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TRANSATLANTIC CARIBBEAN

Dialogues of People, Practices, Ideas

[transcript]

GlobalStudies

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Staging the Caribbean: Dialogues on Diasporic Antillean Music and Dance in Paris during the Jazz Age¹

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The first global diffusion of Caribbean rhythms and dance moves took place during the interwar years of the 1920s and 1930s, the so-called Jazz Age.² For the first time, African-American music and Afro-Caribbean rhythms achieved broad positive acclaim in their countries of origin, often as a result of burgeoning popularity in the metropolises of the Caribbean and beyond, and transcended their local “black” working class origins. New Orleans jazz and ragtime from the United States, Cuban son and the conga, and biguine from Martinique became popular both in the respective countries and on the international stage. The boom of African-American dance music from the 1920s had different causes and manifestations in the respective metropolises. New York produced the artistic movement known as the Harlem Renaissance, which redefined what was still designated at the time as Negro music. Paris became a center for numerous genres of Afro-

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- 1 This article is partly based on my contribution to the *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* from 2011, “Race on Stage: Inszenierungen von Differenz in Musik und Tanz in Paris, Havanna und New York zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen.” In this revised version, I incorporate some ideas which were discussed in an exchange with John Cowley, with whom I am currently working on a chapter entitled “Caribbean Diasporic Culture and Politics in the Jazz Age.” I am indebted to John Cowley for sharing with me in-depth research on Caribbean music styles in Paris during the interwar years. As a reference for his work see Cowley (1999).
 - 2 The term Jazz Age is to certain extent misleading, since it does not connote the variety of musical waves from the Caribbean that left their mark during the interwar years along the coasts and in the metropolises of the Black Atlantic (cf. Hill 2013: 66).

(Latin)American music, mostly due to an appreciation there for so-called *art nègre* in the context of artistic primitivism. And, Havana saw a flourishing of Afro-Cuban dances and music in the wake of Prohibition in the United States (1920-1933). The Caribbean city welcomed 100,000 American tourists annually who sought to freely indulge the vice of alcohol consumption and were attracted by Havana's local popular culture.

This article explores processes that contributed to the globalization of Caribbean culture. It contends that music and dance genres were crucial vehicles through which actors created new ways of thinking about themselves as communities. The Jazz Age saw a rise in anti-imperialist and nationalist consciousness, fuelled by international political movements. Based on commonalities which they perceived in transnational spaces such as Paris actors began highlighting wider regional identities – such as a Latin American, Afro-Latin or Caribbean identity – and often combined them with “race,” as in the case of black nationalisms and black *latinité* (Putnam 2013: 6; Goebel 2014: 105ff, 161). During this period, locally and in the metropolises, Caribbean people from different social classes not only voiced political ideas criticizing imperialism and racism in an explicit manner in political spheres, but also discussed issues of the Antilleans' diasporization and the Caribbean culture's globalization in venues which revolved around imported and hybridizing music and dance genres.

This chapter examines some of the processes which contributed to the global popularization of music and dance genres from the Caribbean and to simultaneously establishing them as a locus of communality for a Caribbean diaspora living in Paris. Paul Gilroy (1987) has stressed the critical importance of popular culture for connections that crisscross the Atlantic and constitute global modernity. In his view, music and performance play a key role in the oppositional practices created and consumed by supranational countercultures. With the intent of operationalizing Gilroy's approach, music and dance performances and activities related to them in the following will be understood as sites.³ Popular-culture sites can be considered bustling interfaces where cultural and social processes overlap and the category “race” is negotiated in its interaction with sexuality, gender, ethnicity, and social standing (Rosaldo 1993; Kummels 2009; Wade 2009).

3 With the term “site,” I draw on Renato Rosaldo (1993: 17, 20, 194, 229). He has discarded notions of culture as an ensemble of fixed and self-contained social actions. Instead, he suggests understanding culture as a “busy intersection” where a number of distinct social processes intersect and attributions of meaning to social phenomena are interconnected.

According to Gilroy (1987: 37), music and performance are important sites for the “transfiguration” of social relations within the context of a “racial” hierarchy, since a “racial community of interpretation *and* resistance” interacts with its former oppressors.

Methodologically, I trace the routes of these diasporic cultural expressions in a way that takes into account how particular actors initiated dialogues and actively encouraged local processes of appropriation at the places they connect, such as their country of origin and their host country, as in this case France. The dialogues under scrutiny are broadly defined. Dialogue here serves as a metaphor for the economic, political, literary, and musical dimensions of interaction (see Matory in this volume). According to James Lorand Matory, contemporary interlocutors shape dialogue by creating multiple sets of relationships over time, a process that is essential for the formation of diasporic consciousness. During the first global diffusion of music from the Caribbean, the principal actors who initiated and participated in dialogues included writers, intellectuals, impresarios and patrons, as well as performers – men and women alike. In this period, the press played an important role in announcing and interpreting novel cultural attractions and thus became a vehicle for counterpolitics of diverse origin. In this regard, daily newspapers and magazines of political and cultural movements such as *Carteles* in Cuba, the Belgium newspaper *Le Soir*, the short-lived Franco-Antillean newspaper *La Dépêche africaine*, and the Panafrican journal *La Revue du Monde Noir* are noteworthy examples. In some cases, collaborations between writers, on the one hand, and musicians, on the other, were decisive in promoting new musical genres and interpreting them as part of contemporary anti-imperialistic and anti-racist political thought.

