or pen, and even objects made in China with the same inscription. In general, and although the tourist might not be aware of this, Afro-Antilleans have not placed emphasis on material objects to represent their identities, unlike indigenous groups in Panama, who are known nationally and internationally for their skills in creating objects that represent their material culture (for example, *molas* for the Kuna; *chacararas* for the Ngöbe, or hand-woven baskets and tagua and wood carvings for the Emberá-Wounan).

For Afro-Antilleans in Bocas del Toro, some of the most evident cultural characteristics that distinguish them from the rest of the Panamanian population revolve around their culinary and musical habits. These cultural expressions are gendered, with men participating more closely in the world of music, and women associating their skills to the world of cuisine (Guerrón-Montero 2004a). Music performance is constructed by Afro-Antilleans for tourist consumption and pleasure, but it is also used symbolically to produce a particular type of tourism environment.

Afro-Antilleanness and Calypso Music in Bocas del Toro

As Marcos noted in the Introduction to this article, in Bocas del Toro, certain musical genres are manifested as constitutive of Afro-Antillean social identity. Gilroy (1993) argues,

Examining the place of music in the black Atlantic world means surveying the self-understanding articulated by the musicians who have made it, the symbolic use to which their music is put by other black artists and

writers, and the social relations which have produced and reproduced the unique expressive culture in which music comprises a central and even foundational element (1993:74-75).

In Bocas, children (boys and girls) learn to sing and dance from a young age. For instance, the two-year-old son of a well-known deejay already distinguishes between reggae and a *típico* song. “He knows all the rhythms, and he sings them too. I say that all my children have music in their blood like their father.”¹⁴ Dancing is also considered an uncomplicated skill. “There is a saying here in Bocas: if you know how to march, you know how to dance.”¹⁵ The ability to dance well, which means the ability to follow and feel the rhythm of any type of music, is perceived by men and women as an attractive quality of a potential partner. A man or a woman with a less skilled dancer as a partner is commented on and laughed at. “If a man asks a woman to dance, and he is going to the north and she is going to the south, he doesn’t ask her to dance again, because the man wants to carry the rhythm.”¹⁶

The vignette with which I start this article narrates some of the ways in which music crosses the lives of Afro-Antilleans in the Archipelago. Historically, the province of Bocas del Toro (where the Archipelago is located) has had an inclination to music. At the end of the nineteenth century, religious music motivated the mobilization of enthusiastic audiences. Afro-Antilleans recall that their grandparents and parents were experienced musicians.

In every house, there was select music, not raucous music like now. In almost every house there was a musical instrument. There was a piano, or a violin, or a trumpet, and the father passed down his musical knowledge to the son. That was a demonstration of culture. When I went to Panama to study at the National Institute [a secondary public school] as an intern, the majority of students were from the central provinces, and they looked at us as if we were garbage because they said we were not part of Panama, and I remember that one of my responses was that we lived in houses of wood and they lived in houses of *quinche*,¹⁷ and that they played the *cuitarra*¹⁸ and we played the piano.¹⁹

Music connoisseurs in Bocas pride themselves that internationally famous jazz musician Luis Russell (1902-1963) was born on Carenero in a family of Afro-Antillean musicians. While Russell’s degree of fame is certainly unique, his upbringing surrounded by classical music and a “musical culture” in Bocas

del Toro is not. Bocas still has a musical culture; a considerable portion of the population knows how to play an instrument and has been in a band during their lifetime. Music is played in the streets, in people's houses, at parties, religious and secular celebrations, and political rallies. Matt Allen, a North American who has lived in Bocas for sixteen years, commented on his experience with the musical culture of Bocas:

If you watch the little children dance when they got things going on, most of the music that they dance to is the old Jamaican, West Indian type of jazz. When I first came here, you would walk around town and there was an older gentleman over here who would play the trumpet and Mr. Bogó played the saxophone, and they were playing the old Louis Armstrong type of jazz.²⁰

Nowadays, music and dance continue to permeate every aspect of the lives of Afro-Antilleans. The most important musical genres in Bocas del Toro are calypso, soka, "Haitian" music and reggae.²¹

Calypso is a musical genre instantly associated with the Caribbean. Although the cradle of calypso is the island of Trinidad, different styles of this musical genre proliferate throughout the Caribbean (particularly, but not exclusively, Martinique, Monserrat, and Guyana). The precursors of modern calypso are the *kalinda* songs of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Rohlehr 1999:223). Baron (1943) notes that calypso is influenced by African, Caribbean, French, Spanish, English, North and South American, and Gregorian rhythms (in Baron et al. 1943:1). Manuel (1995) also considers the *belair* (a kind of French Creole song), *the lavway* (masquerade procession song), neo-African rhythms like *juba* and *bamboula*, British ballads, Venezuelan string-band music, other West Indian Creole song types, as well as the *kalinda*, as having influenced the calypso.

