Understanding “Africa” and “Blackness” in Colombia

Music and the Politics of Culture

Peter Wade

In the 1990s and the first years of the new century, in Colombia the notions of “blackness,” and to a lesser extent “Africa,” have become politically and culturally important in ways that have slim precedents in the country’s republican history. Since the 1991 constitutional reform, “black communities” have an unprecedented visibility in the public and political arena, due mainly to the inclusion of references to them in the new constitution and to the subsequent promulgation of the Law of Black Communities (Law 70 of 1993), which allows land title rights for some black communities in the country’s Pacific coastal region—an area with an 80 to 90 percent black population—and makes provisions for the participation of black communities in the nation’s political and economic life (Arocha 1992; Grueso, Rosero, and Escobar 1998; Pardo 2000; Wade 1995). State recognition of black communities as objects of attention has gone hand in hand with black political organization and activism, although in more limited forms this activity preceded the 1991 and 1993 legislation by some thirty years.

The notion of “Africa” is to a greater or lesser extent entailed by the public burgeoning of “blackness.” State legislation (for example, on education) now makes reference to afrocolombianos, alongside the
Peter Wade

term comunidades negras, which was more usual in the early 1990s.
“Africa” is also a central point of reference for many involved in the
study of, and political organization of, black people. The history of
such concern with Africa goes back some way in academic circles,
although it was a minor concern in Colombian history and anthropol-
ogy compared to interest in indigenous peoples. The Jesuit José
Arboleda, a Colombian student of the US anthropologist Melville J.
Herskovits, wrote a master’s thesis on the ethnohistory of the
“Colombian negroes” in 1950, and various others shared his concern
with the survival of Africanisms in Colombian culture (Arboleda
Llorente 1950; see also de Friedemann 1984; del Castillo M. 1982;

More recently, the interest in Africa has been taken up with
renewed vigor by anthropologists such as Jaime Arocha, and this theme
was the major concern of the late Nina de Friedemann (Arocha 1991,
For them, the issue was never just an “academic” one. They both con-
tested what de Friedemann (1984) once called the “invisibilization” of
blacks in homogenizing definitions of the Colombian nation; they
both participated in the process of constitutional reform and the draft-
ing of Law 70. The notion of “Africa” formed a crucial referent for
these scholars and others, both to understand “Afro-Colombian” cul-
ture—indeed, the term afrocolombiano owes some of its current popu-
ularity to their usage—and to contest the marginalization of black
people within the nation in the battle against racism. Friedemann and
Arocha critiqued a Herskovitsian concept of the simple survival of par-
ticular African cultural traits, persisting more or less unchanged into
American contexts. They prefer the notion of “cognitive orientation,”
which they adopt from Mintz and Price (1976), to link Africa and
America. This notion suggests that African peoples in the New World
shared some basic cultural principles, values, and ways of thinking that
shaped the way they developed new cultural forms in the Americas.
This idea gives rise to what Arocha and Friedemann call huellas de
africanía (traces of Africanness).

For black cultural activists, too, the image of “Africa” is of increas-
ing importance. Previously, and still today, many black cultural orga-
nizations in Colombia have looked to the United States for inspiration
Understanding “Africa” and “Blackness” in Colombia

(Wade 1995). For rural black populations in the Pacific coastal region of Colombia, the idea of African origins does not generally form part of a collective memory or oral tradition (Losonczy 1997:354; Restrepo 1997:302). By the early 1990s, some black organizations were making more explicit reference to Africa as a source of symbols and aspects of a collective identity (Restrepo 1997:300). In 1992 I found that one black nongovernmental organization (NGO) in the Pacific port city of Buenaventura adorned its offices with a poster listing Yorùbá deities and a series of African names that the activists in the organization sometimes used to identify themselves. However, it was quite rare to hear these names in everyday practice. In an extensive interview with some leading members of this NGO (Pedrosa et al. 1996), the absence of “Africa” is apparent. Equally, a look at the documentation produced by various black NGOs in the 1980s and early 1990s reinforces the impression that at that time, “Africa” was not a major point of reference, although by the early 1990s it does occur, most frequently in the use of the term afrocolombiano. Rather, the figure of the cimarrón (fugitive slave or Maroon) and the palenque (fugitive slave community) were
more common referents (Wade 1995), and although these figures could be connected to the idea of Africa, that connotation was not necessarily very explicit.1 By the late 1990s and early twenty-first century, however, the notion of Africa was gaining in importance and public visibility. The terms afrocolombiano (and yet more recently afro-descendiente) have become more common, and connections with Africa are explicit in, for example, recent texts on the new Afro-Colombian curriculum (e.g., Rovira de Córdoba and Córdoba Cuesta 2000; Ministerio de Educación Nacional 2001). The year 2001 was the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in Colombia, and it was an occasion for the public acknowledgment of the links of Afro-Colombians and Colombians generally to Africa. In sum, in the early 1990s “blackness” made a very significant impact on the national political and cultural panorama, while “Africa” had a slighter influence. In recent years, however, while “blackness” continues to be an important idea and symbol, the related notion of “Africa” has been gaining in importance.

My own approach to the Colombian context has never denied Africanisms in Colombian culture, contrary to some criticisms of my work.2 However, I have emphasized how Colombian blacks have used a wide variety of cultural sources—African, European, indigenous—to create new forms that are identified, in the Colombian context, as “black” (Wade 1993). With the new emphasis in Colombia—especially in Colombian anthropology—on Africanisms, I think some clarification is needed.

Theoretically, it is a question of balancing change with continuity and of grasping both the discursive construction of culture—in this case Africanisms—and culture “as such.” Continuity may exist, first, in the persistence of very specific African traits in Afro-Colombian culture, such as the burying of the placenta below a tree (Arocha 1999; T. Price 1955). Here, change would be conceived in terms of the simple disappearance of the trait itself. Second, continuity may exist in the way certain cognitive orientations or underlying cultural principles—derived from Africa and given form in the early processes of creolization that took place in the slave ports of Africa, on slave ships, and in the nascent slave societies of the New World—shape and structure the continuing development of cultural patterns in the Americas. Here change is integral to how continuity occurs. A basic cultural princi-
Understanding “Africa” and “Blackness” in Colombia

people—for example, an aesthetic idea about what makes a pleasing design in shape or color—can be passed down through generations of everyday practice and might influence such diverse spheres of activity as house design, agriculture, and textile making. The underlying idea is made manifest in many different ways as historical contexts change (see the chapters by Sally Price and by Richard Price in this volume and S. Price and R. Price 1999:ch. 8).

