

Cuban Culture All Grown Up: A Study of the Influences on Contemporary Cuban Culture

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Abstract

Cuba has faced many cultural influences during its long and tumultuous history. Spain ruled Cuba and acted as the island's major source of cultural inspiration until the War for Independence. After that point the United States acted as a neo-colonial force dominating Cuban politics, economy and culture. The Cuban Revolution brought in the Soviet Union as the major ally until the collapse of the Socialist bloc 30 years later. Throughout all of these changes in alliance Cuba has managed to form its own unique culture using the traditions of all those who have passed through the island. This paper initially set out to find specifically Spanish influences but the research soon revealed that to talk about one influence to the exclusion of others was to miss out on what makes Cuban culture so vibrant and unique.

Cuba has been a subject of interest and desire for Americans for over two hundred years. During the 19th century many Americans believed that Cuba would fall naturally into the open arms of the United States as another slave holding state (Schoutlz, 2009, 8). After Cuba gained its independence from Spain, the United States quickly stepped in as Cuba's second colonial master and took control of most of the major industries. During the 1940s and 1950s Cuba was widely known as exotic play land filled with rum, cigars and sensual woman. After Fidel Castro's overthrow of Fulgencio Batista the mysterious glamour of the island faded for a few decades and the image became one colored by fear and communist red. As Cuba has once again becomes more open to tourism, more foreigners are able to see Cuba and scholars are presented with new opportunities to discover how Cuban culture has evolved during the Castro dictatorship.

The motive behind this paper was to uncover the Cuba behind the Buena Vista Social Club, the old cars and the Communist regime. The paper initially set out to explore the extent of the Spanish culture, Cuba's first colonial power, on Cuba's contemporary culture. Given Cuba's long period of colonization under Spain it was expected that Spanish customs would still dominate many expressions of culture. To get a more complete picture of Cuban culture this paper will examine the evolution of Cuban film, music and food. Each section will discuss the history of each medium and trace the influences. The research for each section quickly revealed that finding Cuba's cultural influences would not be as simple as comparing and contrasting Cuba and Spain. Therefore in order to come to a more well rounded conclusion the focus of the paper shifted to include a wider range of sources so that Cuban culture could be better understood.

Film

Cuba has faced centuries of colonialism under some of the world's greatest powers. Spain ruled Cuba for about 400 years making Spain the longest lasting cultural presence. It follows that Spain had the longest time to plant cultural roots that would continue to flower to this day. Perhaps due to the fact that film did not gain popularity until after Cuba's independence from Spain, Cuban film shows little relation to contemporary Spanish film. Today, Spain has a well respected film industry and has produced international stars such as Pedro Almodovar, Javier Bardem and Penelope Cruz. But during the early years of film Spain's small industry, they did not have the capacity to reach international audiences. Early Spanish cinema was heavily localized and showed scenes reflective of their national culture (D'Lugo, 1997, p. 1). In the 1930s, most films followed the norms of popular culture, culture produced and consumed by common people, often lower class. This meant many films had regional, especially Andalusian scenes, and folkloric pieces like musicals (D'Lugo, 1997, p. 7). Though Spanish films became more socially aware leading up to the Spanish Civil War, the victory of General Franco's nationalist forces stamped out any hope of an independent cinema (D'Lugo, 1997, p. 16).

Since Spain lost Cuba before film became a widely popular form of entertainment, Spain had little direct involvement in the development of Cuba's film industry. At that point the United States had become the neocolonial presence in Cuba and American influence stretched from politics to business to the cinema. Film arrived on the island right after Cuban independence and was quickly adapted to help Cuba gain an upper hand in the tourism industry (Chanan, 2004, p. 53). Films were produced that catalogued the best Cuba had to offer and geared towards American tourists (Chanan, 2004, p. 54). As Cuba moved into the second decade of the 20th

century, the themes of Cuban films expanded to include nationalist topics. As scholar Michael Chanan summarizes, “a regime as shaky as that of the Cuban republic had every need of the means to legitimize itself” and film provided a way to do that (Chanan, 2004, p. 66). Films quickly passed that boundary and into the arena of entertainment. Soon theaters were spreading across the country and “cinema became the most widely distributed and available form of commercial entertainment in Cuba” (Chanan, 2004, p. 69).

After the first introduction of film and up until World War I Cuban theaters were dominated by European films (Chanan, 2004, p. 68). French films were especially popular thanks to the early introduction of French film company Lumiere (Chanan, 2004, p. 70). After war broke out in Europe, European film production all but stopped and the United States quickly rushed in to fill the empty screens with American stars (Pérez, 1999, p. 283). For the United States film studios, movies were more than exportable entertainment. The influx of American made films provided an opportunity for greater exposure to the American lifestyle (Pérez, 1999, p. 225). These films, in effect, were long advertisements for American mannerisms, slang, fashion, beauty and lifestyles (Feeney, 2006, p. 325). They also exported the American vision of the world. In American-made films, Latin Americans typically played the villainous character and scenes which took place in Latin America were depicted as being dirty and filled with shady creatures (Chanan, 2004, p. 100). Films also added to already strained race relations by making all black characters dumb and cowardly (Chanan, 2004, p. 101). Regardless of their negative portrayal, Cubans continued to flock to the theaters. The United States noticed Cuba’s appetite for American movies and happily supplied it by heavily investing in the island. Cuba claimed 27 percent of all of Hollywood’s investment in Latin America and by the 1950s no “Latin American city was more saturated by Hollywood than Havana (Feeney, 2006, p. 324). The consequence for

Cuban film makers was a limited market dominated by American distributors (Chanan, 2004, p. 76).

American film producers shared both intentional and unintended messages through their films beyond the latest hairstyle. Many American movies promoted heroes who were not reliant on anyone and were always able to save the girl just in time. The themes of many of these movies were independence and self-reliance, two qualities Cuban politics lacked during the turbulent decades after independence (Pérez, 1999, p. 224). Hollywood films were also intensely pro-American and carried a heavy dose of national pride. For Cubans who did not have the same emotional attachment to the United States, the American films that promoted themes of national pride stirred Cuban national pride and fed a growing anti-American sentiment (Feeney, 2006, p. 321). Film critics also bemoaned the language difference between the stars and the audience in American-made films. Jorge Manach, a film critic of the time, rallied around his imported mother tongue because he felt that American films attacked a vital part of Cuban culture, its language (Feeney, 2006, p. 332). Remakes of American movies in Spanish were made starting in 1930. These films replicated the original story but were portrayed by Spanish-speaking actors and supervised by Spanish-speaking directors (Chanan, 2004, p. 82). Spanish speaking audiences found these efforts unsatisfactory because the remakes were made carelessly on a low budget and sometimes were used simply to get theaters to invest in equipment for talking pictures so that audiences could hear the Spanish (Chanan, 2004, p. 82).

Though the Anti-American film critics could not stop the wave of theaters being built across the island, American cultural penetration became more apparent to casual observers (Pérez, 1999, 284). As Cuba continued to be more overtaken by the need to emulate American movie stars, some began to notice the heavy burden of American culture (Pérez, 1999, p. 334).

Many film critics saw the film industry as another example of the “power of foreign capital” keeping Cuba down (Feeney, 2006, p. 326). There was a sense of betrayal among Cubans slammed with debt after the ‘Dance of the Millions’ and again after the Second World War (Pérez, 1999, p. 447). Cubans had bought into the idea of the American lifestyle by buying everything the movies told them they had to have and yet when the price of sugar dropped that lifestyle could not be maintained (Pérez, 1999, p. 447).

Some intellectual film critics tried to dissuade Cuban audiences away from American movies that glorified capitalism (Feeney, 2006, p. 328). Not because they felt that European films were superior or because they were opposed to the language barrier but because they feared the possible societal impacts of American films (Feeney, 2006, p. 328). There was one American import that both the general audience and the film critics seemed to enjoy together was British-born Charlie Chaplin (Feeney, 2006, p. 330). He kept both groups happy because he had the ability to stay in the middle ground between elitist cinematic art and low-class entertainment (Feeney, 2006, p. 330). He could entertain a crowd while “[illuminating] the human condition” through comedy (Feeney, 2006, p. 331). His idealism in the face of harsh reality registered with Cuban viewers who saw themselves fighting an impossible culture war (Feeney, 2006, p. 331).

Even though American films ranked number one during the inter war period there were shifts in Cuban taste. During the 1920s American films saw the most competition from movies from Italy, Germany, France and Spain but by World War II the most competitive films came from Mexico and Argentina (Chanan, 2004, p. 77). For many Cubans watching Mexican or Argentinian films meant being able to understand what the actors were saying, a bonus when trying to follow a plot. Mexican films still followed the guidelines set out by Hollywood and tended to be rather melodramatic (Chanan, 2004, p. 78). Many Mexican films glorified the old

hacienda life of pre-Revolutionary days (Chanan, 2004, p. 79). Cuban cinema began producing history-forgiving melodramas as well because any internal production effort was usually run by the Mexican film industry through coproduction agreements (Chanan, 2004, p. 86). In the early 1950s Cuba also co-produced with Argentina (Chanan, 2004, p. 86). But even with the outside help, Cuba's film industry suffered. Even though Cubans came by the droves to see films the return to producers was not big enough to make even a cheaply made movie worth the investment (Chanan, 2004, p. 87).