Calypso has traditionally been a musical terrain dominated by males. After the 1880s, the *kalinda*, *cariso* or *belair*, became almost an exclusive forum for the "fiercely competing egos of male chantwels," and by the turn of the century, practically all of the calypso singers were male (Manuel 1995:197). They "traditionally ridiculed women as ugly, sexually infectious [...] and forever trying to tie men down with obeah (black magic) or false accusations of paternity" (Manuel 1995:198). Famous singers acquired great status as "men of words" and masters of humor (Jones and Liverpool 1976). Calypso emerged as a text-oriented song performed for seated audiences in large tents. From 1900

to 1930, the genre became institutionalized and commercialized to a larger extent (Manuel 1995:186). Play with words and competition became increasingly important, the subjects ranging from commentary on current events to picaresque stories, double entendres, boasts, and insults (Guilbault 2005:146). From the 1920s to the 1940s, calypso lyrics experienced a transformation, for “to the delight in a purely verbal self-inflation were added two elements: a growing concern for social and political issues (Regis 1999) and the calypsonian’s self-celebration as a ‘sweet man,’ a macho man in ‘control’ of several women” (Rohlehr 1999:224). Eventually, the ballad calypso became a vehicle for narratives about the everyday lives of Trinidadians.²²

Although much less known than in other areas of the Caribbean, the influence of the Antilles also produced national representatives of calypso in Panama. The best known and respected calypsonians are the now deceased, Lord Cobra (born in Almirante, Bocas del Toro) and Lord Panama. These calypsonians were popular musicians in Bocas del Toro, Colón, and Panama City until approximately the 1970s; they gained considerable fame and traveled to the United States to record their songs. Lord Cobra and Lord Panama sang in English as well as in Spanish; in some of their songs, they included both languages in the lyrics.

Partly as a result of Torrijos’ creolization campaigns, calypso music lost its preeminence in the musical taste of Bocatoreneans, although people continued to listen to the tunes of Harry Belafonte, Lord Cobra, and other popular singers on tape. The cover of a Folkway Record by Mr. Gavitt in 1982 reads, “calypso survives sporadically today in Limón [Costa Rica] and Bocas del Toro (Panama), especially around Carnival time. Elsewhere on the mainland, the calypso culture is gone, driven out by radios and jukeboxes broadcasting Latin pop music” (1982:2).²³

In Bocas, calypso music was left to the older generation, especially to Mr. Pops, who continued playing the sax and teaching private lessons. At the beginning of the 1990s, a group of Afro-Antillean musicians from Bocas and Bastimentos formed the calypso group *Reencarnación*. The purpose of this group was to recover the traditional musical styles of Bocas for the younger generations. The group was received with enthusiasm and occasionally was invited to participate in celebrations and festivities.²⁴ *Reencarnación* was concerned with reintroducing “classical” calypso and other Antillean tunes with particular attention to musical virtuosity.

Currently, the most famous calypso group in Bocas del Toro is The Beach Boys. The Beach Boys is a group formed by five musicians (all male) from

Bastimentos who worked for the Chiriquí Land Company and who had started playing in the mid-1990s for their own enjoyment. They were all musicians “by nature”—particularly the lead singer, who had worked as a singer and guitarist at different times in his life—and formed the group *Los Antillanos* (The Antilleans), with only a guitar, a drum, and a coconut grater. “There have always been [musical] instruments all over the island; so we gathered a guitar here, and a drum there, and started playing.”²⁵ In 1995, they changed their name to The Beach Boys.²⁶ People liked their music, and hired The Beach Boys for their birthday parties and other celebrations; they also continued playing at beach parties, boat rides and occasionally at bars in Bastimentos. According to Christian Powell, one of the members of the band, the group did not form with the intention of attracting tourists. They never thought they were going to be popular and only formed the band “to have a good time, a change of air.”²⁷ In fact, Matt Allen remembers the time “when you could go to Bastimentos and you would buy them a beer and they would *quit* playing. And that’s a joke, but it’s also true, ‘cause if you wanted to talk and you bought them a beer, they would just stop playing.”²⁸

Holly Hahn, a Canadian businesswoman who has been living in Bocas since 1994, heard one of their presentations and thought tourists would truly enjoy their calypso music. She invited them to play at her bar, The Red Bone, in Bocas del Toro in 1996.

When I first hired them, I said: “I don’t want you to bring the amplifiers, I just want natural calypso music because I think everybody would love it.” So of course, the first day they brought amplifiers and said: “No, nobody can hear us and we don’t want that to happen.” In the end it worked very well, it drew a lot of people, but they needed a lot of equipment, so I lent them the money for the equipment so they were sort of working it off, but never finished.²⁹

Holly’s bar has become well known for the presence of The Beach Boys. Although tourists truly enjoy calypso music, the local Bocatoreneans have been her best customers. They not only come in larger numbers to listen and dance to calypso music, but they also spend more money on alcohol. “Most of the tourists occasionally would start spending money, but the rest buy one or two beers and dance all night, and I’ve even had some that wanted to sit at the table and not buy anything.”³⁰ Although Bocatoreneans and tourists are still attracted to calypso music, Holly feels that new discothèques and enter-

tainment elsewhere in the Archipelago are making it difficult to maintain a tradition of calypso music on the island.

After their formal appearance in the mid-1990s, the Beach Boys became a hot commodity in the Archipelago for several years. They were hired to play at local social events, inaugurations, and fairs; they also played at national fairs in Panama City, Colón, David, and even made international appearances (at fairs in Costa Rica). The Beach Boys developed as a more organized, less informal band, partly because a large portion of their family income derived from this activity. In fact, although the group was very popular for several years and continues to play at bars and in special events in the Archipelago, its members cannot sustain a living through music alone, and thus engage in other activities including tour guiding, boat driving, agriculture and fishing.³¹ Likewise, some members of the band play individually at local restaurants and bars. It is important to note that, as of 2006, The Beach Boys have not produced recordings for sale. They have confined their music to live performances because they have not searched for or have been approached by a recording company.³²