Both these forms of continuity are incorporated in the concept of huellas de africana, and they both focus on continuities with Africa. However, an overly intensive concern with these forms of continuity can run the risk of blinding us to the way Afro-Colombians have created new forms of culture from many different sources, using particular elements and cultural principles from different sources to create for themselves and for others something that is identifiable as “black” or “Afro-Colombian” culture, or as particular regional (for example, Pacific coastal) configurations of culture associated with blackness. In this process, there is still a sense of continuity at work, but it derives from the way people—Afro-Colombian and others—perceive and categorize what they experience, and try to construct for themselves and others a meaningful world. These are basically discursive processes of cultural construction that use labels such as “black” or “Afro-Colombian” or, just as likely, a regional label such as costeño (coastal—that is, of the Pacific or Caribbean coastal region) to categorize cultural practices that may come from the most diverse sources and be the ongoing product of endless hybridizations. A key feature of these processes are relations of cultural domination and nationalist ideologies of blanqueamiento (cultural and biological whitening), according to which black culture has generally been seen as inferior and backward, while national progress is associated with increasing cultural and physical whiteness. A strong element of continuity derives from the fact that the non-black world in Colombia has generally wished to define whatever black people do—and what they do changes historically all the time—as “black culture,” and therefore inferior and perhaps threatening. Equally, a strong element of continuity derives from the fact that Afro-Colombians recognize this process of labeling and try to cope with the position it puts them in—whether by maintaining their own cultural practices or by attempting to avoid the stigma of inferiority by changing themselves.
and their cultural practices (or by challenging the entire system of values that defines them as inferior).

My purpose in this chapter is therefore in no way to deny Africanisms in Colombian culture—they are indisputably present, it is politically important to reveal them, and doubtless rigorous ethnographic and archival research (for example, of the kind Sally Price and Richard Price [1999] have conducted for the Samaraka Maroons) will reveal more, and more subtle, African influences. My purpose is rather to show that what is considered “African” or “black” in Colombia has varied historically according to many factors. These categories have been discursively constructed in complex ways, and we cannot easily separate out Africanisms “as such” from the way people perceive and talk about blackness and Africa. I also want to show that in this discursive realm, certain continuities are generated by the hierarchies of race, class, and gender, within which attributions and claims of black and non-black identity are made. If the various different musical styles associated with blackness were persistently seen as “primitive” in Colombia, then this notion derived from both basic musical continuities, some of them rooted in Africa, which connected changing, “modernizing” forms of music (for example, the importance of drum rhythms), and the fact that whatever the origins of the music, if it was associated with blackness, it would be classified as “primitive” and yet “exciting” in some way by non-blacks. These two processes are intertwined and very hard to separate out. Sally Price and Richard Price (1999) use the notion of “the changing same,” a term coined by Leroi Jones (aka Amiri Baraka), to evoke their approach. One could just as well use it to evoke the sort of structural continuity I am referring to, in which “cultural continuity appears as the mode of cultural change” (Sahlins 1993:19). That is, a people’s attempt to maintain a cultural continuity, or cultural difference for themselves (and, I would add, others), is the mode of cultural change; in maintaining that difference—which is, crucially, a sense of difference—they avail themselves of whatever seems to work, whether it is their “own” traditions or something else.

“AFRICA” AND “BLACKNESS” IN COLOMBIAN POPULAR MUSIC, 1920S TO 1950S

In twentieth-century academic disciplines and in state circles in
Understanding “Africa” and “Blackness” in Colombia

Colombia, blacks were not an object of attention or legislation. They were “invisible” (de Friedemann 1984). In the popular culture and literature of late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century Colombia, there was a good deal more interest in black people and/or in blackness as a symbol (for example, in music). Such interest was limited and very often placed blacks in an inferior social position, either exoticizing or explicitly vilifying them, but blacks were not actually “invisible,” even if important aspects of their identity were erased. In one sense, to actually erase blacks (or indigenous people) from representations of the nation ran counter to the whole ideology of mestizaje (racial and cultural mixture) on which ideas of Colombian nationhood were—and to a large extent still are—based (Wade 1998, 2000).

There are two aspects here. First, the nationalist ideology of mestizaje automatically implies the notional original stocks involved in creating the mixed nation—Africans, indigenous Americans, and Europeans—and thus reasserts their existence at the same time it envisages their eventual disappearance. Yet their total elimination threatens to rob the nation of its self-definition as mixed: without the original ingredients present, the continuing process of mixture loses its sense. The ideology of mestizaje therefore involves continuous blending, but also continuing separation. Second, a constant emphasis on racial difference is central to elites’ definitions of themselves as superior—as whiter, richer, more central, more “civilized,” more “modern,” and so forth. Black and indigenous people are not only identified as racially distinct but are also often associated with poverty, marginality, vulgarity, and backwardness.

Thus, if we look at Colombia in, say, the 1920s to the 1930s, blackness (and sometimes by extension “Africa”) was not absent but occupied a specific role. As I have shown previously (Wade 1993:16–17), elite writers could take rather different positions. Luis López de Mesa wrote in 1934 that “We [Colombians] are Africa, America, Asia and Europe all at once, without grave spiritual perturbation” (López de Mesa 1970, cited in Wade 1993:16). Although he was at the same time rather disparaging about contemporary black people, he was not as negative as his peer, Laureano Gómez, who lectured in 1928 that black and indigenous heritage were “marks of complete inferiority” (Gómez 1970, cited in Wade 1993:17). Although their views differed to some
Peter Wade

extent, they converged in writing about blackness and Africa within the context of defining the nation and its possibilities. Whatever blackness and Africanness were thought to be took its shape from that context: both qualities were seen to be contributors to a process of ongoing mixture and were defined in terms of what they might have to offer the nation as basic ingredients. Strength, power, and hard work were among the virtues usually outlined by such writers; laziness, lax morality, and irrationality were the vices they feared. Yet, of course, the context of the nation was itself being formed by preexisting notions of blackness. The stereotyped views of what blacks might offer the nation were obviously not disconnected from elitist stereotyped views of blacks that had existed in the late colonial period in Latin America. Here we can see elements of continuity that are linked to persisting power hierarchies and “white” elite hegemony.