The “(e)mbodied performance and irresistible sound” (Putnam 2013: 153) of Caribbean music and dance genres contributed decisively to these developments. Circulating between metropolises in the Caribbean, North America, Europe, and Africa, they became crucial elements of stage productions in night clubs, cabarets, music halls, dancings and *boîtes*. Thus, night clubs and cabarets will also be examined here as sites, along with the artists and performances themselves. Before the introduction of television, they were important sites for the production of popular imaginaries, where expression was given to social concerns, fears, dreams, and desires. The circulation of descriptions of cabaret performances in reviews and illustrations in newspapers, on radio, and in cinema meant that they were able to reach an audience far beyond the world of cabaret itself (Vogel 2009). Beyond this, however, Caribbean music and dance genres were also popu-

larized as a subject of academic debate and avant-garde artistic interest. The sites under analysis therefore include debates about these artistic forms at the Parisian Club de Faubourg and movie screenings at the city's Studio des Ursulines.

Finally, this contribution examines how "race" was renegotiated through Caribbean music and dance in Paris, a city that developed a historically distinctive form of race relations, though at a time when conceptions and stereotypes about blackness were increasingly globalizing. Race was both a fundamental concept for the nation-state's approach to control mobility via exclusion, which in practice was put in effect by everyday understandings of national citizenship. In France, these views were culturally as well as racially inflected, despite the race-neutral terms in which citizenship, immigration and work conditions were couched in official declarations (Goebel 2014: 79). In Europe, race relations reflected the contrasting colonial strategies of the former powers Spain, England, and France in the Caribbean and domestically. Migrants who strove to counteract these practices of exclusion construed genres of music and dance as expressions of national, regional, or international communities and used terminology such as Caribbeanness and blackness. From the 1920s on, myriad versions of these new forms of consciousness circulating as popular culture upended the existing barriers in race relations. In the realm of the entertainment business, Paris, with its craze for the so-called *art nègre* and negrophilia, motivated Caribbean artists to work and even settle there. This location offered opportunities for recreating race relations, especially when African Americans from the Americas in general were eroticized and "black culture" was conceived for the first time as an integral part of universal modernity. This shift in perception took place in the context of the transnational circulation of Africanisms or "primitivisms" – discourses that assessed "blacks"⁴ and certain aspects of their culture "positively" (though

4 Due to their constructed nature, I designate the dimension of "race" and categories like "black" at this point with quotation marks. Later on in the text, they will be omitted. The racial categorization *nègre*, *negro* and *Negro* used at that time will be subsumed under the umbrella term "black" as they are all derived from the Latin word "niger, nigra, nigrum" (meaning radiant or sunburned). "Black" referring to the skin color and the origin from the African continent, is a central "racial" category that has remained remarkably constant over long periods of time and in many countries. Wade (2009: 5) points out the close correlation between the hierarchy "racial" categories defined on the basis of color/phenotype and the continent (black/Africa, white/Europe, yellow/Asia) and to the fact that both of these systems of categorization were developed by Europeans during the first wave of globalization.

in an ambivalent way) and as nationally significant.⁵ Cabarets, dancings, dance halls, and *boîtes* were prominent sites for the renegotiation of race. Who participated and dominated such negotiations? How did the press and the audience in general assess the alternative race versions that were performed? And to what extent did such performances promote identification with a Caribbean diaspora? These issues will be explored by taking a chronological approach. Beginning with the influential transnational “*Revue Nègre*” in Paris in 1925, I focus on key sites for dialogues that were initiated and carried out by writers, intellectuals, impresarios, patrons, musicians, and dancers. In analyzing the different local contexts, I rely on both secondary sources, especially biographies and the chronicles of music critics, and eyewitness accounts. Although they are mentioned only briefly, my interviews with Cuban musicians from the band Anacaona, which captivated audiences with Afro-Cuban son music during a tour in 1938 at the hot spots of the international music scene in Havana, New York, and Paris were critical for better understanding the period’s cultural dynamism.⁶

Antillean Paris: Practicing and writing about Caribbean rhythms and dance moves

From the 1920s, African-American musicians and artists from the United States and the Caribbean were increasingly drawn to Paris, where many eventually migrated. Several developments played a role in this. With the influence of New York’s Harlem Renaissance⁷ and the importance that was ascribed to literature and the arts as strategies for overcoming racism,

5 Although use of the word “primitive” as a category of analysis poses a number of problems, including a sweeping, ahistorical transfer of its European origin to (Latin-)American contexts, I will use it to illuminate the circulation of stage representations of the “black” figure in transnational spaces between the Caribbean and Europe. A broad definition of “primitivism” makes it possible to trace such circulations. According to David Luis-Brown (2008: 6), primitivist discourses create “an opposition between so-called primitive peoples and those deemed civilized or modern, usually making the case that either one or the other is a superior form of life.”

6 In 2000, I recorded, along with Manfred Schäfer, a detailed biography of Alicia Castro (1920-2014), a founding member of Anacaona (Castro/Kummels/Schäfer 2002). Over the years, I also interviewed former members of the band like Graciela Pérez (1916-2010), a singer of Anacaona from 1934-1944.

7 In the context of the Harlem Renaissance, black philosophers and writers such as Alain Locke (1999) had demanded a new collective consciousness for African-Americans (or American Negroes according to the language of the period) as a social group with common interests and a common culture.