During formal presentations, The Beach Boys wear matching Hawaiian shirts, introduce every song with a small joke or commentary, make constant references to the Caribbean quality of their music (“Let’s continue enjoying this night with our Caribbean music, with part of the culture of Bocas”), and encourage audiences to enjoy their contagious tunes by shouting words such as “¡Sabor!” or “¡Azuquita!”³³ In spite of a higher degree of formality, the presentation and musical style of The Beach Boys continues to be very fluid, as they are engaged in a “changing sameness” (Jones 1963) in their performances and “a sense of continuity and tradition is maintained through processes of syncretic change” (Wade 2000:235; emphasis in the original text). It is not uncommon for The Beach Boys to invite other musicians from Bocas or Bastimentos to play the guitar, the bass, the sax or the drums on occasions. At times, they may change words in a song to suit the rhythm they are playing, or simply, because they forgot the words of the original song. Christian, a chorus singer, tends to be the focus of attention of the group with his movements and dance steps. However, his performance is also fluid, depending on his mood and the reception of the audience. The Beach Boys usually take requests from the public; when the audience is composed of a large portion of tourists, they sing occasional soul reggae and more “traditional” calypso songs. Although calypso has in some ways resurfaced to attract tourists’ attention, Bocatoreneans are its most avid consumers.

The calypso music played by The Beach Boys (unlike the calypso found in Trinidad and the calypso of Lord Cobra or Lord Panama) is not text-centered. The Beach Boys do not compose calypso songs. Although the group sings songs played by Lord Cobra, Lord Panama and other calypsonians (where they alternate between lyrics in Spanish and English, or in Creole English), their innovative musical technique has been to interpret popular salsa, bolero, reggae, *vallenato* or *típico* songs in the calypso tempo (traditionally 100 to 110 beats per minute [BMP]; Guilbault 2004; Best 2004). Consequently, along with “Banana,” “Water the Garden,” “Under the Almond Tree,” or “Fiesta”—calypso songs immortalized by Lord Cobra and Lord Panama—The Beach Boys also sing “Sé que Llorarás,” by the famous *típico* group of accordion virtuoso Victorio Vergara, or “Por Mujeres como Tú,” by Tito Rojas. The music of the Beach Boys is to some extent an invented tradition, but also a recasting of symbols of Caribbeanness and the remembrance of a musical past along with the use of the symbols of *panameñidad* that have been so eagerly enforced and highlighted by Panamanian society. The Beach Boys have innovated calypso music by “localizing” a pan-Caribbean musical style and adapting it to their musical preference. Benjamín León, avid music aficionado and DJ told me, “I don’t know if this is a denaturalization of the calypso, but the truth is that they have transformed the rhythm of calypso and people really like it.”³⁴

Although the music of the Beach Boys was not created to convey a message through its lyrics, it is sending a message of creativity and innovation by fusing calypso with other musical genres in a fresh and appealing manner. The fusion has provoked a growth in interest in calypso by older and younger generations, which had remained dormant for several decades and which had been replaced by more popular musical styles. Residents of Bocas, as well as the tourists who attend one of their presentations, enjoy the catchy tunes and the atmosphere that the group creates. In addition, although the calypso groups in Bocas rely on the singing abilities of the lead singer, the attention of the audience is not drawn exclusively to him as occurs with more traditional calypsonians, but to the group. The Beach Boys are a calypso group in the tradition of the *combos* of the past.³⁵ However, whereas the *combos* played different musical genres following the rhythm and tempo of those musical genres, The Beach Boys accommodate every musical genre to the rhythm and tempo of the calypso. They represent the Caribbeanness of Bocas del Toro to young and old Bocatoreneans, as well as to national and international audiences. In the context of a nation historically dominated by one ‘national essence,’ the calypso of The Beach Boys is also an assertion that this musical

style is as Panamanian as the *típico* and that the contribution of Afro-Antilleans should be as respected as the contribution of other sectors of society to the Panamanian musical collective heritage. The Beach Boys are an example of the multiplicity of ways in which popular musicians operate, particularly outside the Euro-American mainstream market. Similarly to Maroon musicians in Suriname (Bilby 1999), Afro-Antillean calypso singers “locate their own practice in a musically globalizing world, presupposing neither an antagonism toward global ‘modernity’ (as something perceived to be threatening to local ‘tradition’) nor a universal tendency to act in accord with whatever the dictates of globalizing markets (administered from distant centers of economic and cultural power) might be” (Bilby 1999:262).

Afro-Antilleanness and Other Musical Genres

For a musical genre to be attractive for Afro-Antilleans in Bocas del Toro, it needs to be catchy or “contagious” and allow the rhythm to flow. Soka and Haitian music, reggae and—more recently—*típico* fulfill these characteristics.

Soka is a musical genre that derived from Trinidadian calypso. Calypso music experienced an important transformation after the independence of Trinidad from Great Britain in 1962. In the 1970s, specifically in 1977, Lord Shorty and Ed Watson developed the “soka” or “sokah” music, which is now used to refer to modern calypso, or more specifically to dance music, whereas calypso proper is used to refer to the calypso songs, emphasizing the text rather than the dance. Although this was not the intention of its creators, the lyrics of soka tend to be short and inconsequential (Manuel 1995:194).