To illustrate this process more exactly, I will examine some changes in the popular music scene in Colombia that took place between the 1920s and the 1950s, paralleling changes in other Latin American countries that saw, often rather earlier, the emergence of “national” urban popular forms such as tango in Argentina, rumba in Cuba, samba in Brazil, and ranchera in Mexico. In Colombia, various types of music, among them porro and cumbia, emerged as national commercial styles during this period (Wade 1998, 2000). Not only were they nationally successful in purely commercial terms, but they became national icons: cumbia especially has come to represent Colombian popular music abroad since about the 1960s, but porro shared this role before that. These genres, known broadly as música costeña or música tropical, came from the Caribbean coastal region of the country, la costa. This region has a mixed population, with significant indigenous groups in some rather peripheral areas and large numbers of mestizos whose ancestry includes much African and indigenous heritage, as well as European. There are also large numbers of “black” people, although the exact term they might use to describe themselves, or that others might use to describe them, would depend on a host of contextual factors. The region has the image of being a relatively “black” place, and the music associated with it in the 1930s and 1940s partook of this image.

Prior to the success of this music, the “national” music of Colombia
Understanding “Africa” and “Blackness” in Colombia

was a style associated with the country’s Andean interior, a central region in geographical, economic, and political terms and also a much “whiter” region. This music was called *bambuco* and consisted of songs played on various types of guitar with some light percussion accompaniment. As *bambuco* was considered to be the essence of Colombian nationality, there was a good deal of concern and debate about its origins. Blackness was part of these discussions. Debates included the relative contributions of the constituent elements of the African-Indian-European triad, which is constantly invoked in such discussions in Colombia; everything must be traced in some way to these origins. However, different people weighted each pole of the triad differently. Some saw the genre, and specifically its name, as deriving from Africa; others saw its origins as European or rooted in the Andean region of Colombia. The debates have continued to the present (Ochoa 1997).

With *porro* and *cumbia*, there was less equivocation about the presence of black, African, and indigenous elements, partly because of the association of these styles with the Caribbean coastal region. Yet exactly what was “black” in the music and what that blackness signified was very open to multiple readings, even more so than in the case of *bambuco*. To grasp this idea, we need to know a little more about how the music emerged and became national in impact.

After 1900, all over Latin America and the Caribbean, cities grew rapidly, industrialization increased, rural populations moved into urban surroundings, and urban space became more class-stratified. Urban popular music began to consolidate just as the radio and recording industries were being set up, first in the United States between 1900 and 1920, and soon after across the rest of the Americas. The middle classes appropriated styles of urban popular music favored by the working classes (samba, tango, and so on) as symbols of national culture (Chasteen 2004). In Colombia, popular music from Latin America, the Caribbean, North America, and Europe was in fashion in the cities in the 1920s. The “national” product was still *bambuco* at this time, and this style had already been recorded by some Colombian artists in New York. In Colombia, as in the rest of the Americas, local “jazz bands” played a wide variety of popular tunes. Although they soon appeared all over the country, such bands were seen first in the Caribbean coastal region, partly because of its very
location and partly because of the influence of many foreign immigrants in ports such as Barranquilla.

Jazz bands in Barranquilla and other regional cities began to include styles that were said to come from the rural hinterland of the region. Porro was one such style. It came from the repertoire of the wind bands that played in provincial fiestas—wind bands were a trend not only in Colombia but all over Latin America from the early nineteenth century onward—and that reportedly picked up peasant styles and “invented” porro. Some jazz band leaders had provincial small-town or even rural backgrounds, had been trained in such wind bands, and had contact with peasant musical groups. In orchestrated form, porro and related styles became popular in the elite social clubs of the coastal cities, although they were met with a certain resistance at first, being considered too plebian and vulgar—and “black” by some. From the Caribbean coastal region, the styles made their way into the cities of the interior, Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali, with the jazz bands of leaders such as Lucho Bermúdez, a key figure in this process. By the late 1940s, this costeño music was a national success and had begun to define the Colombian popular-music sound abroad. Again, some commentators in cities of the interior gave this music a hostile reception as musically unpleasant, licentious, vulgar, too black, and African.

What was the overall context within which different people were defining “blackness” or making reference to “Africa” when they talked about costeño music? The principal frame of reference was the nation. Nationalism has rarely been extremely passionate and intense in Colombia (Bushnell 1993), but during the early decades of the twentieth century, rapid processes of modernization made the nation and its past and future an important concept. For many elite and middle-class commentators, the notion of blackness was something to be superseded, since it smacked of a lack of “culture” (that is, refinement), defined according to European and North American elite norms. Thus one newspaper commentator bewailed the loss of certain “traditional” Christmas festive customs. These had been taken over by “An explosive African-sounding orchestra [which] now threatens festivities from which the feeling and simplicity typical of previous celebrations are absent” (El Tiempo, December 17, 1940). Another writer described contemporary dances in Bogotá, where “the drums beat, the gentlemen of
UNDERSTANDING “AFRICA” AND “BLACKNESS” IN COLOMBIA

the orchestra screech with a tragic fury, as if they were seasoning a joyful picnic of some ‘mister’ [white boss] in a jungle in Oceania” (Sábado, June 3, 1944). The reference to Oceania, rather than Africa, obeys a contemporary primitivist tendency to merge the two (Rhodes 1994), and the overall meaning is clear: costeño music was seen as non-national, black, and primitive; and as highly emotional, exaggerated, and unrestrained (men “screeched” in an emotional chaos of tragedy, fury, and joy). Blackness and “Africa” thus take their meaning within a discourse of nationalism that seeks a Europhile future for the nation and is pronounced by an elite that can highlight its own status by vilifying popular culture.

Nationalist discourse makes reference to an international context, since a “nation” only exists in relation to other nations, and this idea leads us to a second transnational dimension within which blackness and Africanness were being construed. In Europe and North America—the very centers to which many Colombian elite and middle-class people looked to define notions of “culture”—primitivism was, during the early decades of the twentieth century, an important trend within currents of modernism. Primitivist art, the Harlem Renaissance, Josephine Baker, suntanning as an elite aesthetic—all these things were moving the worlds of fashion and the arts (Barkan and Bush 1995; S. Price 1989; Rhodes 1994; Torgovnick 1990). Africa and blackness were being constructed in ways that were by no means new—as powerful, sexy, rhythmic, emotional, authentic, raw, beautiful—but were more positive, if highly exoticizing. To be modern and above all fashionable could include engaging with blackness in these primitivist ways.