Some Cuban intellectuals also laid the foundation for a larger protest against Hollywood's domination of the theaters. Due to the inability for Cuban filmmakers to find outlets for their work cinema took "a key position in the radical cultural consciousness in Cuba" (Chanan, 2004, p. 108). Aficionados of cinema made their own films and organized their own clubs in order to discuss and promote their vision of Cuban culture. The most important of the aficionado films was *El Megano*. Directed by Julio Garcia Esponosa, who would later head the ICAIC, the film was a documentary that employed neorealist techniques to condemn the horrendous working conditions of the charcoal burners in the Zapata Swamps (Chanan, 2004, p. 109). The Church also became an actor of the political scene. Churches around the country set up cine clubs as a response to the more leftist groups sprouting up around the country (Chanan, 2004, p. 108). Though very different, both groups used film as a way to examine and discuss films and make films from the Cuban point of view (Chanan, 2004, p. 108).

All the exploration done by these radical groups in the forties were given new purpose after the Revolution in 1959. Though the new regime had to establish a government and reinvigorate the economy they wasted no time in setting up a national cinema. Film was taken very seriously by the Revolutionary government who viewed cinema as way of getting their

message heard (Chanan, 2004, p. 119). During the campaign in the Sierra Maestra the rebel army had shown the value of media by using the radio to not only encourage support but educate people on what the rebels' ideas really were (Chanan, 2004, p. 118). Once the rebels had taken control of Havana they quickly put film to use in the revolutionary crusade. Che Gueverra himself opened a "military cultural school" only weeks after Batista had fled (Chanan, 2004, p. 119). Documentaries were immediately commissioned on the subjects of agrarian reform and urban housing reform, two issues of great importance to the revolution (Chanan, 2004, p. 120). Due to the revolutionaries' desire to educate the people, documentaries became a crucial part of the new Cuban film industry. This period was known as the "aesthetic revolution in documentary cinema" which benefited from the preceding avant-garde movements abroad (Rodriguez-Mangual, 2008, p. 302). Famous directors such as Tomás Gutiérrez Alea "were originally trained to make documentaries" and started their careers documenting the revolution for the consumption of Cubans alone (Rodriguez-Mangual, 2008, p. 303). These documentaries set out to film the results of the revolution and bring their findings to the rest of the country (Stock, 2009, p. 7). The documentaries were not just for the rural people. Many of the documentaries, especially those produced within the first year, focused on the lives campesinos so that people living in urban areas could better understand the lives of their fellow countrymen (Chanan, 2004, p. 125). There was a cultural turn from the urban to rural lives. During the first 25 years of the revolution half the films made were documentaries (Wood, 2009, p. 514). This shows that revolutionary cinema was opposed to the profit principles of Hollywood. It was not about allowing the audience to escape and find a happy ending. Cuban films were about educating people about the Revolution and making them think (Wood, 2009, p. 513).

While most of the documentaries were about educating people either on the revolution's policies or mobilization of the population, some focused on more diverse topics. One example, *Ritmo de Cuba* (Rhythm of Cuba), looked into Afro-Cuban folk music (Chanan, 2004, p. 130). Focusing solely on African music, the movie demonstrated an important departure from the way Afro-Cubans were treated before the revolution as well as how they were portrayed in pre-revolutionary films. This documentary also demonstrated that at this time the ICAIC were in step with the ideas and goals of the leaders of the revolution (Chanan, 2004, p. 131). The ICAIC chose its topics with care so any documentary subject had a particular meaning and purpose to the institution (Chanan, 2004, p. 131).

Not long after the ICAIC began producing films it ran into some constraints. Fidel in his famous address later named "Words to intellectuals" tried to calm the fears of artists who believed their work would be restrained by the ideology of the revolution. He explained that those who were revolutionaries would have nothing to worry about (Chanan, 2004, p. 141). The rule of thumb became "within the Revolution, everything; against it, nothing". To stay within these bounds filmmakers began constructing fiction pieces that simultaneously told a story and carried an acceptable political message (Chanan, 2004, p. 143). This eventually developed into what would be known as "imperfect cinema". Julio Garcia Espinosa first used the term "imperfect cinema" after the release of his *Adventures of Juan Juan Quin* (Chanan, 2004, p. 145). He described the concept as an style "which embodied his ideas regarding the development of a counter-Hollywood film style" (Quiros, 1996, p. 279). Cuba was not alone in its desire to create films that had more than glamorous people and fairy tale endings. A trend of socially conscious film was sweeping through Latin America. This movement was "dedicated to the people of the continent and their struggles for cultural, political and economic autonomy" (Lopez

1988, p. 94). Without being forced to be pure propaganda, the films of imperfect cinema were still expected to serve a utilitarian function (Quiros 1996, p. 285). In 1971, Armando Hart addressed the Primer Congreso Nacional de Educacion y Cultura and said that “politics in Cuban cinema is not a subtext that either the filmmaker or the critic can include or leave out; it is the inevitable and ever-present inter text of the aesthetic” (Wood, 2009, p. 513).

Many Cuban directors were influenced by European sources. Cubans found themselves in a situation similar to that in Italy, which allowed them to appreciate Italian neorealism (Chanan, 2004, p. 147). Both countries faced shortages and had been suppressed commercially by Hollywood films (Chanan, 2004, p. 147). For many in the Cuban film industry neorealism was a “model for an appropriate cinema -- a humanist and progressive aesthetic” that truly contrasted with the social order of before the revolution (Chanan, 2004, p. 163). In order to overcome obstacles such as budget restraints and the loss of professionals, the Cubans employed some stylistic techniques associated with Italian neorealism. Examples of these techniques included filming not in studios but in the streets and using “‘natural actors’ instead of professionals” (Chanan, 2004, p. 149). Cubans also found inspiration in old Soviet classics but felt no need to remain within the artistic bounds set by them. In his first comedy, director Tomás Gutiérrez Alea set the Soviet story “the Twelve Chairs” in post-revolutionary Cuba. Using neorealist techniques Gutiérrez used the story to show a changing society and the difficulty people sometimes have in adapting (Chanan, 2004, p. 161). French New Wave also became more attractive to Cuban directors because it was young, cheap and rebellious (Chanan, 2004, p. 165). Cuba began showing a wide variety of films from not only Soviet bloc socialist countries but other European nations in order to promote a more discerning taste among Cuban audiences (Chanan, 2004, p. 178).

The combination of outside influences lead many directors to comment on social issues by ending the movie with unresolved conflicts. The audience was left to reflect on what would happen to the characters in these circumstances and determine whether or not that reflects well on society. After the fall of the Socialist block, “Cuban film-makers needed to prod, coax and cajole their spectators into new ways of thinking” (Davies, 1996, p. 180). Viewers in many cases were not supposed to leave feeling satisfied and that nothing needs to change (Craig, 2008, p. 531). May Cuban films were focused on educating and expanding the minds of the people and were therefore made primarily for the domestic market (Davies, 1996, p. 178). Sometimes films included references to daily life that Cubans would be familiar with but foreigners might not pick up on. Revolutionary cinema is constantly “actively seeking to bind the nation together in a common national experience” by examining societal problems as a national community (Wood, 2009, p. 515). Even 50 years after the Revolution Cuban film attempts to define *cubanidad* and stretch it to fit as many Cubans as possible (Wood, 2009, p. 515).

Addressing social issues, such as women’s rights, has become a prevalent issue in Cuba. More films attempting to show the difference between men and women in Cuban society are being produced. However, as much as the Revolution and the filmmakers want to show a Cuba with equality for all, sometimes their films betray the unfortunate truth. Scholar Guy Baron (2010) points out that “films that attempted to produce images of gender equality, or at least the possibility of such, merely provided the illusion of equality while maintaining the status quo of patriarchy” (354). The films *Lucía*, *Hasta cierto punto* and *Portrait of Teresa* exemplify this failed attempt at social equality through film.

Lucía is a film of three parts each depicting a woman named Lucía in a different volatile period of Cuban history (Solás, 1968). The first is the Lucía of 1895, a woman in love with a

Spanish officer who is using her to find out information about the revolutionaries hiding on her family's coffee plantation (Solás, 1968). When she discovers he used her Lucía kills him in a desperate act of retaliation. This can be seen both as an individual act of rebellion against colonial repression as well as an example of the struggle against gender differences (Schroeder Rodríguez, 2008, p. 133). The number of people participating in the rebellion grows in the next part which shows Lucía of 1932 involved with the struggle against General Machado (Schroeder Rodríguez, 2008, p. 136). Their success is depicted as limited due to the group's restrictive bourgeois ideas of capitalism and gender roles (Schroeder Rodríguez, 2008, p. 136). True freedom only comes in the final segment that shows Lucía living sometime in the early 1960s trying to gain equality with her husband (Solás, 1968). While this may seem like a film focused on the decades long struggle for gender rights the director, Humberto Solás, never intended it to be a feminist film or even a gendered one. Solás intended the film to be a social commentary of Cuba's development from colonialism to capitalism to communism (Schroeder Rodríguez, 2008, p. 130). He wanted the audience to appreciate how social problems are formed but are often left with an open end and little resolution (Martin, 2001, p. 2). Ultimately, the film does little to critique the prevailing patriarchal structure and instead simply points the blame backward at Spanish and then American influences.