In Bocas del Toro, soka has been an important musical rhythm for many years. The rhythm of the music, its tempo (120 to 140 BMP; Guilbault 2004; Best 2004), and the use of Creole English in the lyrics make the music more accessible and appealing. Cybert Waterman, experienced deejay and businessman, believes that the reason for the attraction of soka is its catchy tunes and rhythm. The most popular soka groups in Bocas are Arrow Sparrow and The Soka Boys. Some of the most attractive soka songs for Bocatoreneans are actually chutney soka songs.³⁶ Songs by famous Trinidadian singers Sonny Man, Drupratee Ramgoonai, and Rikki Jai have made their way into the dancing repertoire of Bocatorenean deejays. Another common musical genre in Bocas del Toro is known as *Haitiano* [or “Haitian music”]. The taste for Haitian and soka music has been traditionally shared with Afro-Antillean populations in the Talamanca region of Costa Rica.

Soka and Haitian music constitute sources of enjoyment and of cultural reaffirmation of Afro-Antilleans' roots. Afro-Antilleans are aware that this music is only popular in Bocas del Toro and other regions of the country with a large Afro-Antillean population (the province of Colón and some parts of Panama City). The strong presence of these musical styles in the lives of Bocatoreneans is a source of pride and cultural distinction, and it also reflects Bocatoreneans' mobility. According to Cybert Waterman, Bocatoreneans encountered soka and Haitian music because of their transnational connections.

In Bocas there are many young men who, because they lack job opportunities, have worked on cruise ships. They leave for a year, and when they return, they bring this music; they bring soka. And they burn a CD for this guy, and this guy burns a CD for another guy, and the music starts to reach many people.³⁷

Accompanying soka and Haitian, reggae music is popular among Afro-Antilleans. Reggae is one of the many contributions of the island of Jamaica to the world of popular music. By 1968, reggae proper became an established musical genre (Manuel 1995:165). The popular expression "roots" came to signify the downtown ghetto experience of suffering and resistance as well as the African sources of Jamaican culture. In the 1970s, Bob Marley and the Wailers had achieved international stardom with their music, and other reggae players such as Big Youth, Burning Spear, Peter Tosh, Bunny Wailer, and Culture began to be heard abroad.

In Bocas del Toro, two different types of reggae are common, roots reggae and reggae in Spanish. Roots reggae is occasionally heard among older Bocatoreneans and musical connoisseurs such as deejays. There is, however, a general understanding of the Jamaican origin of reggae and, consequently, of the connections between this musical genre and the dominant Bocatorenean population. Reggae in Spanish, or Panamanian reggae (pronounced *reggê*) is one of the most popular musical styles for Bocatorenean youth. Although the older generation and the local deejays do not particularly enjoy reggae songs, they infallibly play them at parties, birthdays, and other special celebrations. As Arthur Burke, one of the most respected deejays in town, told me:

The music that is played now is scandalous, "I will kill you," and "You will kill me;" things like that or things with double meaning [sexual innuendo]. I personally don't like it, but as a deejay, as the owner of a sound sys-

tem I have to buy it, because it's not a matter of whether I like it or not, business is business.³⁸

Benjamín León, another well-known deejay, sees no musical worth in Panamanian reggae, which he believes is a hybrid of reggae and rap. "For me, reggae is Bob Marley or Yellowman.³⁹ Those people have really contributed to this genre. The music that we listen to in Panama and we call reggae is an unknown genre."⁴⁰ He feels that calling this "unknown genre" reggae is disrespectful to roots reggae. However, it is probable that one of the influences of Panamanian reggae is the Jamaican music *ragga* or *raggamuffin*, a musical genre derived from dancehall deejay music (Stolzoff 2000) and focused on "sexual boasting, drug references, and macho challenges," with an overall violent posturing and simulated gunfire (Manuel 1995:173). In Bocas del Toro, the most popular Panamanian reggae singers are Chichoman (Jiffit Donaldson), the group *Cuentos de la Cripta*, and Pepito Casanova.

Roots reggae is preferred by the older generation and by serious deejays. Young men and women prefer to listen to and dance Panamanian reggae, with the exception of a group of young Bocatorenean surfers who have made use of roots reggae music and a stereotypical Rastafarian look to attract tourists. These young men have appropriated some of the most visible symbols of the Rastafarian movement (dreadlocks, reggae music, a nature-loving, and uncomplicated lifestyle), and have claimed their Jamaican origins through them. Reggae music is also used to attract tourists to the bars and hotels where they work, as tourists who visit Bocas del Toro have established a connection between the Caribbean, reggae music and the Rastafarian movement, and request roots reggae music to be played in bars and restaurants.

In an earlier section of this article, I noted that *típico* was chosen by intellectuals and political authorities as the national emblem of Panama. *Típico* is a musical genre inspired by the Colombian musical genres *vallenato*⁴¹ and *cumbia*⁴² as well as the Panamanian genre and dance *tamborito*, which uses a type of drum traced to particular regions of Africa (Cheville and Cheville 1977:18).⁴³ In spite of this undeniable African influence, *típico* music is popularly believed to be Spanish-Indian in origin, and is characteristic of the central provinces of Panama. There has never been a *típico* singer or group from Bocas del Toro. According to Benjamín León,

The people who sing *típico* are not from Panama City or from Bocas del Toro. They move to Panama City because that is where they can be heard,

they can record a CD and sell it, but they are not from the city. They come from small cities or towns in the central provinces, those places that are really in the heart of the country and really Panamanian.⁴⁴

