The study of the movements and transformations of musical forms across time, space, and social contexts, although long a basic consideration of music history, has acquired fresh significance and analytical thrust in recent decades. Both the interest in such studies and their theoretical orientations have been enhanced by the emergence of globalization studies and the fresh appreciation of the ways that musical forms can be rearticulated and resignified as they move between different places, periods, and social strata. In this article I attempt to schematize some of the formal continuities and changes involved in a particularly complex set of interrelated genres, which can be seen to constitute various efflorescences, or adaptations, of Cuban campesino music, or what could be called the guajira complex of musical forms.

In the intricate world of circular musical exchanges between Old and New Worlds, those between Cuba and Spain have particular historical depth and richness. Among these interactions, especially outstanding in their fertility and abundance are the musics in one way or another inspired by música guajira, or music of guajiros, a Cuban term for small farmers of predominantly Hispanic descent. At the generative core of this complex of genres lies the punto cubano, which, in its most characteristic and relevant forms, comprises certain distinctive ways of singing verses, predominantly in the ten-line décima form, with standardized melodic and accompanimental patterns. These patterns appear to have coalesced from Spanish-derived elements by the nineteenth century and have since continued to flourish in their particular milieus. In the latter 1800s the punto inspired a Spanish popular-song genre called guajira, which flourished, in different forms, in zarzuela theater and in commercial flamenco contexts, constituting a major cante de ida y vuelta, or song-form of the “departure and return,” that is,
between Spain and the New World. Around the turn of the century, a parallel although distinct urban song-form, also called *guajira*, emerged in Cuban music theater. In the 1930s, as this early theatrical *guajira* declined in popularity, a thoroughly distinct and more durable form of *guajira* emerged in Cuba, with other striking parallels in Spain.

Taken retrospectively, this set of genres, together with their historical forerunners in Spain, constitutes a musical family of considerable variety and complexity. Fortunately for analytical purposes, the *guajira* complex has not been neglected by scholars. The collaborative two-volume work *La música entre Cuba y España* (1998, 1999) by Cuban scholars María Teresa Linares and Victoria Eli, with Faustino Nuñez and María de los Ángeles Alfonso Rodríguez, constitutes one important study, which covers certain aspects of the *guajira* complex. The evolution of the Cuban *punto* is further explored in Linares’s *El punto cubano* (1999) and Natalio Galán’s little-known but remarkable *Cuba y sus sones* (1983). For their part, peninsular scholars Romualdo Molina and Miguel Espín have documented with great erudition the development of the *guajira* as a flamenco *cante*, or song-type (1991). Meanwhile, the various Spanish and Cuban contributors to Maximiano Trapero’s edited volumes on the décima (1994, 2001) shed much light on the evolution of the *punto* and, in particular, its relation to Canary Island forms. Although the present author cannot pretend to improve upon such writings, much may nevertheless remain to be said on the subject of the *guajira* family. Some of these works (especially those of Linares, León, and Trapero) are collectors’ items, and almost all are marked by a paucity of musical analyses and transcriptions. More formidable a challenge is the way that the *guajira* complex constitutes a musical entity of unwieldy dimensions and complications, and yet one whose internal interrelationships do invite some sort of organizational scheme. It is such an over-arching perspective, with an emphasis on formal continuities and discontinuities, that this essay hopes to present. In the process I endeavor to suggest some broader perspectives on the dynamics of musical continuity and change.

The *Punto Cubano*

The *punto cubano*, in its regional variants (and poorly documented historical ones) can be regarded as the primary inspirational core of the set of genres here presented as the *guajira* complex. These genres can all be seen to rearticulate, with various transformations and external influences, aspects of the individual distinctive formal features of the *punto*. Although the term “punto” originally referred to guitar technique, in nineteenth-century Cuba, as suggested above, it came to denote the family of styles of rendering
pre-composed or improvised verses, accompanied primarily by stringed instruments such as guitar, laúd, and the mandolin-like bandurria. The Hispanic origins of the punto are overt in the use of these instruments, in the genre’s association primarily with white or mulatto guajiros, and in the predominance of the ten-line décima verse form. This form, in its espinela variant, consists of octosyllabic lines in the rhyme scheme abbaaccddc. Although visually resembling a mirrored structure, it is better regarded as an initial abba quatrains (a redondilla), constituting a complete grammatical and conceptual statement, which is then elaborated in the subsequent six lines; a musical pause or interlude after the sixth line can lend the final four lines (cddc) the character of a concluding redondilla. The décima itself, although extant throughout much of Latin America, has been cultivated with particular enthusiasm in Cuba (and Puerto Rico), both as a literary genre and as a vernacular idiom, whose popularity owes much to its role in folk music.