In Colombia, these currents of modernism and primitivism were felt, too, and linked to the Caribbean coastal region (cf. R. Moore 1997 on Cuba). Gilard (1991) shows that one of Colombia’s only avant-garde journals, Voces (1917–1920), came out of the Caribbean port of Barranquilla. In the 1940s, a kind of literary negritude, which influenced the intellectual elites in Bogotá, emerged. Black poet Jorge Artel’s book Tambores en la noche (Drums in the Night, 1940) portrayed the black culture of the Caribbean coastal region as replete with sensuality, music, and rhythm—and pain and sorrow. It was read by Bogotá intellectuals, including poet Eduardo Carranza, who wrote: “Artel carries the singing voice of the dark race” (1944). The black writer
Peter Wade

Manuel Zapata Olivella was also an important figure of the period: he took costeño musicians to Bogotá for presentations of “folklore,” and he published novels about the Caribbean coastal region. In 1940 his brother, Juan, started La hora costeña (the coastal hour), a Bogotá radio program of popular costeño music. Zapata Olivella was also connected to the so-called Grupo de Barranquilla, a group of writers and journalists that emerged in the 1940s and included Gabriel García Márquez, who was writing for costeño newspapers. At the same time, costeño painters such as Alejandro Obregón and Enrique Grau worked themes of sensuality and bright color into their works, sometimes using black women in their paintings (Medina 1978:367).

In many artistic spheres, then, a primitivist blackness was becoming increasingly fashionable, driven by a transnational artistic modernism that in Colombia had a strong basis in the Caribbean coastal region. The links of the region and its music to a transnational modernity were reinforced by the popularity of black-influenced music—often dance music—emerging in the rapid development of an international music industry, based in New York but from a very early stage highly transnational in terms of its recording strategies and marketing networks.

Blackness was therefore readable as modern and fashionable—the newspaper columnist who associated porro with Oceania also quipped that “modernism requires this: that we should dance like blacks in order to be in fashion” (Sábado, June 3, 1944)—and modernity was a goal nationalists aspired to. Some of the contradictions involved here could be resolved by exploiting the twin ambivalences of blackness and modernity. Modernity was generally regarded as a good thing when it implied progress, scientific and technical advance, educational improvement, and “refined” culture, but it could also imply alienation, loss of tradition, servile emulation of foreign examples, vulgar consumerism, and moral laxness. Equally, the ambivalence of blackness, which far predated the primitivist modernism of the early twentieth century, meant it could be seen by non-blacks as both evil and threatening but also as endowed with particular powers. If at this historical moment blackness was being associated with fashionable modernity, it could also be read as being nothing but “fashion”—at best mere faddishness and at worst a threat to national culture and morals.
Understanding “Africa” and “Blackness” in Colombia

The columnist who so neatly saw the connection between modernism and “dancing like blacks” also mentioned that in the contemporary scene, the culture deemed fashionable was that which had “the acrid smell of jungle and sex” (Sábado, June 3, 1944). Sex was constantly connected with música costeña, as it was connected at the time with black music all over the Americas, and as it had been even in colonial times (see Wade 1993:279; Chasteen 2004). In these decades of the twentieth century, however, a more explicit and liberated approach to sexuality was also fashionable in some circles of Europe and North America. In Colombia, where Catholic orthodoxy has historically been strong, it would be wrong to speak of radical changes in sexual morality, but Uribe Celis (1992:45) notes that feminism had made an impact on Colombia starting in the 1920s, and in the 1930s and 1940s women were migrating in large numbers to cities, where they worked as domestic servants and in factories. They earned their own incomes, and my research into people’s memories of the 1940s and 1950s indicates that young urban working-class women had some autonomy in terms of leisure activities—which included going out dancing with groups of female friends. In short, “black” music (or music with connotations of blackness) was modern in terms of the sexuality it was thought to evoke or evince. Naturally, such a connection could equally well be read as a dreadful threat to morals by those who feared the negative aspects of modernism.

If blackness was linked to modernity, or more precisely modernism, it did not thereby lose the negative connotations of primitiveness, backwardness, lack of “culture,” and so forth. But within the national and transnational frames of reference, such associations, if suitably distant or “whitened,” could also be reread in a positive light. One of the perceived threats of modernity was loss of “tradition,” the decline of the authentically national in the face of modern and fashionable “foreign” culture. One of the columnists cited above saw “African-sounding” music as the foreign threat in this context, while, ironically, “carols” were construed as authentically Colombian. But blackness could also be made to mean “tradition,” or something autochthonous. (Indigenousness might be more easily read this way, and indigenous roots were sometimes claimed for porro in newspaper commentaries on it.) Porro was, apparently, authentically Colombian
and could thus compete on the international stage with tango, samba, or rumba as legitimate representatives of national identities. What made it authentically Colombian was its origin in a region that while modern in its Barranquilla city life, was also traditional, “folkloric,” and steeped in blackness (and indigenousness), which themselves could be read, in the standard nationalist discourse of mestizaje, as elements belonging to the past.

An illustration of this concept can be found in the writings of Antonio Brugés Carmona, a costeño intellectual and politician, who in various press articles produced descriptions of costeño people, music, and events. In 1943 he described how porro was born from the traditional music of La Costa: “[S]ince it [porro] was of the same family as cumbia, under the hot and brilliant nights in which cumbia was danced, the younger son appeared in the circle [of dancers] lit by madness, bringing new rhythms to the monotonous rejoicings of cumbia…. [Porro] took over the festivities and finally went beyond the borders of its predecessors, becoming not costeño but Colombian” (El Tiempo, February 28, 1943). Cumbia was generally thought to be of antique origins, with mainly black and indigenous roots, so deriving porro from cumbia rooted it in the black and indigenous past. Lucho Bermúdez, the great jazz-band leader who did so much to popularize porro and other styles of música costeña from the 1940s onward, also emphasized this kind of local, and racial, rootedness: “In my songs I always speak of the magic, of the brujos [sorcerers], of the blacks, of all the legends of Santa Marta, Cartagena and in general of the whole Atlantic coast. I think one should always be close to one’s pueblo [people, village, nation], that’s why ‘Carmen de Bolívar’ and all those other songs were born which carried a message to all of Colombia” (Arango Z. 1985: 19).3 Much later, when Bermúdez died in 1994, President César Gaviria gave a speech in which he declared: “Lucho Bermúdez composed works which by virtue of their artistic quality and their profound popular roots today form part of the cultural heritage of the folkloric patrimony of our country” (El Espectador, April 26, 1994). The emphasis on “folkloric patrimony” is very telling when referring to a highly cosmopolitan musician, with formal musical training, who played mainly in Colombia’s elite social clubs (see below).