In Bocas del Toro, although *típico* has been performed in the last several decades, Bocatoreneans have not until recently found it particularly appealing. Not until Sammy (accordion) and Sandra (vocals) Sandoval, brother and sister, arrived from the central provinces, did *típico* become an integral component of any party or celebration. Sammy and Sandra have transformed *típico* music in several ways. First of all, the lyrics of Sandra's songs (written by Panamanian writers, including Carolina de Pérez, Christian, and Alfredo Chávez) conjure a more aggressive and assertive female performer, which Sandra embodies. In her songs, Sandra openly challenges male authority. Although her songs focus on the importance of finding a man who will love her and respect her, ("When you are here I feel like a queen/owner of the world, of infinity"), Sandra also assures her potential lover that if he does not fulfill her desires or if he mistreats her, she will look for another man who will give her "what you don't give me." As Aparicio (1997) notes, "when women sing sexist lyrics, the object of the sexism is reversed. It is empowering for many women listeners to see women performers on stage or to listen to female voices on the radio as articulations of a female subjectivity" (1997:260).⁴⁵ Daniel Domínguez, *La Prensa* journalist, says of Sandra Sandoval:

Before Sandra Sandoval, the typical popular Panamanian music was mainly the image of masculine feelings. The singers showed how men lived with and without love. In this frame, women were objects to be desired and hoped for, but they generally lacked a voice. With the arrival of this mischievous and charismatic artist, women started to have a stronger presence. Now they can say what they think and change that false image of helplessness and complete dependence on a male figure, for a more combative and free attitude (Domínguez 2002:1).

Sandra also offers reasons for men to be interested in her music by wearing seductive dresses and moving sensuously in her performances, in ways that have become her trademark. Domínguez notes that Sammy and Sandra Sandoval as a team have "transformed [...] *típico* music into a spectacle to enjoy with all our senses" (Domínguez 2002:1). In Bocas del Toro, Sammy and Sandra are considered attractive *típico* singers because they indigenize it,

transforming the genre into a quicker, faster, and “hotter” (*más picante*) music, more suitable to the taste of Afro-Antilleans.

In the past people did not dance *típico* here. You would play a *típico* song and no one would dance. Since Sammy and Sandra started playing their music, the *típico* changed its rhythm, because *típico* in the past was too soft, too slow. However, when the *típico* changed its rhythm with Sammy and Sandra people like it and dance it a lot.⁴⁶

Consequently, although *típico* music was to some extent imposed on Afro-Antilleans as the Panamanian genre that represented their nationality, Afro-Antilleans only accepted it once it was made to appeal to their ethnic tastes. Only when this particular team of musicians modified the *típico*, did Afro-Antilleans consider it interesting and appealing. Sammy and Sandra’s music opened the door for other *típico* singers, such as the famous Victorio Vergara, Los Plumas Negras, Nenito Vargas, Manuel de Jesús, Inocente Sanjur, and Christian Nieto. Sammy and Sandra are also extremely popular in the rest of the country, where they have performed in the most important celebrations and ceremonies, and they have represented Panama in international festivals.⁴⁷

Finally, it is important to briefly mention the presence of deejay sound systems, as they are essential components of the musical world in Bocas del Toro. There are a number of deejays in Bocas, but it is the general consensus that only three, all of them Afro-Antillean men, are real deejays. Working as a deejay is a well-remunerated and respected activity. Although having a sound system is a good economic venture, deejays in Bocas del Toro are not interested in the activity simply as a business. They are truly music connoisseurs and work on their sound systems with the enthusiasm and pride of an artist. They are concerned with continuously improving their musical knowledge as well as repertoire, for having access to the copies of “hot” records is what can make or break a sound system.

A good deejay is a person who is able to interact with and adapt to his audience at all times, to understand what is needed given the mood, occasion, and public audience. Cybert Waterman illustrates this point in the following manner,

I don’t know how the other [deejays] do it, but in my case ... Once, I was playing in a discothèque, there were lots of tourists. I played a *típico*, nothing; I played salsa, nothing. I played an Elvis Crespo merengue, they didn’t dance but they started moving a bit. I thought: “Aja!” I mixed the

merengue with a soka, they moved a bit more. I said: “Ok!” I played music that I know they like, from their countries, what is the name? Techno, and also rave, and ah! They started dancing. I played three consecutive tech-nos. I thought: “Maybe they are tired.” I played a merengue and they kept dancing. See? A deejay has to have [brains] and sight, to see his people, to realize how his people are doing.⁴⁸

According to the deejays, the preferred musical styles for Bocatoreneans to dance are soka, Haitian music, salsa, merengue, and other types of ‘tropical’ music. Some of the soka and Haitian songs that Bocatoreneans dance to are at least 18 to 20 years old. Given that soka and Haitian music have only become popular in Bocas del Toro and parts of Colón, it is quite difficult to acquire the latest hits in Panama City, and purchasing new CDs or tapes, in other islands of the Caribbean is not always possible. Dancing to those songs at every party and in every discothèque has become “a tradition.” The high-lights of every dancing evening are the sets (*tanda*) of soka and Haitian music. When it comes to other musical genres, however, Bocatoreneans demand the most popular and latest tunes. People’s favorite tropical music singers from 1999 to 2006 were representatives of “erotic” or “sensual” salsa, such as Gilberto Santa Rosa, Tito Rojas, Charlie Cardona, Eddie Santiago, Willie Gonzalez, Luis Pavón, the *Orquesta Ideal*, Luis Henrique, and Marc Anthony. “Classical” salsa, such as the salsa of Rubén Blades, Willie Colón, Héctor ‘La Voz’ Lavoe, and the Fania All Stars is not played in the context of a dance. Although Arthur truly enjoys this genre (“Old salsa is like old wine—the more mature, the better”), he only plays it at private parties when the clients specifically request it. Merengue, on the contrary, is a very fleeting musical style. As Arthur pointed out, “a merengue song may be popular today; you play it for five or six months, and then you almost don’t hear it again.” The most commonly requested merengue singers from 1999 to 2000 were Elvis Crespo, Olga Tañón, and Ashley. From 2004 to 2006, Ramón Orlando and Sergio Vargas were popular merengueros.