The punto has flourished primarily in the western half of Cuba, with its more distinctive and to some extent polarized Hispanic- and African-derived cultural traditions, rather than in the culturally and racially more Creole eastern sector. As the predominant genre of música guajira, the punto has flowered in several regional and idiosyncratic personal variants, distinguished by tune, typical accompaniment patterns, and such features as the use of a non-décima estribillo, or refrain (e.g., in the punto of Sancti Spiritus). A more general distinction exists between the metered puntofijo (“fixed”) styles, and the puntolibre (“free”) styles, whose décimas are sung in free time, with punctuating metered instrumental ritornellos in alternating bars of 6/8 and 3/4. The latter style (especially the puntolibre pinareño), with a single fairly standardized chordal and, to some extent, melodic pattern, predominates in western Cuba and the Havana area and has for some time constituted something of a pan-regional norm (extending even to the Canary Islands, where it has been cultivated by returning immigrants).

The most common puntolibre setting is fairly standardized. Essentially, it can be seen as having two bipartite melodic lines, labeled in example 1 as A (A1 and A2) and B (B1 and B2). The first two lines of the décima are sung to A, and are often repeated once; lines 3–4 are then sung to B, leading to an instrumental ritornello (during which the poet, if improvising, may create the rest of the décima in his mind). Lines 5–6 are then sung to A; and after another ritornello, lines 7–10 are sung to melodies A and B. Instrumental ritornellos precede and follow the décima.

verse line: 1 2 1 2 3 4 (rit.) 5 6 (rit.) 7 8 9 10 (rit.)
rhyme:   a b a b b a a c c d d c d c
         A A B A A B
Example 1. Typical *punto libre* melody

\[
\begin{align*}
&F \quad C \quad F \quad G \quad E7 \quad Am \quad D7 \quad F \quad G \\
\text{tune:} & \quad A1 \quad A2 \quad B1 \quad B2
\end{align*}
\]

During the ritornellos, which are of indeterminate length, the guitarist typically strums a do-fa-sol (e.g., C-F-G) chordal ostinato (as shown in example 2) while the *bandurria* player performs single-note, often flashy improvisations. A horizontal hemiola (or *sesquialtera*) pattern is evident in the ostinato typically played on the clave sticks, suggesting alternating bars of 6/8 and 3/4, which could thus be counted 1-2-3-1-2-3-1-2-1-2-1-2.

Example 2. Punto libre ritornello pattern

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Guitar:} & \quad C \quad F \quad G \\
\text{Clave:} & \quad C \quad F \quad G
\end{align*}
\]

Particularly significant for comparative purposes are the various features that are more or less common to the main *punto* substyles. These include the following:

1. A primarily syllabic rather than melismatic vocal style (as in the traditional Spanish *romance*);
2. The tendency to divide the *décima* in the manner mentioned above, with a pause or interlude after the fourth line;
3. Either implicit or explicit *sesquialtera*, i.e., horizontal hemiola with alternating bars of 6/8 and 3/4 (in the metered sections);
4. A generally descending melodic contour, from sol to sol an octave lower, with a marked descent on the final syllable;
5. Mixolydian modality and modal harmony, in which both melody and chordal ostinatos cadence on sol (here, G); the harmonic cadences are typically described by musicologists as “on the dominant,” but (as I have argued elsewhere) are better seen as reflecting a dual tonicity in which do and sol chords (here, C and G) oscillate with relatively equal weight² (see Manuel 2002).
The sesquiáltera and syllabic rendering are also evident in example 3, an excerpt of a punto fijo from Sancti Spiritus:

Example 3. Punto fijo excerpt

```
M | M | M | M | M |
M | M | M | M | M |
M | M | M | M | M |
```

Texts of Cuban décimas are extremely diverse in subject matter, especially since the décima has flourished both as a sophisticated literary genre and as a vernacular popular idiom, with works of poets like Francisco Pobeda (1796–1881) and Juan Cristóbal Nápoles Fajardo (“El Cucalambe,” 1829–62) enjoying wide renown. Typical topics may include nationalism, rural life, philosophy, love, and in the less common seguidilla form, extended narrative. In general, as Cuban musicologists have often observed (e.g., Diaz Ayala 1981, 77; Carpentier [1946] 2001, 266), the richness of the punto is to be sought more in its poetry than in its melodies. The latter consist of a relatively limited set of stock tunes, which, like those of the traditional romance, are reiterated over the decades with little innovation or elaboration.