Harlem-style popular music and dance from the night-club scene exploded internationally (Shack 2001: xvii). In Paris, and the Montmartre district in particular, ragtime, jazz music, minstrelsy, and vaudeville performances⁸ enjoyed great popularity. Beginning in the 1920s, the number of musicians and artists traveling from the US and the Caribbean to Paris grew steadily (Jefferson 2000: 1). Impresarios, night club owners, and musicians coming from Harlem and cities of the Caribbean such as Havana, Port-au-Prince, and Fort-de-France discovered favorable working conditions in the Paris entertainment industry. Most African-Americans suffered from racial segregation in the music sector of their cities of origin. Discriminatory practices, for instance, prevented black musicians in Havana from publically performing in white bands and excluded black patrons in New York from entering white-owned nightclubs.⁹ In contrast, there was a general appreciation of African-derived culture in Parisian night life that led to an exotization of black people from the United States and the Caribbean, or to negrophilia. Though racial attitudes were more permissive, as W.E.B. Du Bois and others noted with astonishment, discrimination was by no means completely absent, as will be discussed in the following.¹⁰

The Paris of the 1920s thus developed into a center of transnational Afro(Latin)-American and Antillean music and dance, which was shaped partly by the diverse immigrants who felt attracted to Paris and adventured traveling to this city, partly by the artists who were already based there. Against this backdrop, it is worth taking a closer look at the incentives and obstacles that migrants from the Caribbean faced during this era, at a time when countries devised new systems of mobility control at their political borders (Putnam 2013: 11). The differential access to France according to migratory or citizenship status granted officially on the basis of the country of origin influenced the possibilities of forming a Caribbean diaspora in Paris. Artists and intellectuals from the English-, French- and Spanish-speaking Caribbean – including performers, writers, and avant-garde painters – headed for France after the First World War because of the new opportunity structure it offered. People from Martinique and Guadeloupe had, in fact, already resided there in larger numbers since the 1820s and the

8 Minstrelsy integrated theater skits that were performed by white actors in blackface. On the genre of vaudeville theatre, a fast-paced, eclectic variety show consisting of numerous unrelated individual acts, see Kenrick (1996-2004).

9 As to Havana's racial categories and complexity during this period, see Moore (1997: 13-15).

10 For a discussion of instances of racism in the French capital during the interwar years, see Stovall (1998) and Goebel (2014: 81ff.).

islands' annexation as possessions of France. They constituted an important nucleus of French citizens from the Antilles and had a more diverse composition, with a greater share of liberal professionals and women, and a wider distribution of ages (Goebel 2014: 40). In contrast, in a first phase, Latin Americans and people from the Spanish-speaking Caribbean residing in France as "foreigners" mostly came from the urban white upper strata of their home countries. By the mid-1920s, this group reached a total population of over 15,000.¹¹ Slowly, the affordability of trans-oceanic ship fares and the fall of the French franc after the First World War opened the city to migrants with diverse social backgrounds.

By 1931, immigrants represented a large portion of Parisian population, as more than ten percent of the 6.7 million inhabitants were foreigners (Goebel 2014: 33). This presence and the concentration of these heterogeneous groups in specific Parisian quarters such as Montmartre and Montparnasse (Quartier Latin) laid the foundation for regular interaction. A community was formed through two related means: On the one hand, music and dance were an important avenue for earning a living. Migrants, therefore, sometimes found work as professional musicians for the first time in Paris (Boittin 2010: 37). At the same time, rhythms and dance moves were central elements for socializing and building a Caribbean community, as the names of nightclubs and cabarets such as Cabane Cubaine demonstrate.¹²

The novelty and impact of "La Revue Nègre"

To trace the fascination with African-American culture and its resignification by the Parisian immigrant landscape, it is worth taking a closer look at the most famous revue of the period of the *Tumulte Noir*, "La Revue Nègre," which premiered in October 1925. Its racial and gendered constructions were perceived as a turning point, though they proved controversial. The revue was the result of an innovative collaboration between cultural mediators from different national, ethnic, and social backgrounds. Caroline Dudley, a white American heiress, mounted the show and organized the

11 Due to this concentration of Latin Americans in Paris, among them many of intellectuals, artists, and politicians, Jens Streckert (2013) has termed the French metropolis as "the capital of Latin America."

12 The Cabane Cubaine emanated from the Palermo and the Cabane Bambou on Rue Fontaine. According to Jens Streckert (2013:67), the Cabane Cubaine was the central place of dissemination for Afro-Cuban jazz in Europe during the 1930s.

collaboration (Jefferson 2000; Shack 2001: 35, 54). As the daughter of a liberal doctor from Chicago, she had grown up with black vaudeville from early childhood and was inspired by the idea of exporting American black cultural forms to Paris. When Dudley was presented with the opportunity to launch a revue at the renowned Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, she assembled an extraordinary team: Along with local big names from the revue scene such as Jean-Jacques, the choreographer of the Casino de Paris, she hired a string of African-American artists, including Louis Douglas, and Senegalese¹³ Joe Alex, both Paris-based dancers, Josephine Baker, whom she had discovered in New York's Plantation Club, and 25 jazz musicians, most of whom had already played in Paris and Berlin.

The revue strove to become the first to represent black culture as an expression of world culture. Toward this end, Dudley's team consciously integrated into the lineup diverse cultural manifestations ascribed to the *nègres*¹⁴, ranging from the Dixieland music of the American South to a dance performance called the "Danse des Sauvages," purportedly from Africa. The revue was comprised of four acts dedicated to the following themes: "Mississippi Steam Boat Race," "New York Skyscraper," "Louisiana Camp Meeting," and "Charleston Cabaret." In each act, a trait commonly attributed to the *âme nègre* – idleness, melancholy, religious fervor, and sexual ecstasy – was presented in a stereotypical way. In the fourth act, the revue's climax, the narrative hearkened back to the African roots of black culture. Josephine Baker and the dancer Joe Alex, both only slightly veiled (Baker wore only a feather mini skirt and feathers on her wrists and ankles), danced the overtly sexualized "Danse des Sauvages" (Blake 2003: 94f.).