Conclusions

Atkinson notes, “as towns and cities embrace tourism for economic development, decisions on how local cultural activities are commodified for tourist consumption [...] become important factors in the shaping of local identities” (2004:181). As I have indicated in the above discussion, although

Bocatoreneans continued to listen to calypso records, live calypso music bands had not been heard in Bocas del Toro in almost thirty years. Through the recent resurfacing and reaffirmation of live calypso, in the context of tourism, Afro-Antilleans portray and display their Caribbean identity for tourism consumption. In the process, they also reassert and reaffirm their Caribbeaness to themselves, and represent their identity to the Panamanian nation-state as a fundamental and distinct group. The process of creation of national sentiment through music is evidenced in Afro-Antillean musical choices: they listen to musical genres intrinsically understood as Afro-Antillean or Caribbean, but they also listen to Panamanian *típico* or the latest *reggée* singer. By playing *típico* or salsa music in the calypso tempo, Afro-Antilleans are transforming Bocatorenean calypso into a unique genre that combines an intrinsically Caribbean rhythm, with rhythms defined and understood as Hispanic. Calypso is thus reinvented, using new lyrics, new tempo and a new thematic.

This reinvention is not without tension. The fusion that results from the experimentations of The Beach Boys is perceived differently by different sectors of society. Many Bocatoreneans view these displacements and transformations as enriching (Cf. Gilroy 1993:97). Some local authorities and Afro-Antillean intellectuals, however, regard these innovations as ‘cultural contamination’ of ‘authentic’ Panamanian forms (cf. Collins and Richards 1989; Mitchell 1993; Scher 2002). Those authorities emphasize the more traditional roots of the calypso rather than the novelty sounds developed by The Beach Boys. This conservative perspective is understandable, considering, as Gilroy asserts, that blacks have emphasized “the need to project a coherent and stable racial culture as a means to establish the political legitimacy of black nationalism and the notions of ethnic particularity on which it has come to rely” as a defensive reaction to racism (Gilroy 1993:97). The level of dependency of The Beach Boys and other calypso groups on private or public institutions may determine the extent to which their creativity will be allowed to flourish in the future. In fact, a recent change (2004) in the local authorities in charge of the Panamanian Bureau of Tourism has already produced a decline in contracts and visibility of the Beach Boys in the Archipelago.

In Bocas del Toro, Afro-Antilleans have appropriated the music that has been portrayed by the government and national elites as the virtuous representative of the nation, but they have done so in their own terms: by blending it with their own rhythms, or by accepting it only when it is quick, spicy and rhythmic enough for their particular musical taste, thus producing a ‘creative appropriation’ or ‘resignification’ (Manuel 1994). Askew (2002) reminds

us that national imageries and national cultures must be understood as processes under construction, not final products. As Bilby notes for the case of the Surinamese Maroons, “not only does the process of indigenization assign new meanings to ‘borrowed’ elements, but it fundamentally alters musical relationships to accommodate them” (1999:277). Afro-Antilleans are appropriating, transforming and replacing an ethnic commodity for their consumption, and for tourists’ consumption, producing difference rather than homogenization (cf. Bilby 1999; Miller 1995, Mitchell 1993), difference that is built into the logic of late capitalism itself (Jameson 1991; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; Comaroff and Comaroff 2001).

Cohen (2004) notes that, when faced with tourism growth, some local cultural values may be negatively affected but others may be redefined or reinforced (cf. Hannerz 1998). Similarly, Chambers (2000:121) states that anthropologists have tended to assume that distinctiveness is a result of isolation, but “there is equally compelling evidence that cultural contact through various experiences of translocality can lead to increased distinction in the forming of local identities” (cf. Abram and Waldren 1997; Bruner 1996). In fact, tourists often become the collaborators, and some times the instigators, of cultural change (Dunbar-Hall 2006;56) and cultural revival. Afro-Antilleans are creating new versions of popular musical genres, via a cross-fertilization of a pan-Caribbean musical genre with Panama’s iconic music (cf. Mitchell 1993). This is part of a familiar pattern in the Caribbean, where each new wave of musical developments has surfaced from the lower social strata, the marginal populations, the forgotten, the uncultured, the uneducated (Bilby 1999).

In Bocas, the tourism industry (managed and imposed from above) unexpectedly has provided a conjuncture for the reassertion of Afro-Antillean identities as cosmopolitan and with enough transnational connections to access musical worlds that are not the domain of other ethnic groups in the country (cf. Guilbaut 2006). While Antillean music and a more intangible ‘Antilleanness’ are undoubtedly used as marketing devices for tourism consumption, this consumption has taken on oppositional liberational signifiers, as “an-overarching ‘Afro-centrism’ which can be read as inventing its own totalizing conception of black culture” (Gilroy in Mitchell 1993:336).

As a result, Afro-Antilleans have attempted to reposition themselves *nationally* through participation in transnational circuits. This statement is particularly poignant if we consider that Panama is a highly centralized country, where practically everything of relevance for the country is produced, located in, or emanates from Panama City. The fact that ‘marginal’ Bocas del Toro

‘exported’ its artists and musical knowledge (albeit temporarily) to the rest of the country is a strong response to the “master narrative of nationhood” discussed earlier in this article.