Sources of the Punto Cubano

Many aspects of the punto’s evolution are impossible to reconstruct, although Galán, Linares, and Iberian musicologists have plausibly documented the trajectories of several of the genre’s distinguishing features. Perhaps easiest of these to trace is the origin and spread of the décima itself. After being fashioned and popularized by Spanish poet and musician Vicente Espinel (1544–1644), the eponymous espinela form of décima came to flourish among both peninsular literati and laymen. The décima’s prominence in theatrical works by “Golden Age” playwrights like Lope de Vega (1562–1635) and Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1600-81) helped bridge the gap between the two social strata, and also popularized the tradition of setting it to music. In the eighteenth century, the décima took root throughout much of Latin America, and especially in Cuba and Puerto Rico. In the following century, paradoxically, its popularity in Spain (including the Canaries) came to be eclipsed by the vogue of other literary and musical genres, especially (in the case of southern Spain and the Canaries) fandangos, malagueñas, and folias, which did not, however, exert great influence in the Americas. However, the décima retained enough vitality in the Canary island of La Palma such that emigrants from there to western and central Cuba appear to have intensified its cultivation in those regions. Ongoing
ties with La Palma led to the transplanting of the *punto cubano* there, where it survives, in diminished form, alongside other more distinctively local décima-singing traditions (see, e.g., Trapero 1994).

While the origins of the *punto cubano*’s distinctive melodies, or tonadas, have not been documented, other features have been plausibly traced, in ways that may contribute to an appreciation of their historical trajectories beyond the realm of the *punto* itself. Moorish roots have been postulated for the practice of alternating solo vocal verses and instrumental interludes (especially played on the *‘ud*, ancestor of the *laila*) (Siemens Hernández 1994). Other features, especially the Mixolydian modality, and the frequent monophonic unison doubling of the voice on an accompanying stringed instrument, can be seen as archaisms from the Renaissance or even earlier. Particularly curious are the circuitous paths of features that may have derived originally from the Afro-Latin Americas—perhaps Mexico/New Spain, whether reaching Cuba directly thence, or via Spain itself. Linares (1999, 26–32) points out the similarity between the chordal ostinatos of the *punto* ritornello and those of the eighteenth-century peninsular salon fandango, whose ultimate origins in Afro-Latin music seem likely. One might further note the parallels between the *punto libre* and the flamenco-style *fandango libre*, with its strophes in free meter punctuated by instrumental ostinatos often in ternary meter.

For its part, the 6/8–3/4 *sesquialtera*/hemiola figure, which is particularly abundant in Latin American genres like the *punto*, surfaces in various peninsular sources dating as far back as the mid-sixteenth century. During that period it came to constitute a cliché in Spanish song, recurring in many *romances*, *villancicos*, and Spanish-Italian *frottolas* (Binkley and Frenk 1995, 14). Melodies with rhythms nearly identical to that of the *punto fijo* presented in example 3 can also be found in this era.4 The *sesquialtera* figure also constituted a basic feature of the *zarabanda* (sarbande), which appears to have emerged in the late 1500s in Mexico, possibly of Afro-Latin origin. Scholars seem to disagree as to whether the *sesquialtera* first emerged in Spain or in the Americas.5 Whatever its origin, the pattern went on to exhibit great popularity and fecundity in Latin America, while becoming less prominent a feature of peninsular music after the seventeenth century.

In the latter 1700s a tune known as “*punto de La Habana*” or “*punto habanero*” (Havana-style *punto*) came to be popular in Spain, documenting that a *punto cubano* style had already coalesced and had even returned to the metropole. Spanish composer Xavier Montsalvage (Galán 1983, 29) presented the melody, although of uncertain historicity, as shown in example 4:

Example 4. “Punto de La Habana”
The Guajira between Cuba and Spain

While the vogue of the Cuban *contradanza habanera* in mid-nineteenth-century Spain is well documented, as Galán observes, the documentation of the “punto habanero” in Spain predates that form of musical *vuelta* (or return) by a century, constituting the first known presence of Cuban music in the peninsula. Let us turn to the course and dynamics of this return.