Hasta cierto punto is a story about a director making a film on machismo who falls in love with a woman he interviews as part of his research (Gutiérrez, 1983). Director Tomás Gutiérrez Alea attempts to keep the criticism directed inward by making the protagonist a director and casting his own wife as the director's mistress. In this way he "subjects himself to the same critical gaze as his characters and Cuban society more widely" (Wood, 2009, p. 519). The film becomes a way of comment on how intellectuals discuss the failures and successes of

the Revolution (Wood, 2009, p. 518). The film's protagonist, Oscar, attempts to make a documentary about machismo in revolutionary society. But Oscar, and the film as a whole, get sidetracked by a love affair (Gutiérrez, 1983). Instead of focusing on machismo and the treatment of women in revolutionary society, the camera focuses on his mistress' body and only tells the story from his point of view (Baron, 2010, p. 359). Oscar stops questioning machismo and begins living up to its expectations by keeping both women at a distance without letting either one of them go (Gutiérrez, 1983). Even though Lina, his mistress, is portrayed as independent and strong, she continues to follow the rules of patriarchy and waits around for him to leave his wife (Baron, 2010, p. 358). Somehow, throughout the film Oscar is still the sympathetic figure and the patriarchal system remains firmly in place (Baron, 2010, p. 360).

Portrait of Teresa appears unable to adequately challenge gender roles through its examination of one woman's life. Teresa is an exemplary revolutionary woman; she works long hours in her job at a textile factory, volunteers in the union's cultural group and raises three children (Vega, 1979). Instead of portraying her as a powerful woman, the film deprives her of any possible agency and portrays her as an easy victim to machismo. Not only is she shown as selfish and unwilling to compromise with her husband Ramon, she seems unable to cope with her own work problems (Vega, 1979). Instead of relying on her own skills she must be helped along by a sympathetic man (Benamou, 1994, p. 54). Viewers do not sympathize with Teresa at all. The film does not confront gender stereotypes because Ramon's extramarital affairs are shown on screen on screen but there are only hints of Teresa's. The three films, *Lucía*, *Hasta cierto punto* and *Portrait of Teresa*, highlight three powerful female characters portrayed by talented actresses but the films still remain somewhat masculine because they are all made from the perspective of male directors (Chanan, 2004, p. 364).

Revolutionary filmmaking also falls short of idealized goals when it comes to portrayals of race. Fidel himself has largely remained silent on the issue mostly because he believes class issues are more important and therefore by eliminating class through the revolution the issue of race has been resolved (Serra, 2004, p.136). During the 1960s there was a general silence on race and most Afro-Cubans in films appeared as extras or secondary characters (Serra, 2004, p. 141). Still many directors claim that “Cuban cinema is neither black nor white” and that there is no “real difference between Cuban and Afro-Cuban culture, on the grounds that the former is already imbued with the later” (Chanan, 2004, p. 364). In the 1970s most representations of race were folkloric (Serra, 2004, p. 143). Afro-Cubans and black culture in films were limited to roles focused on themes relating to black history (Chanan, 2004, p. 365). In *Lucía*, there is a brief scene in *Lucía* of 1933 where black and white women sit next to each other. This is an attempt to show the evolution of racial equality but it does little to convince critical viewers of the existence of true racial equality in Cuba (Mraz, 1975, p. 11). Elpidio of *La vida es silbar* is an important breakthrough for a character not only because he is Afro-Cuban but because he represents the Afro-Cuban community as a group that feels marginalized (Pérez, 1998). Elpidio is able to confront his mother, named Cuba, and ask why she demanded so much of him (Serra, 2004, p. 142). His demand for recognition could also be pointed at the film community who rarely gave black actors principle roles in films without specific black themes because “whiteness remained the paradigm of the handsome and the beautiful” (Chanan, 2004, p. 365).

The portrayal of gays in Cuban film is a subject of great debate thanks to the astounding success of *Fresa y chocolate* (Chanan, 2008, p. 361). For the first 30 years of the Revolution homosexuals simply were not in films because of the anti-homosexual stance of the government. The release and subsequent success of the film *Fresa y chocolate* has thrown the discussion of

homosexuality in Cuba to the mainstream. Director Tomás Gutiérrez Alea once again pushed boundaries by making a film primarily about the relationship between a religious gay man and an atheist Communist student. Some have viewed the film as proof that Cuba was loosening up and that society was ready to be more tolerant of gays (Santí, 1998, p. 407). The issues in the film and the fact that it was well received may indicate that society has matured and become more tolerant (Birringer, 1996, p. 67). The film includes the marginalized parts of Cuban life such as praying to Santería idols and the existence of imperfections in Cuban socialist society. Diego's collection of cultural masterpieces as well as his habit of consuming foreign liquor and other illegally obtained goods encourage average Cubans to identify with him (Davies, 1996, p. 178). Nancy, Diego's neighbor seems to be the ultimate paradox of Cuban life because she is the neighborhood vigilante but also a prostitute and a dealer on the black market. Her role is conflictive because even though she is independent and freed from traditional roles, she is wildly unstable, perhaps due to her untraditional and illegal lifestyle (Davies, 1996, p. 179). The film's main story line shows that reconciliation between the two extremes of Cuban political identity is possible through dialogue (Santí, 1998, p. 409). Gutiérrez and script writer Senel Paz make Diego sympathetic to a wide range of Cubans by mentioning his activity in the literacy campaign of 1961. The audience is also reminded that it is possible to love Cuba and not have the exact same ideas as the hardliners. In fact the film "seems to be making the point that Cuba and the Revolution are very much the less for having lost the contribution that figures like Diego" (Wilkinson, 1999, p. 22).

According to the filmmakers, *Fresa y chocolate* is not a film about sexuality, it is a film about tolerance (Santí, 1998, p. 418). In the uncertain political climate of the last two decades many Cubans have become more vocal about the need for change in Cuba. The film echoes the

call for tolerance between the two political poles and encourages dialogue. The downside to sticking to this interpretation of the film is that it limits the room for discussion of homosexuality. In the end it fails to address adequately homosexuality in the same way many Cuban films fail to portray women's rights adequately; it maintains a male heterosexual viewpoint (Santí, 1998, p. 418). Even though Diego is a sympathetic character most viewers would want to identify with David, the student who remains on the whole true to the revolution. Even after Diego confesses his attraction to David and apologizes for his actions, David never apologizes for doing his revolutionary duty by spying on Diego because of his suspicious activity (Santí, 1998, p. 423). Further distancing viewers from Diego is his flamboyant attitude. If the intention was to make tolerance among sexualities more acceptable the film did not do the gays any favors by making the first starring homosexual role extremely effeminate (Toledo, 1994, p. 31). Not only is Diego flamboyantly gay but he attempts to seduce a straight man; an action not likely to induce sympathy from straight males. Finally instead of focusing on the theme of tolerance between Diego and David, the film distracts viewers from the potentially awkward sexual tension and inserts a more comfortable heterosexual love interest between David and Nancy (Toledo, 1994, p.31). That way the presence of a gay male can be viewed merely as an obstacle between a "normal" relationship (Toledo, 1994, p. 31). Overall, *Fresa y chocolate* attempts to make Cubans aware of past mistakes, like the abuse of homosexuals, but never denounces the ones who made them (Wood, 2009, p. 522). Instead of honestly reevaluating the successes and failures of the Revolution, the film encourages Cubans to "return to their daily lives with an enriched understanding of the need for tolerance, and of the role of art" (Wood, 2009, p. 522). For this reason some have criticized the film for not looking for those responsible for abuses and instead focusing on putting the past behind without answering all questions.

Almost all the major films made after the special period have two common themes; disillusionment with socialism and the divide between generations. Films such as *Alicia en el pueblo de Maravillas* shows how good intentions can morph into bizarre and unexplainable structures (Chanan, 2008, p. 363). This can cuOlder people remember the hardships before the Revolution or at least remember the excitement of the early days (Chanan, 2004, p. 455). The young only know the current struggles and the unending patronage. The relationship between Diego and David is an example of this because Diego can recall his participation with mass mobilization efforts right after the revolution whereas David only knows the political theory he has been taught in school. *Adorables mentiras* also hints at the different types of experience in a conversation between two women of different ages. The older woman speaks of her expectations of life and how different it is to grow up within the institutionalized revolution (Chanan, 2004, p. 454).

Cuban cinema faces new influences from the outside world. Currently, the ICAIC only gives money to new directors; all established directors must find co-productions (Martin, 2001, p. 9). While this gives Cuban directors the opportunity to open up their audiences it also imposes stylistic concerns. Previously a Cuban director had only to think of the Cuban audience, now the film must be relatable for international audiences. Director Pastor Vega lamented that he now has “to think about ‘marketing’ and ‘profits’”, things directors did not have to worry about before (Chanan, 2004, p. 480). While many see the financial benefits others worry that co-productions cannot “offer a solution for a genuinely Cuban cinema” because true Cuban film should not desire foreign investment so greatly (Chanan, 2004, p. 483). Emigration, a drain on many industries, also threatens the future of Cuban film. Due to financial and creative restraints, directors and actors leave simply so they are able to work (Chanan, 2004, p. 484).