At the present juncture, Afro-Antilleans are experiencing a cultural revival of their Antillean identities, through the process of tourism consumption. Cultural revivalism in the case of Afro-Antilleans points to the importance of rhythm, performance and spiciness in the manifestation of ethnic commodities. Calypso, soka and the new *típico* share these characteristics. Afro-Antillean men and women are portraying their identities as hot, spicy, fun-loving people who enjoy life and listen to calypso or roots reggae and dance salsa. This image clearly coincides with the stereotypical image of Caribbean people (cf. Gerstin 1998; Hintzen 2005). Beyond this superficial perspective, however, Afro-Antilleans are asserting to themselves and to the rest of Panama that they also have a musical culture that has survived a few centuries, and that remains as the repository of one of the many roots that form the Panamanian nation.

ENDNOTES

¹Title of a calypso song from a Trinidadian carnival in the 1990s (Manuel 1995:186).

²Description printed on the jacket of The Soka Boys’ CD “Follow de Leader” (1998).

³The repertoire of The Beach Boys is somewhat limited. The director of IPAT from 1999 to 2004, Mauricio López, jokingly responded to that by introducing the group in celebrations or presentations where he was the host as “the calypso group that knows 756 songs.” Before they perform each song, he pointed out: “And now, we are going to listen to song No. 124, ‘Fiesta.’”

⁴The term ‘night-a-fun’ or “night of fun” refers to parties celebrated by young and old in Bocas del Toro approximately 30 years ago. Currently, the term continues to be used on occasion.

⁵Interview M. G., May 8, 1999.

⁶This article is based on ethnographic research conducted in the Archipelago of Bocas del Toro from March 1999 to September 2000. I also conducted research in August 1997, July-August 1998, and later in July-August, and December 2002, July 2004, March 2005, and June 2006. Sections of this article are taken from my dissertation, entitled “‘Like and Alien in We Own Land’: International Tourism, Gender and Identity in Afro-Antillean Panama” (Department of Anthropology, University of Oregon, 2002). Research for this paper was conducted with the support of the Inter-American Foundation (Dissertation Fellowship Award 1998-2000), the Nippon Foundation (International Trade and Development Fellowship 1998-2000), a University of Oregon Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship (2001-2002), a University of Oregon General Fellowship (2001-2002), an Oregon Humanities Center Fellowship (2001-2002), a Center on Diversity and Community (CoDaC) Fellowship (2002), three Regis University Sponsored Projects and Academic Research Council Grant (2002, 2004, and 2005), and a Regis University Teaching, Scholarship, and Service Committee

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⁷The provinces considered part of 'el interior' in Panama are Veraguas, Coclé, Chiriquí, Los Santos, and Herrera.

⁸In fact, Juan Materno Vásquez, a Black Panamanian of colonial ancestry, known politician, and supporter of Torrijos' regime, asserted that "West Indians, speaking English, practicing Protestantism and adhering to 'strange' cultural norms, impede the perfection of the Panamanian man (*hombre nacional*) and hence of national identity" (in Priestly 1990:227).

⁹Another important element was language. With the constitution of 1941, the government of Dr. Arnulfo Arias established that Spanish was the national language in the country. According to Aníbal Reid, "people had to speak Spanish, all the signs that were posted in Bocas had to be translated to Spanish, and every foreigner who wanted to get involved in minor commerce had to register the business in the name of a Panamanian, or sell it to Panamanians" (interview A. R., April 12, 2000).

¹⁰*Panameñidad* should not be confounded with the 1930s and 1940s racist movement known as *Panameñismo*, which fostered the development of the 1941 constitution that temporarily prevented Afro-Antilleans from becoming Panamanian citizens.

¹¹According to the Panamanian National Census of 2000, there are 31,215 Kunas located in the Comarca Kuna-Yala, 6,600 in two other Kuna comarcas, and about 24,000 throughout the rest of the country. The Kuna of Kuna-Yala live in 49 communities, with matrilineal residence, and bilateral inheritance. They are governed by the *Congreso Kuna's* *sahilas*, or maximum leaders (all males) (Howe 1998).

¹²Prior to this period of intensive and deliberate tourism development by the Panamanian government, the tourism industry was present at low scale and was focused on the Panama Canal, the Colon Duty Free Zone, and the Archipelago of San Blas (Kuna Yala). The Panamanian Bureau of Tourism was created in the 1960s.

¹³The devastating present and future consequences of 'residential tourism' in Bocas del Toro are not the subject of this article and will be addressed by the author in another article in progress.

¹⁴Interview C. W., March 11, 2000.

¹⁵Interview L. M., February 1, 2000.

¹⁶Interview S. C., February 15, 2000.

¹⁷*Quinche* or *quincha* refers to a wall or roof made of rushes and mud.

¹⁸*Cutarra* refers to a pair of sandals or rough shoes. Mr. Reid may be implying that musicians from the central provinces use rough, non-refined instruments such as rustic guitars (Young, personal communication).

¹⁹Interview A. R., April 12, 2000.

²⁰Interview M. A., June 1, 2000.

²¹It is highly probable that if a tourist asked a Bocatorenean about their "typical" dances, they would respond that quadrille and May Pole are the most relevant. These two dances, although very infrequently performed, are considered to be the most representative cultural manifestations of Afro-Antilleanness in Panama (cf. Conte Guardia 1984).