After its initial run, the press and the intellectuals of Paris attributed a significance to the revue that went far beyond the realm of mere entertainment. The majority of the critics celebrated "La Revue Nègre" as an artistic dramatization of the modern age that combined exoticism and primitivism and perfectly expressed the spirit of the times. The erotic "Danse des Sauvages" figured prominently in this reappraisal. On the one hand, the

13 According to a newspaper report of 1930 Joe Alex was from Senegal, but this information is not wholly reliable.

14 *Nègre* (which corresponds approximately to the English category of Negro) developed its own meaning and implications as a racial category in France. Bottin (2010: 89) emphasizes that its derogatory meaning was transformed in the 1920s, when the term "was repossessed by black workers who wanted their race to bespeak political engagement." It therefore began to convey more a commitment to politics than solely represent a racial category.

dance consisted of acrobatic bodily movements that highlighted Joe Alex's strength and Josephine Baker's agility, such as when she imitated a chariot wheel. On the other hand, the dancers both incorporated Charleston elements into their performance, adding shimmies, for instance, to express ecstasy.¹⁵ One writer acknowledged that the "Danse des Sauvages" recalled the earlier archaism and modernism of the Ballets Russes, though it now took the dance performance to even more exotic realms (Blake 2003: 96).¹⁶ Nevertheless, the press conveyed the general impression that the "Danse des Sauvages" depicted a particularly "authentic African" experience that was characterized by frenetic movements, the nakedness of the dancers, and Baker's "ebony body." From the perspective of the enthusiastic critics, the performance depicted primordial emotions that were unique to modern man and effectively unleashed by the dance. Gustave Fréjaville commented that the "Danse des Sauvages" was "of extraordinary audacity" and that Joe Alex "expresses with an intensity that is almost unbearable, tragically shameful, the obscure force of desire" (Blake 2003: 96). On the other hand, conservative critics largely dismissed the revue and bemoaned that it signaled the decline of classic European traditions.

One of the few more nuanced and profound critiques of "Bakermania" came from Martinican writer Jane Nardal, who published her essay "Exotic Puppets" ("Pantins exotiques") in the Paris newspaper *La Dépêche africaine* in 1928. The Antilleans running this paper had mostly written sympathetically about Josephine Baker. Some fiercely defended her against right-wing journalists who denigrated her artistry (Boittin 2010: 28-29). In contrast, Jane Nardal from the perspective of a black woman studying and living in Paris reflected on the fallacies of Baker's success as part of an

15 Janet Flanner (1973: xx-xxi), correspondent of *The New Yorker* and eyewitness, described the scene many years later as follows: "She [Josephine Baker] made her entry entirely nude except for a pink flamingo feather between her limbs; she was being carried upside down and doing the splits on the shoulder of a black giant [Joe Alex]. Midstage he paused, and with his long fingers holding her basket-wise around the waist, swung her in a slow cartwheel to the stage floor, where she stood [...]. She was an unforgettable female ebony statue. A scream of salutation spread through the theater. Whatever happened next was unimportant. The two specific elements had been established and were unforgettable – her magnificent dark body, a new model that to the French proved for the first time that black was beautiful, and the acute response of the white masculine public in the capital of hedonism of all Europe-Paris."

16 The ballet company founded in 1909 by Sergei Djagilev specialized in groundbreaking modern productions. They included fantastical narratives, abstract geometric dance figures, as well as exotic and erotic costumes.

imperial cultural consumption (Hill 2013: 71). Antillean intellectuals¹⁷, Nardal claimed, had already offered more truthful portraits of “the colored man” that transcended exoticism and primitivism, only to then experience a backlash: “[...] Josephine came, Josephine Baker you understand, and bored a hole through the painted backdrop associated with Bernardin.¹⁸ Here is that a woman of color leaps on-stage with her shellacked hair and sparkling smile. She is certainly still dressed in feathers and banana leaves, but she brings to Parisians the latest Broadway products (Charleston, jazz, etc.). The transition between past and present, the soldering between virgin forest and modernism, is what American blacks have accomplished and rendered tangible. And the blasé artists and snobs find in them what they seek [...]” (Jane Nardal 1928, in Sharpley-Whiting 2002: 109). Jane Nardal thus highlighted the dynamics of the very modern primitivist fantasies which not only fueled the success of black artists, but also imposed new racial stereotypes in the context of Caribbean music and dance. In an essay she wrote in 1928 on *Internationalisme noir*, Nardal coined the neologism of “Afro-Latin” to refer to the existing exchange between blacks from Africa and the Americas and Latin Americans in Paris and as a concept to help foster black *latinité*. It is here, that she suddenly casually thanks the (white) “snobs” for launching Negro art which together with the Caribbean arts of music and dance conquering European music halls unite blacks with regard to remembrance of a common origin in Africa. Among the diversity of black people she characterizes the Afro-Latins as a group capable of loving their Latin country and Africa at the same time. Nardal therefore aspired to a cross-way between the shared Latin cultural sphere and racial consciousness (Jane Nardal, in Sharpley-Whiting 2002: 105-107; Sharpley-Whiting 2000: 12-16).

With regard to her performance in the “Danse des Sauvages,” Josephine Baker herself likely only played a limited role in the reconceptualization of race.¹⁹ In her earlier vaudeville career, she mostly personified comical blackface characters. In this form of theater, white actors usually imitated blacks on stage by blackening their faces and mimicking certain facial expressions. Depictions in blackface consisted in stereotyping blacks, but besides also revealed an ambivalent attitude toward blacks and not an

17 She refers among others to Marius-Ary Leblond, a writer from Reunion Island.

18 This is a reference to 19th century writer Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, who exoticized the West Indies in his novels.