This is where the narratives about the origins of porro and cumbia

---

3 Peter Wade
are so important. Most of these narratives have been constructed in written form from the 1960s onward by folklorists and amateur historians, as well as professional academics (see Wade 2000:ch. 3). William Fortich, for example, is a costeño university professor and folklorist who was central in setting up in 1977 the annual National Festival of Porro, dedicated to preserving wind-band porro. He maintains that porro derives essentially from the traditional peasant conjuntos de gaitas, groups based on flutes of Amerindian origins and drums, which are documented as existing at least through the 1830s, but are said by Fortich to have origins “so remote that they become confused with legend” (1994:2). The gaita is a flute of Amerindian origins, hence Fortich is emphasizing the indigenous elements in porro’s mythical origins. However, the drums used in the music of the Caribbean coastal region are attributed to African influence, and Fortich then makes tangential reference to Vodou and santería (without explicitly linking them to Colombia or porro) before mentioning a secret society called poro, found in West Africa (1994:12–15).

Fortich then focuses on a late-nineteenth-century founding figure, Alejandro Ramírez Ayazo, who had learned the clarinet from a trained musician and liked to invite conjuntos de gaitas to his house, where he played clarinet with them (1994:67–68). This was the transitional context in which “the old porro of the gaiteros served as a nucleus which musicians with some academic training could develop” (1994:6), and the wind-band repertoire is generally agreed to have emerged from porro.

The same basic narrative of continuous musical tradition molded superficially by new interpreters informs the next phase, when jazz bands adopted porro from wind bands in the 1930s. Band leaders such as Lucho Bermúdez are said to have taken porro and other similar styles and “dressed them up in tails.” Portaccio, for example, a costeño radio announcer and amateur historian, makes obligatory reference to the “tri-ethnic” origins of porro: from “the white” comes the dance, specifically the “minuet”-style opening of the music; from “the black” comes the drum; from “the Indian” the cane flute, precursor of the clarinet (1995:44–45). Portaccio adds that in the 1930s, the genre was considered rather plebian, so Bermúdez “took up elements of the Big-Bands of the era, above all [those] of white origin, softening porro and thus giving it a greater circulation” (1995:46).
Peter Wade

This very typical rendering of a central body of tradition with a light clothing of new style is also characteristic of the historiography of cumbia. The story is generally simpler, focusing less on late-nineteenth-century wind bands and referring to cumbia, whether as music or dance, as having remote colonial origins that are of course tri-ethnic. Cumbia is often held to be, as in the words of Delia Zapata Olivella, a folkloric dance teacher of some renown and sister of Manuel, “a musical synthesis of the Colombian nation” (1962). The sleeve notes of La candela viva, a CD by black costeño singer Totó la Momposina, say that cumbia is “a fine example of the combined sentiments of Indian, Spanish and African culture”; it originated as “a courting dance . . . between Black men and Indian women when the two communities began to intermarry.” The notes also cite Totó herself as saying that “the music I play has its roots in a mixed race: being Black and Indian, the heart of the music is completely percussive.” Cumbia is thus presented as a regional variant—particularly in the lesser role given to European influences—of the central metaphorical act of sexual congress that drives the mestizaje central to nationalism. All this construes cumbia as a traditional, even originary, music and dance form.

These commentators are emphasizing tradition and continuity, with greater weight given to indigenous and African than to European influences. They are retrospectively plotting particular lines through a tangled skein of syncretized syncretisms and mutual influences that could also be traced in different ways. One might look at the formal training Lucho Bermúdez received and his avowed indebtedness to non-Colombian musicians and teachers with conservatory backgrounds and conclude that the porro he played was a variant on a contemporary pan–Latin American and Caribbean musical style that he chose to label as porro in order to give it some nationalist appeal and to distinguish it in a competitive, transnational music market. The traditionalist commentaries allow us to see how “Africa” or blackness is constructed as a point of reference—albeit a rather distant one, sketched in invocations of secret societies or African drums—for the nation’s identity. Indigenous and black genealogies are privileged and traced in direct lines of descent that allow a central core to remain, audibly linking twentieth-century porro and cumbia to the sexual act that gave birth to the nation. One could argue for real musical conti-
Understanding “Africa” and “Blackness” in Colombia

nuities, from colonial associations of slaves with their drums, through the peasant groups, to the wind bands and the jazz bands. Bermúdez, for example, does retain certain muted rhythmic markers that link his music to local peasant music, as far as we can know that music through contemporary accounts of it (Bermúdez 1996). My point is not to deny these continuities but to demonstrate how they are also discursively constructed—whether by folklorists or racist columnists—so that judgment about what constitutes a “real” musical continuity is by no means straightforward.

Whatever blackness and Africanness might be was therefore subject to innumerable readings: they might be modern and fashionable, or primitive and backward; they might be modern precisely because they were “primitive”; they might be sexy, but that sexuality could be an underlying drive for mestizaje and nationhood, a threat to morality, or a liberatory force challenging hidebound social conventions; they might represent roots and authenticity, something autochthonously Colombian, or they might represent the benighted past that had to be superseded.

So far I have discussed constructs of blackness and Africanness at the level of discourse about music within the national and transnational context. But the theme of sexuality suggests a much more personal level at which these processes of identification operate. Two ideas push me in this direction. First, I have already mentioned how nationalist discourse on mestizaje has a permanent tension between an image of homogeneity and one of continuing difference; each depends on the other. This tension is enacted in terms of pronouncements about the nation’s past and future, and in terms of discriminations against individual people (rejected as marriage partners for being “too black”) or particular cultural forms, such as musical styles (also rejected for being “too black”)—even while the person discriminating in this way identifies him- or herself as mestizo and understands Colombian culture as the product of mixtures. In her dissertation about the María Lionza cult in Venezuela, Plácido (1998) explores how believers in the cult sometimes think of mestizos as being gray and boring people, in whom the three original ingredients of mixture—Africa, America, and Europe—have blended to produce a colorless, bland, uneventful product. She identifies an alternative discourse in which people see the
three elements as coexisting in a mosaic, without losing their original identity. People eclectically make use of symbols and resources identified with different origins, according to their needs and desires. The variety that this coexistence implies is seen as rich with possibilities, with color, with potential. In concrete terms, within the very broad terms of the “cult” (which is not a closed and systematic grouping but a very open and varied set of beliefs about spirits who descend into mediums), the coexistence of elements is manifest in three central spirit figures, las tres potencias, the three powers: El Negro Felipe (black), María Lionza (white, although occasionally presented as indigenous), and El Indio Guacaipuro (indigenous). These, plus a host of other spirits, can descend into mediums who then speak to other believers (see also Taussig 1997). The notion of coexisting rather than fused elements is certainly suggested in some commentaries on Colombian music, which often insist on identifying particular aspects of contemporary styles as “black/African,” “white/European,” and “indigenous.” The notion of spirits being in the body suggests that these “powers” or potentialities are thought of, or even experienced, as parts of the self in a bodily sense, as aspects of embodied personhood.