²²Traditionally, calypso songs have encountered certain recurrent themes, developing from the context where the music was created. For instance, out of the concept of hunger came the calypso axioms that everything (including love, power, status and desire) required an economic base, and that without money none of those things would be achieved. Moreover, a central calypso axiom is that “no man is loved for himself, but for what he can provide” (Rohlehr 1999:227). Another common theme was the desperation felt by men who were unable to tend to their families, for the expectation of Western societies that men were to be the breadwinners and women the homemakers was imposed upon the lives of colonial subjects. Nowadays, calypso continues to maintain erotic puns, euphemisms, and sexual double entendres. The emphasis is on “whimsical wordplay rather than sexual politics” (Manuel 1995:200).

²³The city of Colón has one calypso band by the name of Atlantic Calypso Band.

²⁴In fact, *Reencarnación* was invited to play for the visit to the province of Bocas del Toro in 1995 of the internationally famous Don Francisco, host of the variety program, *Sábado Gigante*.

²⁵Interview C. P., July 7, 2000.

²⁶The Beach Boys is also the name of a famous 1950s pop music group in the United States. The Bocatorenean Beach Boys were not emulating the US artists when they chose their name; the name resembles the famous Bocatorenean *combo Los Beachers*.

²⁷Interview C. P., July 7, 2000.

²⁸Interview M. A., June 1, 2000.

²⁹Interview H. H., February 24, 2000.

³⁰Interview H. H., February 24, 2000.

³¹Interview C.R., March 5, 2005.

³²Interview C.R., March 5, 2005.

³³“*Sabor!*” (literally, flavor) and “*¡Azúquita!*” (literally, a little bit of sugar) are words used by salsa and other tropical music singers to emphasize the sweetness and spiciness of their music and the feelings that accompany it. The word “*¡Azúcar!*” has been immortalized by the famous Cuban tropical music singer Celia Cruz (1925-2003).

³⁴Interview R. S., April 9, 1999.

³⁵*Combos* or live bands were common throughout the country, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s. They played in high school celebrations, US military bases, birthdays, beach parties, boat rides, school beauty contests, Afro-Antillean lodges, *boîtes*, and dance halls. Among the many *combos* throughout the country, *Los Superiores* (Panama City), *The Fabulous Festivals* (Panama City), *The Soul Fantastics* (Panama City), *Los Dinámicos Exciters* (Panama City), *The Silverstones* (Colón), and *Los Mozambiques* (Panama City) were particularly famous (INAC 1990:9). Many of these *combos* were undoubtedly influenced by U.S. groups such as The Temptations and by singers such as James Brown. Some *combos* became famous internationally, and traveled throughout Latin America. *The Fabulous Festivals*, among the few *combos* with a female vocalist, Olivia Thousand, played along with James Brown and The Jacksons, brought to Panama in the 1970s (INAC 1990:5). *Los Dinámicos Exciters* were also well known internationally, and recorded four LPs and fifteen 45-rpm albums during their career (INAC 1990:11).

³⁶Chutney is a traditional Indian musical style. East-Indian migrants introduced chutney to Trinidad, and it has been fused with soka (Manuel 1995:217; cf. Balliger 2005). For Afro-Antilleans, the nuanced differences between soka and chutney soka are not relevant.

³⁷Interview C. W., March 11, 2000.

³⁸Interview A. B. April 26, 2000.

³⁹Yellowman is actually a famous deejay star that appeared in the Jamaican music scene in the 1980s. He is one of the most famous representatives of Jamaican dancehall deejay music (Manuel 1995:172-173).

⁴⁰Interview B. L., February 22, 2000.

⁴¹*Vallenato* is a musical genre resulting from the tradition of versification in Latin America, which includes ballads, *décimas*, *cantos*, *coplas* and *trovas*. One version of the origin of this genre traces it to the 1880s, when the accordion (imported from Germany) was incorporated into this corpus of songs. This music is now called *vallenato*, a term that means “born in the valley” (referring to Valledupar, a town in the eastern part of the coastal region of Colombia) (Wade 2000:61-62).

⁴²*Cumbia* is a musical genre considered the principal folk style of the Colombian coastal region. The dance has been interpreted as a courtship dance, “since the man circles the woman, who maintains a certain aloofness.” Wade asserts that *cumbia* represents a “subversive [. . .] act of mixture” between an Indian woman and a Black man, a union not sanctioned by the Spanish authorities during colonial times (Wade 2000:61).

⁴³*Típico* is informally called *pindín*, when discussing the more modern versions of this musical genre.

⁴⁴Interview B. J., February 22, 2000.

⁴⁵Aparicio (1997) suggests that a more feminist approach to analyzing lyrics is what she calls “listening woman” [and also listening *as* a woman] which differs from the ‘images of women’ methodology of the 1970s utilized by white feminist scholars, which strived to “decod [e] and denounc[e] literary figurations of women by male authors” (1997:260). In practice, these studies fell into the assumption that texts “reflect” reality, consequently “leading to mere psychological or descriptive comments on female characters” (1997:260).

⁴⁶Interview C. W., March 11, 2000.

⁴⁷Their popularity and economic success is so prevalent and sudden, that an urban legend surrounds them. According to the legend, Sammy and Sandra made a pact with the devil to obtain fame and fortune, and it is for that reason that the *Maligno*, an evil man dressed in white, appears in every one of their dances.

⁴⁸Interview C. W., March 11, 2000.

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