19 In her biography, Josephine Baker claimed to have spontaneously invented the dance in a kind of trance state; see her description in Jules-Rosette (2007: 47f.).

exclusively discriminatory one, since whites' fascination for the racial other became evident in the great pleasure they took in impersonating them on stage. Blackface was characteristic of societies with a rigid social hierarchy based on phenotypic attributions like the USA, Cuba, and South Africa (Jules-Rosette 2007: 56f.). It was both an integral part of the repertoire of minstrelsy performances and vaudeville theater in the United States and Havana's Teatro Vernáculo.²⁰ African-American entertainers and performers such as Josephine Baker also appeared later in blackface. This form of white imitation of blacks was in demand among white audiences and because it was profitable some blacks adopted this style of performance.

Dialogues of musicians and writers: Reinventing beguine and son

The dialogues that reconceptualized race, as in the case of "Danse des Sauvages," simultaneously influenced Caribbean artists, who increasingly traveled to Paris and began popularizing music and dance genres from their countries of origin. From 1924, French Antillean performers and French-speaking Africans promoted and helped popularize the beguine, a hybrid music and dance style that originated from Martinique. It combines layered West African rhythms with European melodies and harmony, and the complex instrumentation gives it a distinct Dixieland flavor. The development of this music in Paris was partly due to the legal status of Antilleans from Martinique and Guadeloupe as French citizens. Clubs in Montparnasse and on the Left Bank playing beguine gradually became a focal point for migrants from the Caribbean, local surrealist artists, intellectuals, as well as Harlem Renaissance writers, artists, and performers with their appreciation for African-influenced cultural fusions.

A bit later during this period, Cuban artists also began to make an impact on the Parisian night club scene. A single musical composition, *El Manisero* (or *The Peanut Vendor*),²¹ sparked Cuban son music's global popularity from 1930. Cuban musicians looking for good work venues overseas already began exporting their own versions of black Afro-Cuban music and dance to Paris in 1928: the *danzón*, *son*, *conga* and *rumba*.

20 The Teatro Vernáculo has been a popular form of comedy theater in Cuba since the 1860s. Its plays are largely based on stereotyped ethnic characters such as the Galician, the Chinese, the mulatto, and the black.

21 Based on a market vendor's street cry (or *pregón*), the song was written by the prolific Cuban composer Moisés Simons.

Previously, Cuban artists had engaged in a lively exchange with the US scene and, much like Josephine Baker, had also been influenced by the same trends, from minstrelsy to vaudeville (Pulido Llano 2010: 50). In 1928, some Cuban musicians found work in the Parisian nightclubs of Montmartre and Montparnasse, yet still formed parts of jazz bands or orchestras that played tango, ragtime and the Charleston and only occasionally risked including a piece of Cuban *danzón*.²² The Cuban composer of “El Manisero,” Moisés Simons, began touring New York in 1928 and Madrid and Paris in 1930. The tours and recordings of the Havanan son septet *Septeto Nacional* also contributed to Cuban music and dance’s incursions into Europe. Indeed, the *Septeto Nacional* was invited to the *Exposición Iberoamericana* in Sevilla in 1929, where they won an award for their music.²³

Dialogues between these migrating music and dance styles took place at Parisian nightclubs and cabarets such as *La Jungla* and *Le Palerme*. A great deal of cultural hybridity resulted from the intermingling of and collaboration between musicians from diverse countries with different migration statuses teaming up together to satisfy the increasing demand for Caribbean rhythms and dance moves. As a formula for success, they would emulate each other’s styles according to the genre currently en vogue. One example of this is the house orchestra of *La Coupole de Montparnasse*, a large brasserie that opened its doors in December 1927 and offered dance music from 1929 on. In the summer of 1929, the orchestra, which played a mixed repertoire,²⁴ consisted of seven musicians originating from Martinique, Guadeloupe, Barbados, and Cuba under the direction of Haitian clarinetist and saxophonist Bertin Depestre Salnave. It was replaced in May 1934 by Rico’s *Creole Band*, led by the Cuban saxophonist and flutist Filiberto Rico. Here, musicians from diverse Antillean provenance teamed up and played a “repertoire [which] deliciously mixed different rhythms from the

22 As Cuban writer and intellectual Alejo Carpentier (2012: 423) attests in 1928, Cubans formed part of jazz orchestras such as the one at *La Jungla* and they chiefly played jazz and ragtime pieces to accompany the Charleston “con un ritmo infernal.” Only occasionally did they risk playing a *danzón*. See also Ruel (2000: 43).

23 See <http://www.encaribe.org/es/article/septeto-nacional>.

24 See Meunier (2005). John Cowley has informed me that the *Creole band* nominally led by Salnave performed in *La Coupole* until December 1933. The band appears to have had several leaders, including the Martinican drummer Florius Notte (under whose name they recorded for Ultraphone in February 1931) and Cuban multi-instrumentalist Filiberto Rico.

Caribbean islands" (Navarrete 2003). Rico's Creole Band recorded several rumbas and biguines for the record company Gramophone in 1934. Don Barreto's orchestra, which performed at the Melody's Bar starting in 1935, was led by a Cuban violinist, who first concentrated on playing biguines (until 1930) and then gradually introduced Cuban rhythms.