This idea links to the second theme: the importance of thinking about racial identities in terms of embodiment. Embodiment has been tackled from the perspectives of medical anthropology and gender and sexuality studies, but it is less clear what difference it makes that racial identities are lived in an embodied way. I am not referring here simply to the idea that racial identities may be marked phenotypically. I am trying to grapple with how people feel their racial identity (their “blood”) expresses itself and is part of their person. I cannot elaborate on this agenda here (see Wade 2002), but I am interested in the fact that music and dance are intensely embodied activities and ones that have been highly racialized in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Notions about the racial origins of particular musical elements might be considered from the point of view of how people live their lives in an embodied way. Going to a dance class to learn cumbia might be understandable as a personal project of working on one’s body to express and indeed develop the “blackness” one “has inside,” as a potentiality. Or indeed, simply going out in Bogotá, Cali, Barranquilla, or Medellín to dance salsa, plus a bit of cumbia and perhaps nowadays
the occasional *currulao* (a Pacific coastal style), could be a way of expressing the “blackness” in one’s body and keeping it alive. One might also think about the significance of common sayings such as “se le salió el negro” (literally, “the black came out of him”), which can be heard from Argentina to Cuba when a person who may be “white” or “mixed” behaves in a way thought to be “black”; the implication is that “blackness” is still “in there” somewhere and may come out spontaneously or be consciously developed.

Some pilot interviews I carried out with black dancers and musicians in Cali in 1998 also point in this direction. All of them acknowledged a strong link between black people, rhythm, and skill in dance. Some thought this skill was “in the blood” (*en la sangre*). Others were more “environmentalist” in their views, either because they were explicitly aware of the racist potential of arguments that invoked “blood” or because their own experience had taught them that non-blacks could be excellent dancers while blacks might not be. The dancers all emphasized, however, that becoming a dancer had been an intensive process of bodily training, whatever their “natural” skills. One man, a singer in a rap group (see next section), recounted his experiences learning salsa, and later getting into reggae, raggamuffin, and finally rap, and told of his identification with *ese golpe fuerte* (that heavy beat), which he found in these different styles. Developing that “heavy beat” as a personal embodied project of being a good dancer and eventually a performer was linked to his own developing identity as a black man, which he also expressed by growing dreadlocks and adopting a discourse that included elements of black consciousness and Afrocentrism. In a sense, although this man explicitly rejected the notion of rhythm being “natural” to black people in general, he was developing the “blackness” inside him, realizing, expressing, and enacting it through his body to achieve an identity as a black man in 1990s Colombia.

All this theory is somewhat speculative, and I don’t have systematic empirical data to back it up, but it gives us a different way of approaching the processes in which people identify what is “black” in their local, regional, and national cultures. This, I suggest, might profitably be seen as an intensely personal and bodily process. Thus—to return to Colombian music in the mid-twentieth century—the historical shift by which *música costeña* displaced bambuco as the most
Peter Wade

popular national sound can be understood in some sense as the “blackening” of Colombia (albeit with a whitened form of blackness, so to speak) but also as the “bringing out” of the blackness that individual Colombians might have felt was inside them (not that all would have felt this; some surely vigorously denied any such thing). Interestingly, I found that people often used intensely bodily imagery in recounting their experiences of musical changes in Colombia in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. The imagery most often used was that of heat: migrants to the interior of the country from the Caribbean coastal region, whether black or mixed, and people native to the interior all talked about how the costeños and música costeña had “heated up” the cold interior of the country—made it freer, more colorful, less restricted, and so on. This idea suggests that dancing and listening to music might be understood as a way of “embodying the nation.” Individuals might conceptually and bodily reproduce themselves as “nationals” as they express certain aspects of their person—black, white, indigenous, mixed—through the embodied practice of dance and music. Of course, such a process of reproduction would immediately locate a person in a transnational as well as national frame, since the elements involved (for example, “black rhythm”) evoke diaspora as much as nationhood; and, of course, the person might be dancing to “foreign” music. But this internationalizing power of the imagination when channeled through mass media is equally true of all processes of imagining national communities, not just musical ones.

This section has examined the public and personal ways in which people make claims and attributions about the racial identity of various different “ingredients” seen to constitute cultural forms, musical styles, and persons. These claims and attributions are being made in the context of notions of the nation in a transnational world; the international recording industry’s attempts to market musical genres; ideas about modernity and tradition; sexual morality and changing gender relations; and personal development of the embodied self. In these contexts, “Africa” and “blackness” are being discursively constructed in changing ways not related in straightforward ways to the “realities” of Africanisms in Colombian culture, partly because these discourses also have the power to construct the perception of these realities.

On the other hand, it is clear that there are certain important structural continuities, in addition to those we might trace in terms of
UNDERSTANDING “AFRICA” AND “BLACKNESS” IN COLOMBIA

African rhythm or African-derived musical aesthetics. The attributions and claims of origin and identity tend to be made within hierarchies of race, class, gender, power, and moral worth that retain important aspects of their structure. Thus “blackness” and “Africanness” in Colombia and more widely in the Americas have generally had a subordinate social location; “black music”—however that term has been construed by different people—has very often been seen as noisy, vulgar, and primitive, but also possibly attractive. In a general sense, too, some basic hegemonic values of whiteness won out: even as the music introduced elements of tropicality and blackness and even “Africa” into the national cultural panorama, these appeared in rather whitened form: porro was made “smoother”; black musicians were infrequently seen in the big jazz bands.