Cuban film is unique from other manifestations of national culture because it has resisted outside influence for so long. Directors had a dream for what cinema could do for the country and kept that as the number one goal. This contrasts sharply with the development of other national cinemas. There are few strong foreign influences on Cuban cinema partially due to the embargo. However the United States has in a way helped Cuban films by taking away their number one competition. Without the pressure of Hollywood Cuban filmmakers were able to experiment and make films that way to express a solely Cuban point of view.

Music

Cuban music is unique when compared to many other types Latin American music because it has essentially no indigenous input. Besides one type of handmade drum, all the music of the Taino people who lived on the island before the arrival of Columbus has been lost to history (Leymarie, 2002, p. 9). In other Spanish colonies, music for the Church was essential in converting the indigenous and drowning out native music that might inspire rebellion (Carpentier & West-Duran, 2000, p. 172). Since the indigenous population was exterminated very quickly no great emphasis was placed on promoting music (Carpentier & West-Duran, 2000, p. 175). Therefore the art evolved slowly and for the first two hundred years of colonization Spanish music prevailed with little development beyond the traditional Spanish themes and Church music (Carpentier & West-Duran, 2000, p. 180). The slight diversification of music was a result of immigration from various regions in Spain. Most of the Spanish settlers that came after the initial conquest were from Galicia or Catalonia with a significant number from the Canary Islands as well (Sweeney, 2001, p. 3). Each group brought their own distinct musical flavor but the greatest

contribution of the Spanish was the group of string instruments (Sweeney, 2001, p. 3). During the colonial period most of the music produced on the island attempted to replicated European sounds or “art music” by relying heavily on the traditional styles such as operas, symphonies and the popular European dances of the day (Acosta & Kirstein, 1989, p. 29).

While the upper classes tried to remain true to the forms of music appreciated in “cultured societies” the lower classes, and especially the slave population, started creating what would become known as “popular music” based on their musical traditions (Acosta & Kirstein, 1989, p. 29). The slave trade continued much longer in Cuba than in other parts of the Caribbean which meant slaves were continually being put in contact with new slaves who had been brought up with their native African traditions (Chanan, 2004, p. 102). This continual influx of slaves true to the traditional ways not only allowed religion and language to be invigorated but musical styles as well. Slaves incorporated the Catholic traditions pushed on them by the Spaniards to protect their true religious practices (Roy, 2002, p. 12). The Yoruba tribe in particular is credited with establishing Santeria by matching Catholic saints to African orishas, or deities (Leymarie, 2002, p. 12). Just as Catholicism has its musical repertoire, each Santeria deity had its own chants and songs (Leymarie, 2002, p. 10). This lead to a large collection of songs based around the religion. Slaves recreated drums and other instruments they used in Africa but also incorporated European instruments such as the mandolin, guitar and tuba (Leymarie, 2002, p. 10). In more limited circumstances they used materials around them such as boxes, crates and frying pans to recreate the sounds of instruments (Leymarie, 2002, p.10). Freed blacks and mulattos were allowed to perform in the celebrations of Corpus Christi. The feasts, dances and parades that marked this festival allowed blacks to “assimilate Iberian melodies, enriching them with rhythm and percussion” (Carpentier & West-Durán, 2000, p. 184). These celebrations were

the closest whites came to listening to black musicians during the early colonial period but it laid the ground for development of black music in the next century.

The third noticeable foreign influence was French. This came about somewhat indirectly since the French who ended up in Cuba came by way of Haiti. After the Haitian revolution in 1791, the whites fled the island to Cuba (Roy, 2002, p. 42). They brought with them their vast knowledge of sugar planting but also their music and dances (Sweeney, 2001, p. 6). Many of the plantation owners also brought their slaves from Haiti thus introducing Cuban slave to Creole traditions. The French influence is less marked because many of the French who fled from Haiti settled in the eastern provinces and kept their musical traditions mainly among themselves until marriages between French and Cuban slaves broadened the reach of Creole traditions (Roy, 2002, p. 43). One important Creole contribution was the *tumba francesa*: a dance accompanied by three drums unique to this style (Roy, 2002, p. 45). The dance is lead by a “dance master” who chooses who will dance next as the rhythm unfolds (Roy, 2002, p. 46).

African rhythms quickly infiltrated Spanish themes in the 19th century. The Africanization of many Spanish songs came as a result of the large number of black musicians. In 1831, the number of black musicians was the three times the number of white musicians (Leymarie, 2002, p. 10). Well-versed in Spanish themes, these musicians added their own rhythms and feel to familiar tunes. The clave “became the foundation of popular Cuban music, giving it a smooth, round and propulsive feel” (Leymarie, 2002, p. 10). The first “art music” composers to include a more uniquely Cuban feels were Manuel Samuell and Ignacio Cervantes in the late 19th century (Acosta & Kirstein, 1989, p. 30). They still used European models but incorporated Hispanic and African sounds and feelings. Composers were open to the newer European techniques and sounds such as “Debussian impressionism and Stravinsky’s *The Rite of*

Spring” (Acosta & Kirstein, 1989, p. 31). Conductors updated their percussion sections by borrowing heavily from African instrumentation (Acosta & Kirstein, 1989, p. 31). Composers like Amadeo Roldan and Alejandro Garcia Caturia stopped simply copying European trends and added something truly new and truly Cuban to their symphonies (Acosta & Kirstein, 1989, p. 31). However this form of Cuban music was not the type white Cubans felt should represent their country (Acosta & Kirstein, 1989, p. 31). They held onto the older styles such as the Spanish zarzuela and Italian songs (Acosta & Kirstein, 1989, p. 31). Up until the 20th century these styles had the largest impact on what was considered “Cuban”. The *danza*, *danzón*, *habanera* and *criolla* became part of Cuba’s national style but soon became seen as a piece of culture trying to force itself on Cuba’s collective memory (Acosta & Kirstein, 1989, p. 31). Even after independence temporarily united blacks and whites against a common enemy, white Cubans continued to fear blacks and the traditions they brought with them from Africa (Cushman, 2005, p. 170).

While never fully accepted by white society, Afro-Cuban music was marginalized even further soon after independence. General Machado was especially harsh on the music scene and forbade playing the *son* in public (Leymarie, 2002, p. 44). Bongos and conga drums were banned in an attempt to erase the sound from the island (Leymarie, 2002, p. 44). Even in this limited setting music was still one of the few employment opportunities open to black Cubans. Many musicians moved from job to job playing ballads that became known as *trovas* (Sweeney, 2001, 154). The *trova* style began in the Oriente province as the Cuban interpretation of European operas and French romantic pieces (Sweeney, 2001, 152). As the *trovadores*, as the singers of these ballads were called, made their way to Havana to find work they spread the popularity of this romantic and occasionally patriotic style. Different musicians would respond to each other’s

songs and add on to the story (Sweeney, 2001, 155). Later the *trova* would evolve it would incorporate styles *sones*, *guarachas* and boleros (Sweeney, 2001, 157). By the 1940s it would be combined with the bolero to be known as “filin” (Sweeney, 2001, 157). But even as the *trova* was gaining popularity thanks to black musicians, racial discrimination continued to limit blacks to careers in music or sport so they continued to play even though it paid poorly (Leymarie, 2002, p. 45). Black musicians struggled to find jobs even in the music industry because major hotels and clubs preferred to hire foreign musicians to play North American music and dance numbers such as the tango, fox-trot and the charleston (Leymarie, 2002, p. 46). Despite the upper class preferences for American music, the *son* continued to take over Cuba. Most musicians did not take the distinction between “art music” and popular music too seriously. Enrique Jorrín, a performed in symphonies, a high class art, but also created dance numbers for the working classes (Acosta & Kirstein, 1989, p. 33). Composer Alejandro Garcia Caturla wrote suites and chamber music but also *sones* and *danzónes* (Acosta & Kirstein, 1989, p. 33). This flexibility of musicians and composers allowed styles to spread even if they were not supported by the government or upper classes. Thanks to this indifference to the distinction between types of music, the *son* was a nationwide favorite by the 1930s (Leymarie, 2002, p. 54).

As Cuba entered the 1930s American involvement reached into every Cuban industry, including music. Record companies divided musicians and the “commercial pressure led to exploitation and musical compromise” (Leymarie, 2002, p. 49). American companies began to find ways to profit off of Cuba’s exotic culture by labeling everything “rumba” and selling it abroad. The “rumba craze” created job opportunities for Afro-Cuban musicians who would not have found as many opportunities in other sectors of the economy (Cushman, 2005, p. 170). Cuban groups also copied industry trends that dictated tastes on things besides the style of music.