Despite these developments, writers and musicians from the Caribbean did not wholeheartedly celebrate musical cultural *métissage*. They were also concerned to some extent with conserving the authenticity of their cultural styles in Paris, while, at the same time, they reconceptualized their national identities. *Cubanismo*, for instance, was reinterpreted with regard to cosmopolitanism and Caribbean cultures' globalization. The Cuban intellectual Alejo Carpentier was one of the actors involved in this process: His magazine articles from the late 1920s and early 1930s document how the triumph of Cuban music and dance in Paris rested upon multiple dialogues, including the one between him, French surrealist Robert Desnos, and Cuban musicians working in Paris. They were decisive for the diffusion of and the attribution of new meanings to son and further Cuban genres like danzón, conga, and rumba, which record companies such as RCA Victor, Columbia, Parlophone, and Gramophone marketed under the common catchword of "rumba." As a result of his contacts to French intellectual circles and his activities in the press and radio of both his country of origin Cuba and of France, Alejo Carpentier became a central promoter of Cuban dance and music upon his arrival to Paris.²⁵ In close cooperation with Carpentier, Robert Desnos organized evening soirées at his atelier in Rue Blomet to promote Cuban musical genres. He also published an article entitled "L'admirable musique cubaine" in the daily newspaper *Le Soir*.²⁶ As a foreign correspondent of the Cuban magazines *Social* and *Carteles*, Carpentier wrote two celebratory articles on Cuban music, "La música cubana en París" (September 1928) and "Nuevas Ofensivas del Cubanismo" (December 1929). But he did not limit himself to writing. Together with Desnos, he organized lectures on Cuban music and dance, which took place at Parisian venues such as the avant-garde cinema Studio

25 Carpentier's stay in Paris was due to the fact that he was accused in July 1927 at the "*Proceso comunista*" during the Machado government of an international conspiracy against the governments of Latin America (Chaple 2009: 9). Following the invitation of Robert Desnos, the French surrealist and writer (who had participated in 7th Congress of Latin American Journalists in Havana; see Ruel 2000: 40-42), Carpentier accompanied Desnos as a stowaway in his cabin on a ship to Paris, instead of heading as planned to Mexico (Chaple 2009: 21).

26 See Ruel (2000: 42); Carpentier (2012: 429).

des Ursulines, and the Wagram Hall of the Club de Faubourg, where members of this club such as politicians, painters, actors, and physicians organized expositions on issues of current interest. Alejo Carpentier (2012: 424) also created a soundtrack for surrealist films by Desnos and Man Ray, in which son and danzón music were played on three gramophones to produce a seamless soundscape. It was first performed before an audience of fifty persons, among them surrealist André Breton.

Carpentier considered performances such as those by Cuban singer Rita Montaner to be turning points in Cuban music and dance's transformation into cosmopolitan and globalized genres.²⁷ It is therefore worth examining the case of Montaner more closely. An actress, singer and pianist, she was already a star in Cuba by the time she traveled to Paris in 1928. It was not until 1927, after a career as an operetta singer, that she had finally begun to give priority to Afro-Cuban cultural productions. Montaner made the first commercial recording of "El Manisero," which was recorded by Columbia Records from the United States during their field trip to Cuba in November 1927. She performed blackface (called *negrito* in Cuba) in the play "Niña Rita" and even took on the role of the male black coachman.²⁸ In Paris, she had engagements at prestigious music halls such as the Palace. She delighted audiences there with son cubano songs like "¡Ay! Mamá Inés" and "Lupisamba o yuca y ñame" (Fajardo Estrada 1998: 74). These numbers came from the repertoires of white Cuban composers like Eliseo Grenet, Sindo Garay, and Moisés Simons (Sublette 2004: 386). Songs like Garay's "Lupisamba o yuca y ñame" usually had a black male first-person narrator speaking in *Bozal*, the Creole language created by African slaves who had recently been shipped to Cuba (who were likewise called *bozales*) and which combined Spanish and African languages.²⁹ *Bozal* had been integrated into stage performances in Cuba since 1830 and was used in blackface

27 However, it was not until January 1930 that examples of Cuban rhythms were put on record in Paris by the Cuban Castellanos brothers (this information was shared by John Cowley).

28 The black coachman (*negro calesero*) is a stock figure of the Cuban Teatro Vernáculo. His comic effect is produced by his vain attitude, for he is convinced that he is very handsome (Moore 1997: 47). It was unusual for a female performer like Rita Montaner to embody this male figure.

29 Sindo Garay explains that this song was the only *afro* he composed in his whole career on occasion of his engagement as part of Rita Montaner's line-up (de León 2009: 169). Contemporary whites discriminated against the *Bozal* language, alleging that it was as a corrupted Spanish. Nevertheless, African-American variants of Spanish called *Bozal* were created by the multi-ethnic and -linguistic slave groups for use as a *lingua franca*.

performances to portray blacks as simple-minded, superstitious, and comical people.

Rita Montaner, however, reinterpreted black personae in a more dignified way, as in the case of the black male in the song “Lupisamba o yuca y ñame.” She not only performed the song at the Palace, but also communicated to the Parisians her own particular version of Afro-Cubanness. The song describes a black man who is head over heels in love with a white woman and offers her tubers as a gift to express his feelings, something especially audacious for the time given his lower social status (Fajardo Estrada 1997: 74). When performing this kind of Afro-Cuban music, Rita Montaner became a new kind of cultural mediator who mixed comedy, skillful acting, and local cultural expressions (Moore 1997: 174-175). As part of her upbringing, she had acquired the ability to perform in multiple cultural registers. She grew up in the Eastern Havana district of Guanabacoa in a well-to-do middle-class family, the daughter of a white father and a mulatto mother. She was classified as a light-skinned *mulata*. Guanabacoa is known for its strong Afro-Cuban religious traditions and Montaner was herself a devotee of Santería (Estrada Fajardo 1998: 395). As Carpentier (2012: 431) remarked on her performance in Paris in 1928: “Rita Montaner has created her own style: she shouts at us with an authentic voice, with a prodigious sense of rhythm; she sings suburban songs written by a Simons or a Grenet that have the flavor of a *solar* courtyard [...]”³⁰ In Cuba, *solar* refers to a formerly spacious upper-class house in which – mostly black – lower-class families each occupied a single room. Montaner transformed this very typical Cuban space through her performance into a universal one. Here, Carpentier also alludes to the fact that Montaner no longer solely performed in the operetta style, as was common for singers of her social class at that time. Shifting between diverse vocal ranges, Rita Montaner would accordingly change between the different characters she personified in a song. A hoarse voice was part of her broad vocal range that allowed her, for example, to transform into an old black man.³¹

Over the years, Rita Montaner perfected her fluid shifting between the roles of racial and gender categories that she performed on stage. Her audiences adored this ability and she was nicknamed “Rita, *la única*.” Such impersonations and role changes also play an important role in the trance dances of Afro-Cuban religions. Cuban audience members from the lower

³⁰ Translation by the author.