CALI

The question of continuities raises its head with particular force in Colombia in the wake of the 1991 constitution, which defines the nation as “multiethnic and pluricultural” and gives some specific symbolic and politico-legal space to both black and indigenous communities. Are “Africa” and “blackness” being substantially redefined in this context? Or are there important continuities? The answer is, perhaps predictably, a bit of both.

To examine this question, I will focus on a very specific case, a small “ethno-cultural association” in a low-income barrio of the Colombian city of Cali, with which I did some fieldwork in 1997. The association, which is also a rap group, is called Ashanty, which gives some indication of where their interests lie (see Matory, this volume, for hints as to why such a name might have been chosen). The group, formed in about 1992, is held together by a small number of regular members—three in 1997 and 1998. It undertakes community projects within the barrio and also organizes rap events on a larger scale. The key members are men in their twenties, who also work in various occupations to earn a living. I will look at the various different fields of practice that influence their definitions of blackness and Africanness and also influence how these definitions are received by other people in the city. I make no claim that the views of these three men are representative of the views of Afro-Colombians in Cali or in Colombia. I simply use the case of Ashanty as one illustration of a quite varied situation in Colombia.
Peter Wade

A central field is that of the constitutional reform itself and the legislation issuing from it. In the 1990s blackness achieved a greater public profile than it had ever had (although fear of slave rebellion put blackness pretty high on the public agenda on occasion in colonial New Granada). This profile is evident in political debate about legislation in favor of black communities, government decrees about the inclusion of Afro-Colombian themes in school curricula, and the very rapid burgeoning of black organizations, rural and urban, which, although concentrated in the Pacific coastal region where land rights can be claimed, are also found in many other areas, especially the principal cities. It is also evident in TV documentaries about the Pacific coastal region, the inclusion of contemporary “black culture” in state museum displays, and the increasing visibility of music associated with the Pacific coastal region.

Ashanty emerged in exactly this wave of interest in black culture. The everyday problems its members encountered in their struggle to survive and maintain some kind of material and cultural security—poverty, violence, lack of urban services and employment—were strongly channeled into ideas about racism. These ideas emerged from two sources: first, their own experience of racism in Cali—a city with a large native black population but also a rapidly growing number of black immigrants from the Pacific coastal region (Urrea 1997); and second, their perceptions of racism elsewhere, such as in Jamaica (particularly via Bob Marley’s reggae) and the United States (via such films as Malcolm X). At the same time, they were involved in more homegrown challenges to racism, such as those mounted by Cimarrón (the National Movement for the Rights of the Black Communities of Colombia), some of whose seminars they attended.

Ashanty members are also linked into academic circuits to some extent, as they have been “studied” by a few academics, and recently one of them worked as a research assistant with a Colombo-French study of black migration to Cali. Two Ashanty members attended a seminar mounted by this project in 1998 and participated in debates. One of them criticized my paper precisely on the question of “Africa,” to which he felt I gave insufficient emphasis. The whole academic debate about Africanisms in Colombian culture thus also filtered into Ashanty’s world via the growing reflexivity of academic knowledge that
Understanding “Africa” and “Blackness” in Colombia

is characteristic of late-twentieth-century social science, and forms the second field of practice that influences definitions of blackness at this local level.

Ashanty forms part of a growing number of small black grassroots NGOs that larger institutions—the state, the Catholic Church, international NGOs—have been beginning to support. In Cali, for example, the city created a Division of Black Affairs in 1996. This trend introduces a third field of practice that impinges on the definition of Ashanty’s identity: the circuits of state and NGO funding within which small-scale community organizations compete for support. Ashanty has had some success in this competition. In 1996, for example, it organized a citywide rap concert as the culmination of a series of workshops covering various aspects of black culture and history as well as the history and techniques of “hip-hop culture.” The whole project was financed by the church, one dependency of the city administration, and an international NGO. But I found that the city, in dependencies such as the Youth Section, was reluctant to fund Ashanty because it considered the group too radical on the one hand and too disorganized on the other. That is, Ashanty members emphasized racism and blackness too much for the mostly white city employees, and they did not seem, by the standards of these employees, to have a “culture” that was stable and enduring enough to warrant investment of public funds destined to create good citizens. In one sense, the logic of the new multicultural constitution and the creation of entities such as the Cali División de Negritudes is that black people, and indeed everyone, have a “culture.” Yet the city also wanted to be able to vet whether a “culture” was worthy of being considered as such for the purposes of funding and support (Wade 1999).

To compete for funding in local, national, and even international networks, Ashanty members have to have a coherent representation of who they are. Since part of their claims involve ethnic identity and difference, they have to construct a “culture,” or at least a specific “subculture,” that is representable as “black” (although some in the City Council might prefer it to be represented as “youth”). This situation leads us to a fourth field of practice: the objectification of culture taking place within globalizing circuits of commodification. Ashanty members nurtured their identity as a group and as individuals on salsa,
Peter Wade

reggae, raggamuffin, and rap; mass media images of Bob Marley; and Spike Lee’s Malcolm X. The iconography visible in the places they hung out included pictures of US basketball stars, US rappers, and Jamaican reggae singers; Nelson Mandela sometimes figured too. The rap concert event they organized in 1997 had all the usual trappings of a commercial popular music presentation—including sponsorship by a Colombian beer company. Of course, the members of Ashanty personalized these symbols. Two of them wore dreadlocks and often Rasta colors; one of them painted a sign in Rasta colors for the Peluquería Africa (Africa Barbershop). I am not implying, therefore, that the use of globalized commodities to construct a local identity is in some way inauthentic (see Campbell 1987; D. Miller 1995). The point is that notions of blackness and Africanness are constructed in ways influenced by this field of practice. Of course, this idea is hardly new. As I showed above, Colombian music from the 1930s onward developed in the highly transnational commodified field of the international music industry; a key symbol of blackness in Colombia was Afro-Cuban popular music, for example. In the 1990s, one difference was the speed of circulation of these commodities, their accessibility and pervasiveness, especially at the barrio level. The other difference was the more self-conscious use of these symbols to actively construct an identity around an objectified notion of culture (which is not to say that this identity is therefore “false”). In the 1940s, although costeño musical culture was being objectified and commodified, it was less involved in a self-conscious construction of identity.