For example, all female groups became a trend in the United States during the 1930s and Cuban female singers soon jumped on the bandwagon by forming all female groups including Orquesta Anacaona, which remains active today (Leymarie, 2002, p. 66). American desires soon influenced more than just what was played on the radio.

Colonel Fulgencio Batista overthrew a progressive government in 1934 with U.S. approval and paved the way for pliable regimes until he was overthrown in 1959. American business and mafias moved in to set up a utopia for the American tourist. Cuban musicians were essential to the bustling Havana nightlife Batista promoted (Leymarie, 2002, p. 109). The 1930s especially was the decade of swing, big bands and jazz bands (Acosta & Kirstein, 1989, p. 37). Once again Cuban musicians proved their versatility by going between styles in order to make ends meet (Leymarie, 2002, p. 130). Due to the high level of tourism, especially during Prohibition, Havana was besieged with pleasure seeking Americans who wanted to dance and be entertained. While this may have supported some beginning artists it perplexed others. Emilio Grenet, Cuban composer and writer at the turn of the century, viewed the U.S. and its music as the “cultural enemy of Cuban music” because made classic dances like the *danzón* out of style and promoted perverted versions on the *son* and *rumba* (Cushman, 2005, p. 175).

Two important styles to come out of this period were the *mambo* and the *cha-cha-cha* which grew out of the traditional styles of the *danzón*. The *danzón* includes a fast, syncopated section that composer Antonio Arcano Betancourt called the “mambo” (Roy, 2002, p. 93). Many versions of the story around the naming of the *mambo* exist but there is an agreement on the fact that Orestes Lopez was the first composer to use this section as the basis of an entire piece in 1937 (Roy, 2002, p. 93). The new style set off an explosion of experimentation among jazz band orchestras with strings and the flute (Roy, 2002, p. 94). One result of this experimentation

resulted in the creation of the last-known strain of the *danzón* (Roy, 2002, p. 96). Enrique Jorrín first composed what would become known as the *cha-cha-cha* in 1953 under the name of “mambo chachacha” (Roy, 2002, p. 97). He created the style because he felt that the *mambo* was too difficult for some people to follow (Sweeney, 2001, p. 98). The style is danced in time with the beat and gets its name from the sound of the dancers’ feet rubbing against the floor (Roy, 2002, p. 97). Whereas the focus of the *mambo* is the syncopation, the main characteristic of the *cha-cha-cha* is the beat and the off-beat (Roy, 2002, p. 98). The *cha-cha-cha* was huge hit among American audiences who were “terrified into immobility by the Afro-Cuban complexities of the *mambo*” (Sweeney, 2001, p. 98). An icon of this era was vocalist Benny More. He lacked any formal musical training but had a well-tuned ear and “a profoundly instinctive feel for the music” (Leymarie, 2002, p. 142). He joined the big band of Pérez Prado and soon became the mambo king by “applying the swing and attack of big jazz bands’ brass section to *mambo* style” (Sweeney, 2001, 65).

While the *mambo* and *cha-cha-cha* were taking over dance halls, Cuban jazz continued to be another important Cuban influence on the American music scene. Cuba first influenced jazz soon after independence. Many newly freed blacks fled to New Orleans where the familiar French customs meant that it seemed to be a more accepting city (Acosta & Kirstein, 1989, p. 36). From the beginning, musicians of Afro-Cuban descent were involved in the development of jazz (Acosta & Kirstein, 1989, p. 36). Musicians who visited Cuba brought back the *habanera* and incorporated it into jazz sets being played in New Orleans. The Spanish rhythms gave jazz an extra “spice”, according to early jazz pianist Jelly Roll Morton (Leymarie, 2002, p. 79). As Cuba gave jazz its Spanish flavor, the American jazz scene introduced the trumpet and the cornet to the *son* (Leymarie, 2002, p. 80). Jazz bands became more “Cubanized” during the 30s by

“lending itself to the interpretation of danceable Cuban rhythms like the *son*, *guaracha*, *rumba* and *danzón*” (Acosta & Kirstein, 1989, p. 37). Though intended as entertainment for the North American visitors the big band style captivated Cuban audiences too. Soon the relatively new instrument, the saxophone began appearing in large bands as well (Leymarie, 2002, p. 80). The end of World War II brought even greater exchanges between jazz musicians and Latin artists (Leymarie, 2002, p. 199). Jazz musicians borrowed Cuban percussion instruments, rhythms, breaks and riffs (Leymarie, 2002, p. 200). The symbol of this exchange is the collaboration of Cuban percussionist Chano Pozo and trumpet player Dizzy Gillespie (Acosta & Kirstein, 1989, p. 38). Their exchange led to the Cuban version of bop, “Cubop” and a further appreciation of the diversity of jazz (Acosta & Kirstein, 1989, p. 39).

The Cuban revolution drastically changed the production of music but it could not immediately change the musical desires of the Cuban people. Hotels and clubs, previously places of regular performances, were shut down or taken over by the government (Leymarie, 2002, p. 208). Initially the regime saw traditional music and even jazz with suspicion but eventually the realities of Cuban forced a change in attitude (Leymarie, 2002, p. 208). The regime realized that music could be useful for the continuation of the revolution and began to support Cuban music through specific channels (Leymarie, 2002, p. 209). Afro-Cuban music enjoyed a renaissance and renewed governmental support thanks to the realization that traditional customs such as Santería could protect the longevity of the revolution by providing an outlet for frustration (Leymarie, 2002, p. 209). In 1962, the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional was established to “preserve Cuba’s traditional dance and music” (Leymarie, 2002, p. 209). The Escuela Nacional de Arte and other music conservatories have produced highly accomplished musicians who have only furthered the island’s musical diversity (Leymarie, 2002, p. 209). The revolution also

brought a new type of the *trova*, called the *nueva trova*, which focused on political and social themes rather than romantic ones (Leymarie, 2002, p. 213). This shift was inspired by “militant folk songs” and was often used as a medium for regime propaganda (Leymarie, 2002, p. 212). An example of the theme of this genre includes “Hasta siempre”, a song written by Carlos Puebla and dedicated to Che Guevara (Leymarie, 2002, p. 213).

Even though the United States cut diplomatic ties with Cuba in 1961 Cuban musicians continued to be inspired by the sounds they were able to catch from Florida radio stations. Cuban jazz, once it regained trust from the regime, began performing again without the restrictions of the nightlife promoted under Batista (Leymarie, 2002, p. 213). Jazz musicians began experimenting with sounds they heard from the U.S. and from recordings from other parts of the world (Leymarie, 2002, p. 213). Sunday afternoon jam sessions were held in various clubs in Havana beginning soon after the revolution and drew international artists (Leymarie, 2002, p. 213). Outside inspiration and freedom from commercial pressures allowed jazz musicians to join new groups and come up with new drumming techniques to accompany their new sounds. During the 1970s, a temporary thaw in U.S.-Cuba allowed musicians to travel back and forth and exchange inspirations (Leymarie, 2002, p. 258). Jazz sensation Irakere uses “the inexhaustible polyrhythms of the Afro-Antilian tradition” and “has returned to the inexhaustible quarry of Cuban music of African origin” to supplement their style (Acosta & Kirstein, 1989, p. 43). Many Cuban musicians go beyond the more Spanish and now overused forms of music to find inspiration in African rhythms of the Yoruba, Carabali and Arara ritual music.

The 1970s brought years of economic hardship for Cuba. The harsh lifestyle forced many to flee to Miami in 1980 (Schoultz, 2009, p. 348.). They brought with them the new music trends that had been developing in Cuba for twenty years. The *songo*, a new rhythm, “paved the way for

the *nueva timba*” and crept into *salsa* music as well (Leymarie, 2002, p. 244). This new wave in Cuban music came from within the island. Musical ensemble, Los Van Van is credited with bringing the *songo* to the forefront of Cuban music by experimenting with the *charanga* and adding more modern instruments like the electric guitar and the synthesizer (Leymarie, 2002, p. 247). The group mixed together the “*son*, Yoruba rhythms, funk, pop and other elements ... and the electric base and piano” to create a whole new Cuban sound (Leymarie, 2002, p. 248).

The 1970s and 1980s also saw the birth of other offshoots of traditional Cuban music. The *malembe*, a new genre in 6/8 time; the *gogocha*, a style invented by Orquesta Sensacion; the *baston*, created by Orestes Lopez; the *moanga* and the *chaonda*, both put out by composer Alejandro Tomás after La Orquesta Aragon’s tour in Africa (Leymarie, 2002, p. 249). None of these new rhythms took hold in Cuban society in the same way the *songo* and other styles however Cuban the large amount of creation and experimenting shows that music continued to grow and evolve with limited outside forces. Musicians were inspired by international groups but they continued to push the limits of the genre of Latin music without commercial or cultural pressure from outside forces.

The next major wave to hit Cuba was the *nueva timba*. While a decidedly Cuban style, the formation was inspired by disco of the 1970s (Leymarie, 2002, p. 253). Coined by Juan Formell, *nueva timba* is a hot and energetic style inspired by the *songo* (Leymarie, 2002, p. 253). This was “Cuba’s answer to salsa -which Cubans had long rejected as an imperialist product” (Leymarie, 2002, p. 253). The *nueva timba* symbolizes a shift in Cuban consciousness. The lyrics that accompany other musical styles promote Cuban culture or history, while lyrics of this genre are more materialistic and focus on the desires of the younger generations (Leymarie, 2002, p. 254). Less ideologically focused music is an expression of the economic hardships

many Cubans face. The young are more worried about getting by than recalling heroes of the past.