³¹ Gilberto Valdés, Afro-Cuban song composer, describes this vocal technique of Rita Montaner (Giro 2009: 243). See also Moore (1997: 174f.).

class, most of whom were devotees of these religions, therefore had a special appreciation for Montaner. Carpentier in turn asserts in his discussion that this new hybrid style is *criollo* or native to Cuba. In Paris, he thus reassessed *cubanismo*, which in Cuba had been exclusively associated with Spanish culture, as having an Afro-Cuban character. This new cosmopolitan understanding of Cuban culture, which now integrated Africanisms, was part of a broader movement of reinventing Afro-Caribbean culture and transforming it into an anti-imperial space, where persons ascribed to different races could intermingle. Carpentier saw Afro-Cuban culture in this phase as “an antidote to Wall Street,” the symbol of whiteness and capitalism (Carpentier 1933, in: Kutzinski 1993: 141).

Dialogues in the cabaret and the spatialization of bodies

The example of Rita Montaner and Alejo Carpentier’s interpretation of her performance show how the understanding of black culture in Paris was expanded and repositioned in the 1920s, while the dissemination of local cultural expressions such as Cuban son fueled the wave of globalization of Caribbean music and rhythms. I now turn to the night clubs, cabarets, music halls, dancings, and *boîtes* themselves as sites for the negotiation of race as well as for the production of popular imaginaries, where expression was given to social concerns, fears, dreams, and desires – and to new subjectivities. As Alejo Carpentier discovered, Cuban conga, son, and rumba music, and dance dominated at the beginning of the 1930s in the *boîtes* of Montmartre, including the Melody’s Bar, the Cabaña Bambú, the Cabane Cubaine, and the famous Chez Florence. These clubs and cabarets became crucial for social positioning and racial ascriptions. But why was this so? When viewed from the perspective of interconnected metropolises such as New York, Paris, and Havana in the 1920s, it is easier to discern how these recreational venues became key locations where the concept of a modern lifestyle was developed in close relationship to concepts of race and sexuality (Vogel 2009; Kummels 2011: 242f.; Jacotot 2013). Decried by opponents as dens of vice, cabarets were celebrated by supportive patrons and artists as sites of cultural creativity that not only allowed for permissiveness, but also the overcoming of racial, social, and sexual restrictions (Vogel 2009: 3). The transformative potential of the cabaret was based on its unique characteristics. Since performances were not limited to the stage, it was a place where the traditional boundaries between the artists and the audience became blurred. The simultaneous enjoyment of food and drink during a performance also made for a uniquely intimate setting

(Vogel 2009: 60f.). These innovative spatial and performative practices of the cabaret were developed in transnational circuits. Parisian prototypes, like the Chat Noir, founded in 1881, were emulated in New York from 1911. In the wake of the Paris *Tumulte Noir*, New York cabarets such as the Cotton Club were, in turn, re-exported to Paris. Havana's cabaret culture, for its part, influenced and was also influenced by the metropolises to the north (Lam 2007: 142f.).

The cabarets in Paris were not uniform. Instead, they were oriented towards different audience segments and had varying degrees of exclusivity. This is illustrated by the distinction between "high-class" *soirée dansantes* like Les Ambassadeurs on the Champs-Élysées, with its tea time and supper club revue, and Montmartre's expensive, though more inclusive, *boîte* Chez Florence. After the show ended around midnight in Les Ambassadeurs, white customers fascinated by African-American cultural forms increasingly migrated over to the dancing at Chez Florence, managed by famous African-American entertainer Florence Embry Jones. The club was racially mixed and put on shows that privileged Caribbean rhythms (Castro/Kummels/Schäfer 2002: 171ff.). As I will discuss later, the Caribbean dances adopted in France became an important site for representing the couple, desire, and race in a new form (Boittin 2010; Jacotot 2013). Patrons and musicians like the Cuban son septet Anacaona were important actors, for they contributed to the dialogue between the music scenes of Les Ambassadeurs and Chez Florence and thus connected these sites. Anacaona, an all-woman ensemble, established itself in Havana beginning in 1932, despite being confronted with the Havana entertainment industry's discrimination against female instrumentalists (Kummels 2006: 267). The band's international success began following its recording of several son pieces for RCA Victor in Havana in 1937, which were distributed in the US, Europe, and Africa. After performing as the opening act at the Havana-Madrid on New York's Broadway, the Cuban all-women band teamed up with Alberto Socarrás, a Cuban soloist on the transverse flute. Socarrás had made a name for himself in New York as the leader of his own rumba orchestra and pioneered Latin Jazz. Havana-born Alicia Castro (1920-2014), a double-bass player, traveled to Paris with five of her sisters and black singer Graciela Pérez as members of the band Anacaona. They performed as one of most highly coveted acts at the noble Les Ambassadeurs on the Champs-Élysées in April and May 1938. At the Les Ambassadeurs, the female band formed part of an internationally oriented revue that combined what were now perceived as exotic variations of world culture like son, tango, waltz, and jazz. Show girls in sequined bathing suits from the International Casino

of New York danced to their rhythms in a “tropical” revue. The show’s climax was a “typical Cuban” conga, in which all of the patrons were encouraged to join in (Castro/Kummels/Schäfer 2002: 172). The Cuban composer Eliseo Grenet helped create this greatly simplified, Europeanized form of the original carnival dance from Cuba. Here, the dancers lined up and executed their steps in unison, first left, then right, with rhythmic accent being put on the fourth beat.