Given these different fields of practice, how are blackness and Africanness being constructed in this Cali context? As with Colombian music, we can see that what is identified as black and/or African is located in a national field (the constitutional reform, the increasing public legitimacy of blackness in definitions of national identity) and an international field (global circuits of exchange); it is influenced by academic research (on African origins) and by the salability, so to speak, of an identity (in this case the “selling” of Ashanty’s identity to public and NGO funding bodies). Embodiment is also important. For Ashanty members and other young blacks who participate in rap and in barrio-level “folkloric” groups that practice Pacific coast curricular music and dance—the same individuals often have experience in both
of these very different musical contexts—the motor skills acquired through practicing dance moves associated with these musical styles do not just express but also constitute their blackness (and their youth).

In these contexts, then, we find—at least in the case of Ashanty but also more widely—a much more assertive and less whitened definition of blackness, in which “Africa” is an important, if vague, symbolic element, and various elements are combined, montage-style, in a self-conscious process of identity formation in which reflexive relations between academics and activists are more tightly woven than before. New images of blackness are being created based on rap, reggae, and raggamuffin, and images of the United States and Africa itself, alongside the ever-popular salsa. In the musical world of the Caribbean coastal region, this situation is paralleled to some extent by the advent of champeta (known more recently as terapia), the local name for an eclectic mixture of Zairean soukous, Nigerian highlife, and Haitian konpa, soca, and reggae, which since the 1970s has become popular among particular young working-class people in Cartagena and other the cities and towns of the region (Cunin 2003; Mosquera and Provensal 2000; Pacini 1993; Streicker 1995; Wexer 1997). These faces of blackness tend to sit rather ill at ease with other more nationalist versions, to which these faces appear rather “foreign”—as did porro to some in the 1940s.

Here we can see some continuities in the hierarchies of power and morality within which attributions and claims about blackness are being made: blackness is still mainly subordinate, still mainly working class; it is still, in some of its forms, construed by others as “disorganized” and, with its (“foreign-looking”) US-style emphasis on racism or “foreign” musical styles, threatening to the image of (national) racial democracy, now revamped as tolerant multiculturalism. Meanwhile, other instances of black culture, such as the currulao music of the Pacific coast, can be commodified and sold in “cultural” festivals as authentically Colombian and emotionally liberating. (In fact, the two aspects are not as separable as this idea might suggest: as I mentioned above, many black Cali rappers have been part of barrio “folkloric” groups that specialize in “traditional” currulao styles of music and dance.)

In sum, blackness is being constructed in a more assertive way on the one hand, but also in a rather conservative nationalist way on the
other. In both cases, appeal may be made to multiculturalism, although nationalist versions of this idea are in many ways a variant on the older theme of mestizaje as based on the Africa-America-Europe triad. In both cases, too, “Africa” is a more visible (or audible) presence, although it remains a rather vague evocation with very different meanings attached: it may legitimize a specific cultural difference in the realms of identity politics (for Ashanty and other black organizations), or it may tap into the realms of “world music” trends of commodification.

**CONCLUSION**

The thrust of this paper has been that “blackness” and “Africa” have to be understood in their changing historical contexts; these include such varied aspects as definitions of national identity, transnational capitalism, local politics, the academic production of knowledge, and the way people conceive of their own persons as embodying different aspects of the nation’s heritage, expressible through embodied practice. This emphasis on contextuality has to be tempered by a concern with continuities, however. One can locate these in terms of huellas de africanía, but it is necessary to do this with the knowledge of the multiple readings of “Africa” that are already being made by others within the contexts outlined above—readings that have their own structural continuities generated by relations of dominance and that intertwine with the continuities of cultural practice passed across generations.

An aspect of these complex processes of particular concern to academics is how the production of academic knowledge fits into a sense of continuity and change. What is the impact of my argument? What is the impact of Arocha’s approach? What happens when Arocha suggests (1996:327), admittedly in a speculative fashion, that the white veils he saw hanging from a ceiling during a funeral in the Pacific coast region of Colombia evoked, in their shape and form, the two linked equilateral triangles that symbolize the ax of Changó on Yoruba altars in Cuba, Haiti, and Brazil? It seems unlikely that the local people at the funeral thought of these connections, but it is possible that they, or others, would begin to do so, whether or not the connections turned out to be “true” (by the academic standards current in history and anthropology). The effect is to reconstruct “Africa” in yet another form.
in the Colombian context. The burden of my argument is not to deny
that connections between Africa and Colombia exist, nor to deny that
their unearthing is worthwhile and has important political implica-
tions. It is rather to say that the ways in which “Africa” and “blackness”
have been constructed and read in Colombia make these terms so vari-
able that we cannot confine ourselves to the endeavor of unearthing.
The implication of my argument is that “blackness” and “Africa” are,
and can be, much more than the genealogical origins we might be able
to unearth for them, and that their political importance need not depend on attributions of authentic origin.

Notes

A grant from the Leverhulme Trust (1994–1995) financed my research on
costeño music. I based this research on interviews with musicians, industry per-
sonnel, and “ordinary” listeners in Bogotá, Medellín, and Barranquilla; a review of
the press archives; and secondary literature. The Nuffield Foundation (1997) and
the University of Manchester (1998) funded my research in Cali. These projects
were linked to the Organización social, dinámicas culturales e identidades de las
poblaciones afrocolombianas del Pacífico y suroccidente en un contexto de movil-
idad y urbanización, run jointly from 1996 through 2000 by CIDSE (Centro de
Investigaciones y Documentación Socioeconómica) of the Facultad de Ciencias
Sociales y Económicas, Universidad del Valle, Cali, and IRD (Institut de
Recherche pour le Développement, Paris). My thanks to Fernando Urrea of
CIDSE for help with this work.

1. Cunin (1999) shows how in the city of Cartagena, on Colombia’s
Caribbean coast, the representation of black and Afro-Colombian identities in the
post-1991 context is dominated by palenqueros, black people from the village of
Palenque de San Basilio, a former palenque that today retains a clear and unique
Afro-Colombian cultural and linguistic identity.

musical style, if not the form and content of much black music [in Colombia] is
very African…the Congo dances and the masks of the carnival of Barranquilla
clearly have strong African origins….Clearly the Africans imported into Colombia
had a major impact on the evolution of Colombian culture.”

3. Santa Marta and Cartagena are cities of colonial origin on the Caribbean
coast. “Carmen de Bolívar” is a song dedicated to Bermúdez’s hometown.
Peter Wade

4. I use the real name of the group, since it is already in the public domain, and group members have given me explicit permission to do so.