The next major change event in Cuban musical history involved taking a step back from new and electric forms of music. Buena Vista Social Club rocketed to the top of the charts in 1990 and put Cuban music back on the map. A resurgence of traditional Cuban music, mainly the *son*, came about because an American guitarist traveled to Cuba to play with some of the island's forgotten masters (Leymarie, 2002, p. 256). Ry Cooder, an accomplished musician who collaborated with many famous American musicians, found a new appreciation for Cuban music and wanted to produce an album of traditional music played by Cubans themselves. Juan de Marcos Gonzalez brought together the group that would eventually record the international hit record and star in the documentary that came out two years later (Leymarie, 2002, p. 256). All the stars of Buena Vista Social Club, Ibrahim Ferrer, Omara Portuondo, Eliades Ochoa and Compay Segundo, were students of the older styles of *trova* and *nueva trova* (Sweeney, 2001, p. 283). Though the album and documentary of the group brought renewed interest in Cuban music, many critics felt that the Buena Vista Social Club set Cuban music back 40 years by bringing out nostalgia for the old Cuba (Albarrán, 2006, 319).

One of the most interesting developments in Cuban music has been the swelling popularity of Cuban rap. Like much of Cuban music, rap developed due to the unique circumstances the Cuban people found themselves in after the collapse of the Soviet bloc (Schoultz, 2009, p. 432). The Special Period brought unprecedented economic hardships on all Cubans due to the abrupt halt of aid from the Soviet Union (Chanan, 2008, p. 361). In an attempt to alleviate some of the suffering the Cuban government legalized the use of American dollars so that Cubans receiving remittances from abroad could use them in Cuban stores (Schoultz, 2009,

p. 434). While this, and the effort to open up Cuba to tourism, helped many Cubans, most Afro-Cubans continued to suffer because they were the least likely to have family members abroad or to have a job in the tourist industry (Fernandes, 2003, p. 578). Dollarization brought back class distinctions between those who had access to dollars and those who did not and frequently these divisions went along race lines (Fernandes, 2003, p. 578). In this new society hampered by class differences and renewed racism the black population “finds itself in a hostile environment without the political and organization tools to fight against it” (Fernandes, 2003, p. 580). To express their discontent, Cuban youth turned to rap.

The movement began in the early 1990s and for the first years of its existence rap music was mainly “produced and consumed within the specific social context of the local community or neighborhood” (Fernandes, 2003, p. 578). Music brought back from the U.S. or recorded off radio stations broadcast from Miami circulated around high-density housing projects such as Alamar (Fernandes, 2003, p. 578). After 1991 the Cuban government attempted to institutionalize rap to benefit from its popularity and prevent it from spawning feelings of discontent against the regime (Fernandes, 2003, p. 578). The government organized concerts, started a radio program dedicated to rap and aired videos of international rap artists on state TV (Fernandes, 2003, p. 580). Even though much of the discontent expressed in rap lyrics is aimed at the Cuban government, the people who run the agencies responsible for supporting Cuban rap view the genre as a way to spread the revolutionary message (Baker 2005, 368). Social protest has “been assimilated into Cuban national culture” and promoted by the government through this emerging genre (Baker 2005 369). The government believe rap can “change the world” and help fight cultural imperialism by reminding audiences of the hardships and injustices occurring around the world (Baker 2005, 368). Thanks in part to government subsidies, entrance fees rap

shows are considerably cheaper than those for salsa clubs or other venues which are geared towards tourists and Cubans with dollars to spare (Baker, 2006, p. 220). These cheap venues give Cuban youth a place to go and have their voice heard. A community was built around these small venues that many consider to be a safe and positive environment for Cuban youth to spend time (Baker, 2006, p. 222). DJs and rappers often bring their children and people who bring alcohol share it with those around them (Baker 2006, p. 222).

While the image of community supported rap might seem odd to American listeners accustomed to the gangster rap popular today, Cuban rap was inspired by U.S. rappers. American “rap music is the original source of Cuban rap music, and from the early days Cuban rappers have maintained close ties with rappers in the U.S.” (Fernandes, 2003, p. 581). Cubans initially became interested in African-American “conscious” rap, a genre that focused on themes like racism and underdevelopment; themes which resonated with marginalized Cuban youth. The Cuba government claims to have solved the race problem by removing institutional discrimination (Baker, 2006, p. 224). Cuban youth see that removing all formal barriers to success does not mean equality for all and rappers express this frustration routinely in their songs (Fernandes, 2003, p. 585). Cuban rap has also adopted the aggressiveness of North American rap. Many North American rappers take the posture of a gangster and project an image of a tough guy (Olavarria, 2008, 370). Young black Cubans who are viewed as criminals and drug dealers by the police and white Cuba adopt the tough-guy image as a form of self-defense against the animosity they feel from society (Fernandes, 2003, p. 587).

While initially motivated by the sounds coming from U.S. rap artists, Cuban rap has become its own by focusing on more complex issues such as the current state of the Cuban economy and the revolution’s mixed record on the fight against racism (Fernandes, 2003, p.

578). American rap has lost some of its hold over Cuban rap due to the commercialization of the genre. Records sales trump content in importance. Most American rappers write lyrics that focus on the life of a gangster and glorify money, promiscuity and violence (Albarrán, 2006, p. 321). Cuban rappers steer clear of lyrics that promote consumerism partially out of dedication to rap that promotes social change but also because a Cuban listener would not relate to a song that spoke of a glamorous lifestyle that is so distant from the daily realities of Cuban life (Albarrán, 2006, p. 321). However some groups have followed the U.S. style more closely which has created a distinction within Cuban rap between “underground” and “commercial” groups. Underground groups attempt to maintain a more radical position by focusing lyrics on political and social issues and staying away from large records companies (Fernandes, 2003, p. 582). Concerts for underground groups draw smaller crowds where the audience listens and responds to the lyrics rather than dance to the rhythm (Baker 2006, p. 216). Commercial groups focus more on record sales and combine rap with other Cuban styles to attract larger audiences (Fernandes, 2003, p. 582). Most underground rappers are disdainful of commercial rappers who they view as sell-outs, especially those who leave the country to work with international record labels (Fernandes, 2003, p. 583). Though international record deals could help the industry many “Cuban rappers offer strong criticisms of neoliberal globalization” and suggest that Cuba take pride in its black culture by resisting cultural imperialism (Fernandes, 2003, p. 576).

Rap group Orishas has achieved mainstream success and therefore has been criticized by underground groups who they have been taken over by international companies “who seek to sell Cuba to western audiences through stereotypical images of rum, tobacco and mulatta women” (Fernandes, 2003, p. 583). Much of the Orishas’ music uses the main themes of traditional styles such as the *son* and the *rumba* (Albarrán, 2006, p. 316). Their single “537 Cuba” uses the main

theme from “Chan Chan” recorded by the Buena Vista Social Club in the chorus (Orishas, 2007). Some older listeners appreciate harking back to the old styles while younger audiences view it as selling one sound to represent Cuba (Albarrán, 2006, p. 316). The music videos made by Orishas give a somewhat mixed view of Cuba. In the video for “A lo cubano”, the rappers are surrounded by attractive women in short skirts or swimsuits dancing seductively on the beach (Orishas, 2000). Little distinguishes this video from other Latin style rap produced in the United States. In contrast, the video for “La Naranja Se Pico” made by underground group los Aldeanos shows the rappers strapped in a chicken coop, a representation of the restrictions placed on them by the Cuban government (Roman, 2009). Still, even the most underground rappers listen to hedonistic American hip-hop, as one author found while researching Cuban hip-hop (Baker, 2006, p. 218). American rap will continue to be a source of discussion for Cuban rappers. Maybe as an inspiration or a source of derision, either way there will continue to be give and take between old and new sounds.

Jamaican reggaeton is the latest influence on Cuban hip hop. The new sound came mainly via Puerto Rico and a growing number of Cuban artists are popping up primarily in the eastern provinces (Baker, 2005, p. 374). Underground rappers view this shift negatively because they think reggaeton promotes “mindlessness, materialism, corruption and frivolity” whereas rap focuses on important social issues (Baker, 2005, p. 389). The state also disapproves of reggaeton for similar reasons. The government would prefer to have music focused on the words not the seductive movements of the body (Baker, 2005, p. 389). Whatever the government may think, reggaeton has become the most popular music genre for the younger audiences (Baker, 2005, p. 389).

Although Cuban music was clearly influenced by some African-American based styles such as jazz and rap, other styles such as soul, blues or rock n' roll (Acosta & Kirstein, 1989, p. 40). Cuban music scholar Leonardo Acosta suggests that Afro-Cubans have preserved their own way of vocalizing so they have not needed to adopt other forms of vocal expression (1989, p. 40).