Anacaona additionally appeared every night after midnight in a program with Django Reinhardt’s Quintette du Hot Club de France at Chez Florence. This *boîte* was managed by Florence Embry Jones, who explicitly sought to introduce a more egalitarian ethos into the city’s night life (Vázquez 2013: 110f.). The demand for authentic local cultures was met by the club’s joint program of female Cuban musicians and *tsigane* artists. One new development here was that female instrumentalists were now being appreciated for their mastery of authentic cultural forms such as Afro-Cuban son music. Numerous women actors, from host Embry Jones to Anacaona’s instrumentalists and son singer Graciela Pérez, deserve credit for having decisively created an important transnational space of exchange (Vázquez 2013: 115). Compared to other venues, audiences at the Chez Florence were more mixed in terms of race and class. This was due to both the *boîte*’s history as a more permissive place and the demand for the authentic Caribbean cultural forms that were presented there. The *boîte* not only attracted American intellectuals and French surrealists. It was also one of the places where the workers of the Parisian nightlife could party after their shifts to the early hours of the morning (Blake 1999: 113). At the Chez Florence, these workers of the leisure industry mingled with persons at the top of the social echelon such as Marlene Dietrich and the Duke of Windsor (Castro/Kummels/Schäfer 2002: 174). They also contributed in a dialogical manner through music and dance to the creation of local cultural expressions from the Caribbean that could not be found at Les Ambassadeurs. Anacaona’s instrumentalists made a political statement, not only by playing son, both a local Cuban genre and a formerly male-dominated site, but also by adopting the name of Anacaona. The name referred to a Taino political leader, composer, and noblewoman from the island of Hispaniola (Haiti/Dominican Republic), who was executed for alleged conspiracy by the Spaniards around 1500. The band contributed to turning her into a symbol of Caribbean resistance (Vázquez 2013: 101).

Boîte audiences were less interested in the conga dance than the erotic couple dances and the accompanying music that Caribbean bands, among them Anacaona, would play there. Patrons transformed these dances into a

new discourse about the couple, desire, and race, which was evaluated from different perspectives. Because of such transformations, Caribbean dances were generally under a great deal of scrutiny. Already in the 1920s, the eroticization of dance, white women performing “black” dances, and racially mixed dance partners were subjects of public discussion. The Nardal sisters, for example, wrote several articles on biguine dance. In one piece, they defended it in its original Martinican form against the “obscene” Parisian version as a respectable dance which “express[es] a languorous grace and an extreme liveliness [that] mimics the eternal pursuit of woman by man” (Andrée Nardal, in: Sharpley-Whiting 2002: 54). In the meantime, scholars like Alejo Carpentier as well as writers of a feminist newspaper represented white women (e.g. the legendary French actress and singer Mistinguett) dancing to Caribbean rhythms as objects of ridicule (Carpentier 2012: 438ff.; Boittin 2010: 60). Despite such debates, however, new forms of mixed race couplehood were overtly performed in night clubs, cabarets, music halls, dancings, and *boîtes* and thus widely celebrated. George Brassai’s later famous images of the racial diversity of dancers and audiences at the Cabane Cubaine also attest to this. These different perspectives demonstrate that dance and the spatialization of bodies in nightclubs constituted new and powerful forms of dialogue.

Concluding remarks

Conceptualizing a range of different sites such as high-class nightclubs and *boîtes* geared toward diverse audiences and sites of academic and artistic debate as dialogues holds great promise as a research approach. It allows for discerning the interconnections between seemingly divergent and mixed social settings, where actors intermingled on the basis of different cultural expressions and media such as music and dance, academic and public debate, as well as print journalism. While these media served to express ideas in fundamentally diverse ways (some being embodied and others not), they were simultaneously connected to each another because of their reciprocal references. Examples of this include newspaper articles commenting on Caribbean rhythms and dance moves and academic lectures at the Club du Faubourg and the Studio des Ursulines, which even included music and dance expositions for didactic purposes. Night clubs, cabarets, music halls, dancings, and *boîtes* have not yet received their due in the research as crucial transnational spaces probably because of the relatively small number of actors and their casual mention in writing, photography, and oral history. However, these venues in particular were hotbeds for imported and

hybridizing music and dance genres as well as a diversity of patron interactions. They are therefore sites that provide important cues and reveal dialogues about, among other things, the Antilleans' diasporization and Caribbean culture's globalization. These venues display diverse formulations of diasporic Caribbeanness, ranging from gendered symbols of Caribbeanness such as the Taino noblewoman Anacaona, reconceptualizations of the national character of music and dance to more encompassing horizons of identity such as black *latinité*. In this period, nationalisms with regard to music and dance were reformulated: Son and biguine were both defended as national cultural forms and at the same time these national cultural forms were cosmopolitanized, since they were now also considered as constituting world culture. Alejo Carpentier, for example, attributed to Cuban singer Rita Montaner the ability to displace Havana's *solar* courtyard to Paris and interprets this kind of Afro-Cuban culture as an "antidote to Wall Street." The cultural politics with which he and other Parisian actors reconfigured Antillean cultures and Paris as an anti-imperialist space provided an outlook that extended far beyond the imperial attitudes of the Jazz Age.

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