At the crossroads of the Caribbean, Cuba has been aptly placed to receive the musical currents of many cultures. What makes Cuba unique is that it does not simply copy or adapt certain styles but combines them and makes them part of their own national sound. Even in times of economic hardship, Cuban musicians have poured their discontent and their hope into their music. In fact "... a surge in the popularity of some Cuban rhythms coincided with some of the most negative stages of Cuba's history" (Acosta & Kirstein, 1989, p. 42). Rap proves that "all music is written within the frame of an epoch and a society" (Acosta & Kirstein, 1989, p. 42).

Reviewing the history of Cuban music seems to only increase the difficulty in determining Cuban and what is foreign. Today the guitar and the drum are just as Cuban as they once were Spanish or African (Acosta & Kirstein, 1989, p. 41). New instruments such as the synthesizer and electric guitar are considered "foreign" now but once Cuban artists fully adopt the instruments and made their own sound it will seem just as Cuban as the *tres* (Acosta & Kirstein, 1989, p. 41). Cuban music has defied strict interpretations by remaining true to the fact that "the real history of music in Latin American in general and in Cuba in particular is made of constant interchanges and crisscrossing between the "popular" and the "cultured" (Acosta & Kirstein, 1989, p. 34). Instead of repelling each other "the cultured and the popular shake hands, and tend more and more toward their own original synthesis, one that is Cuban and defines Cuba as a cultural identity, liberating from all colonialism" (Acosta & Kirstein, 1989, p. 34).

Cuisine

Food, an important cultural marker in any culture, is an integral part of Cuban life. Not just because it is an essential part of living but because of what it represents to the Cuban people. The lower classes fought in the War of Independence and again in the Cuban Revolution in the hopes of securing a government that would help them feed their families (Dawdy, 2002, p. 46). Although considerable problems with the ration cards in terms of quality and diversity of food persisted the Revolution succeeded for the first 30 years in eliminating malnutrition, previously a continuing problem in rural Cuba (Dawdy, 2002, p. 46). The Special Period brought another round of malnutrition, in some severe cases resulting in temporary blindness, but as the economy has slowly recovered Cubans are back to celebrating life through food.

Cuba first started to develop a unique island cuisine in the mid-19th century around the same time that criollo nationalism appeared with the first stirrings of an independence movement (Dawdy, 2002, p. 49). Cookbooks focusing on Cuban food appeared in order to make a distinction between what was Spanish and what was “lo cubano” (Dawdy, 2002, p. 49). These books were important because they helped build a national idea of what was considered Cuban food (Dawdy, 2002, p. 55). As Cuban discontent with colonization grew, more people looked to build a new identity for the people of Cuba (Dawdy, 2002, p. 52). Some were swept up in the artistic trend of costumbrismo which passed through Latin America around the end of the 19th century. This trend glorified the traditional and the native through semi-fictional works and other forms of artistic expression (Dawdy, 2002, p. 51). The peasant farmer entered the national

conscience as an unsung hero; self-reliant and a symbol of progress. Self-sufficient farms not only implied ample food production but a way to prove their ability to survive without Spain (Dawdy, 2002, p. 54).

In one of the first cookbooks published in Cuba almost 50 percent of the vegetables used were unknown in Spain and most Spaniards probably never encountered them (Dawdy, 2002, p. 56). Yet middle class housewives using this cookbook would be expected to be familiar with these African and Caribbean vegetables. These Cuban households were dependent on local produce and were not simply copying their colonizers foods or style of preparation (Dawdy, 2002, p. 56). As Cuba began to define its local cuisine many cookbooks used adjectives such as *a la habanera, cubana, or criollo* to show that the recipe was uniquely Cuban (Dawdy, 2002, p. 58). Cuban cookbooks however, did include a variety of international cuisines. One cookbook published in 1926 includes French dishes and traditional English delicacies such as plum pudding (Dawdy, 2002, p. 58). Spanish recipes were included as well but always with a parenthetical reference noting their origin so they would not be confused with the Cuban recipes (Dawdy, 2002, p. 58). Though it is unknown how frequently Cubans made English dishes such as beefsteak or plum pudding, a review of more recent cookbooks show that many foreign types of cooking have been eliminated in these publications reflecting perhaps a decline in popularity. While English and French cuisines may have had an influence on the dinners of the upper class their cuisine does not appear to have penetrated well into everyday Cuban cuisine.

Perhaps surprisingly, upper and lower classes ate and continue to eat similar foods. Similarities between the diet of all classes is due in part to the high number of viandas, native roots and tubers, consumed by Cubans of all social classes (Dawdy, 2002, p. 21). Of course the quantity, accompaniments and preparation differed but Cubans of any class ate some

local vegetables. Some high class cubans did not eat some things they considered “comido ignoble”, low-class food, such as black beans and plantains (Lluria de O’Higgins, 1994, p. 90). Any food that seemed “African” could risk being excluded from upper class menus but for the most part everyone ate the bounty provided by the island. The term “Cuban cuisine” was used to identify foods that were uniquely Cuban such as “*viandas*, fresh fruit off the tree, soups and stews” and these goods were “not used to distinguish the classes, even in highly stratified pre-Revolutionary Cuba” (Dawdy, 2002, p. 59). According to scholar Shannon Lee Dawdy (2002), “when cuisine was used as a marker of social status (which it surely was), it was the generalized “international cuisine” of hotel chefs and French and American influence, not anything local or native” (p. 59).

Cooking in Cuba was dramatically altered by the Revolution and subsequent American embargo. Cubans were used to eating imported foods such as “canned sardines, peaches, processed cheese and Campbell’s tomato soup” (Dawdy Dawdy, 2002, p. 75). In fact over 70 percent of all the imported food originated in the United States making it a serious blow to Cuban styles of cooking. The embargo cut off American imports but also hurt Cuba’s ability to acquire goods from other countries. Cuba did not have the capacity to conduct healthy trade across oceans (Benjamin, 1986, p. 20). Transport costs had been much cheaper when the main supplier of imported food was only 90 miles away (Benjamin, 1986, p. 20). Cubans did not know how and where to store imported vegetables and lacked the materials for packing and processing food (Benjamin, 1986, p. 20). However, the embargo may have allowed Cuban food to remain more “native” because Cubans became accustomed to cooking with what could be produced on the island (Dawdy, 2002, p. 75). Due to the pressure of the embargo, food production and consumption has become symbolic of true patriotism (Dawdy, 2002, p. 61). Cooking what food

is readily available on the island became a necessity to the survival of the Revolution. Therefore “the adaptability of Cuban cooking has not so much spelled the demise of traditional foods as ensured their survival through the uncertain fluctuations of the Cuban economy” (Dawdy, 2002, p. 76).

It is possible that the embargo has helped keep Cuban cuisine at a place where it easier to see influences and track changes overtime. Overall, “Cuba's native cuisine can be seen as a variant of a general Antillean diet based on the triad of rice, beans, and starchy roots or plantains” (Dawdy, 2002, p. 49). In one cookbook there is an entire section devoted to recipes of rice and beans even though most of the meat recipes already include directions to prepare them as sides (Lluria de O’Higgins, 1994, p. 143). Another section entitled “Vegetables” included only four recipes out of 22 that did not contain some sort of vianda (Lluria de O’Higgins, 1994, p. 181). The most popular dishes “exhibit Spanish influences in seasonings and a preference for pork, as well as African preparation techniques and native Caribbean crops.” (Dawdy, 2002, p. 49). After years of influence from various colonial influences Cubans have fashioned a national cuisine based on the goods available on the island, primarily “yams, potatoes, yuca, *malanga*, squash, tomatoes, bananas, corn, peanuts, and all the various fruit trees” (Dawdy, 2002, p. 75).

Cuban dietary habits, menu choices and cuisine development have in part been influenced by the Spanish due to the long period of colonization. The schedule of Cuban meals is decidedly Spanish. Breakfast often consists of a cafe con leche and a piece of buttered toast (Houston, 2005, p. 115). This mirrors what Spaniards still eat today for their morning meal. One possible difference now is the availability of processed sweet breads which sometimes take the place of toast made at home in Spain (Medina, 2005, p. 55). The midday meal is the biggest meal of the day in Spain and Cuba (Medina, 2005, p. 56). One author recalls growing up in a well-off family

in pre-Revolutionary Cuba and enjoying decadent lunches with his grandparents (Machado, 2007, p. 11). Of course most Cubans of that era did not have the same spread as the wealthy but lunch remained the most important meal of the day. Even though Cuba is hot especially in the middle of the day, soups or stews were a common lunch time dish (Lluria de O'Higgins, 1994, p.11). Dinner then becomes a less elaborate affair eaten later in the evening as it is in Spain (Medina, 2005, p. 90).

An important difference between Spanish and Cuban food is the lack of tubers in Spanish cuisine. Almost all Cuban meals have some root plant, known as *viandas*, to accompany the main dish (Dawdy, 2002, p. 57). There are a wide variety of tubers in Cuba including boniatos, yams, yuca and malanga. A few Spanish dishes, such as the all important tortilla de patata, include potatoes but these dishes were not created until after the discovery of potatoes in Peru (Medina, 2005, p. 38). Spain also lacks a tradition of cooking with other types of tubers such as okra or yams since they did not grow in Spanish soil (Medina, 2005, p. 38). Not only are tubers eaten on a daily basis for the necessary carbohydrate intake, they are also seen as medicinal foods (Dawdy, 2002, p. 57). When root vegetables are pureed they are easy on delicate stomachs and used for other intestinal problems (Dawdy, 2002, p. 58).

Spanish influences in Cuban cuisine are also evident when looking at specific regional influences. Many Cubans can trace their lineage or at least a dish's lineage back to Spanish area of origin. Two of the most common cuisines are from the Basque country and Andalusia. Basque cuisine is heavy on seafood and lends its affection for bacalao, or cod, to Cuban dishes (Lluria de O'Higgins, 1994, p. 49). Andalusian dishes often show the Moorish influence. The Moors ruled most of Spain for 700 years and left a distinct taste in the south of Spain where they stayed the longest. Many Cubans came from this region and brought with them the Moorish style of

cooking that use olive oil, almonds, olives and raisins (Lluria de O'Higgins, 1994, p. 40). One example of Andalusian influences in Cuban cuisine is pig's feet with chickpeas. The major difference is that in Spain it is served with bread while in Cuba with white rice while the rest of the recipe keeps traditionally Spanish ingredients such as chorizo, proscuitto, saffron and olive oil (Lluria de O'Higgins, 1994, p. 94). In Spain, this dish is served with bread while in Cuba with white rice (Lluria de O'Higgins, 1994, p. 94). Gypsies have made up a large part of Spanish folklore and national image. Even though Cuba does not have gypsies living as they do in Spain Cubans continue to call beef roulade "brazo gitano de carno" or gypsy's arm (Lluria de O'Higgins, 1994, p. 68). The best example of Spanish history intervening in Cuban cuisine appears in the name of one of Cuba's most popular dishes. Cubans eat great amounts of black beans and rice, fondly known as "Moros y Cristianos" (Machado, 2007, p. 15). This dish got its name because at the time of discovery the Spanish had just beaten the Moorish forces in Granada, their last strong hold in Spain. To celebrate their victory Spanish soldiers named the white rice after the Christians and the black beans after the Moors (Lluria de O'Higgins, 1994, p. 154). A piece of far off history continues through an everyday staple of Cuban cuisine.

Other historical events have played an important part in shaping Cuban cuisine. In contrast, many preferences were created based simply on what was available to Cubans through the years. Cubans still eat tasajo, jerked beef, partially because it was on La Pinta, La Nina and La Santa Maria and remained a mainstay of Spanish soldiers (Lluria de O'Higgins, 1994, p. 63). Cattle were on Columbus' ships and were soon introduced to the island where they would thrive and provide for Cubans' love of beef (Lluria de O'Higgins, 1994, p. 63). Even though it is no longer necessary to preserve meat due to the advancements in refrigeration jerked beef is still enjoyed by Cubans today (Lluria de O'Higgins, 1994, p. 75). Rice and chicken with frills, arroz

con pollo a la chorrera, is a dish made with mushrooms and artichokes as the “frills” around the chicken. The “frills” were named such because they looked like the lacy collar that was part of a gentlemen’s formal attire during the colonial period (Lluria de O’Higgins, 1994, p. 134). Garlic soup is another Spanish dish that has evolved due to Cuban history. In Spain, garlic soup is made of bread, garlic and olive oil and served with ham, salt pork or fried eggs (Lluria de O’Higgins, 1994, p. 19). Cubans ate this soup for years but during the first war for independence the soup was adjusted to use old bread because bread was so scarce and could not be wasted (Lluria de O’Higgins, 1994, p. 19). Due to this, the dish became a low class food considered only worth eating during times of scarcity (Lluria de O’Higgins, 1994, p. 19).

One of the most common characteristics of Cuban food that “distinguishes it and that links it to its indigenous and African influences, is the idea of “making do” (Houston, 2005, p. xxv). Many popular dishes including the well-known ajiaco is made up of a variety of ingredients, usually whatever is on hand. Many of these are one pot meals which were preferred by Africans and the native people of the Caribbean before the Spanish arrived (Houston, 2005, p. 16). In slavery this practice became a necessity due to the limited supply of food (Houston, 2005, p. 16). This lead to a wide variety of stews and a willingness to reuse food byproducts for other meals. Monteria, a pork stew, is a classic example because the dish is inspired by Spanish dishes made from wild boar. The Cuban version uses the leftovers from a roasted pig most likely eaten in the days immediately proceeding cooking (Lluria de O’Higgins, 1994, p. 30). Another example of Cuban resourcefulness is pescado en sobreuso, literally recycled fish (Lluria de O’Higgins, 1994, p. 41). Ropa vieja, or old clothes, is a beef hash that uses the meat featured in the dish to first make the broth (Lluria de O’Higgins, 1994, p. 73).

Chinese cuisine has had a more subtle but very important place in Cuban culture. Pork and rice, two of the staples of Cuban diet owe part of their popularity to the Chinese laborers who consumed great amounts of them. Pork was popular in Spain and even brought on Columbus' ships so the island has a long history of eat pork (Lluria de O'Higgins, 1994, p. 75). The arrival of Chinese laborers furthered Cubans' taste for pork due to their own history of consuming it (Lluria de O'Higgins, 1994, p. 76). Now pork holds a place of honor in Cuban cuisine (Lluria de O'Higgins, 1994, p. 93). The Eastern influence also is evident in the large quantities of rice consumed by Cubans. The Spanish introduced arroz de Valencia, a type of short grain rice grown in near the town of Valencia (Lluria de O'Higgins, 1994, p. 120). Spaniards used it in paellas and to accompany dishes with chorizo and seafood (Lluria de O'Higgins, 1994, p. 120). When Chinese laborers arrived in Cuba they ate rice with every dish and made it a staple of Cuban diet (Lluria de O'Higgins, 1994, p. 123). One cookbook stated that the "ability to make perfect white rice is perhaps the most indispensable skill of Cuban cooking" (Lluria de O'Higgins, 1994, p. 146).

Today many Spanish dishes are made more Cuban by eating them with rice when Spaniards would accompany the meal with bread (Lluria de O'Higgins, 1994, p. 125). Other dishes, such as paella, have been handed down almost untouched. Many Cubans continued to use the traditional paella pan used in Spain to make the dish (Lluria de O'Higgins, 1994, p. 125). Some recipes maintain a distinct Spanish flavor by calling for short grain Valencia rice while others call for long grain white rice favored by Chinese laborers (Lluria de O'Higgins, 1994, p. 140). These recipes usually include more African and Caribbean influences and use local viandas (Lluria de O'Higgins, 1994, p. 140). A recipe which calls for short grain Valencia rice is most likely Spanish, whereas long grain recipes are most likely is a Cuban creation. Other clues for the

origin of a dish may come from the preparation instructions. Foods of Afro-Cuban origin often used lard whereas Spanish dishes always call for olive oil (Lluria de O'Higgins, 1994, p. 147).

To find American influences one has to move out of the kitchen and on to the street. Pizza, hamburgers and ice cream is available from street vendors and cafeterias (Carballo, 2006, p. 21). While foods such as hamburgers, hotdogs and tomato soup did appear in Cuban kitchens it seems that most home cooked meals focused on Spanish and Afro-Caribbean fare. Fried chicken, a favorite of many Americans, shows up in Cuba but in a much altered state. Fried chicken was never fried in a batter but instead "marinated in sour orange juice and fried crispy" (Lluria de O'Higgins, 1994, p. 104). Even when food was fried, in fritters or croquetas, the author of one cookbook said that Cubans were able to heat the oil to the right temperature so that it would be crispy but not greasy like American food (Lluria de O'Higgins, 1994, p. 104).

Cuisine is the one area examined in this paper that contains the strongest Spanish influence. However, given the dominance of viandas, beans and white rice it is impossible to call Cuban food a direct descendent of Spanish cuisine. Over the centuries Cubans combined Spanish dishes with Caribbean foods out of necessity and created a cuisine capable of supporting an independent country.

CONCLUSION

Americans often describe their culture as a "melting pot"; breaking apart old cultures to create something new and unique. It may come as a shock to many to find out that the United States is not the only country blessed with a variety of cultural inspirations. Cuban culture contains strains of a variety of cultures that originated around the world. Spanish, African, American, Moorish, French and Chinese traits appear in what today is simply known as Cuban

culture. Cuba's film, music and cuisine proves that different cultures can be pieced together in such a way that no one culture is dominant over another. While the hypothesis predicted a large amount of Spanish influence across the board, the reality is the amount of influence one culture has fluctuates between each medium. However, the most exciting discovery shows that Cuban culture should not be limited to a discussion of influences. Cuban film, music and food have evolved thanks to a very unique history and the Cuban people have worked hard to make their culture representative of that. Even after years of colonialism and neocolonialism Cuba has created a culture completely its own without relying too heavily on any single source. The result is that very little remains that can be called solely Spanish or solely African. Instead Cuba has taken many diverse cultures to create its own cultural expressions that tell the story of life from a Cuban point of view.

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