The Vuelta, Part I: The *Guajira* in Spain

From the 1850s, stylized, elaborated forms of gypsy and Andalusian traditional song forms began to be widely performed in commercial contexts—especially the *cafés cantantes*—in Andalusian towns, primarily by gypsy professional musicians. This diverse category of songs, loosely united by performance styles and contexts, soon came to be called *cante flamenco* or simply flamenco. As flamenco spread and evolved in these contexts, the need for new material led singers to incorporate a wide variety of non-gypsy genres into the repertoire. Among these was the *guajira*, which, together with the flamenco-style *tango*, *milonga*, *petenera*, and others, constituted the aforementioned category of *cantes de ida y vuelta*—*cantes* of departure and return, that is, between Spain and Latin America.

While some 1860 references to Andalusian versions of *guajira* remain enigmatic, it is clear that by the 1880s the *guajira* had become an important, popular, and well-defined flamenco *cante*, or song-type. From the cylinder recordings of the 1890s through subsequent decades, it came to be fairly well documented as a *cante* whose features persist through the present. From the 1930s, Pepe Marchena, Juanito Valderrama, and other singers of *cante bonito* (“pretty flamenco”) popularized a sort of rococo version of the *guajira*, abounding in florid, delicate melismas crooned in a somewhat effeminate, rubato style. By the 1970s this style had definitively passed out of vogue and is currently regarded by most flamenco audiences as manneristic and insipid; the *guajira* itself is also seldom performed since that period.

The emergence of the flamenco *guajira* coincided with a period of intensified contact between Andalusia and Cuba, not only through the general increase in maritime traffic and trade, but especially in the form of the hundreds of thousands of peninsular soldiers who returned from duty in the insurrectionary island. After the independence of Cuba from Spain in 1898, personal, economic, and cultural exchanges between the two countries persisted, with the port of Cádiz retaining some of its historical status as a sort of sister city to Havana.

It is commonplace in flamenco discourse and literature to regard the *guajira* as derivative of the Cuban *punto*. Although, as we note below, its evolution may be somewhat more complex, the parallel and presumably derivative features of the *guajira* are evident, as summarized here:
Example 5: Guajira, by Manuel Escacena

-the use of the décima. Although many flamenco guajiras, especially in the early period, include cuartetas (in abab form) and simple décimas not in espinela form, the standard décima does come to be the most predominant verse form in the guajira. Its use parallels a partial and ephemeral revival of the décima as a literary genre in Spain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries8;

-pervasiveness of the sesquialtera, primarily as an accompanimental ostinato but also, in some early recorded guajiras, as a melodic figure, as shown in examples 7 and 9 below;

-a chordal ostinato consisting of alternating bars of dominant and tonic, in the major (see examples 6, 7, and 8 below);

-frequent use of an essentially major-scale melodic ambitus, roughly outlining a descent from the fifth degree (sol) to that an octave lower, and typically concluding on a descending phrase (see example 5);

-lyrics which frequently depict Cuba and campesino life (albeit generally in an idealized form).
Such similarities notwithstanding, the flamenco guajira, far from being a simple imitation of its Cuban counterpart, exhibits from its earliest documented forms several distinctive features, especially the following:

- The melodies of the guajira do not correspond to any known punto tunes.
- The chordal ostinato is a simple dominant-tonic pattern (sol-do, V7-I), without any sense of Mixolydian modality or dual tonicity; also distinctive is the pattern often used in ritornellos: V7 / I / V7 / I / IV / I / V7 / I.
- The guajira is “flamenco-ized” or aflamencada by means of florid vocal melismas and a rich, elaborated guitar style; hence, as the latter developed its own characteristic norms, guajiras also became a solo guitar sub-style.

Both the similarities to and differences from the Cuban punto can be seen in example 5, schematizing one décima of a 1909 recording, and representing the most common stock melody of what Molina and Espín (1991, 48-49) call the “central guajira.” Note here the general ambitus of sol-to-sol (G to G an octave lower), the descending final syllable, and the prevailingly syllabic vocal style. Both vocal style and guitar accompaniment are rendered in a highly rubato and irregular manner, as only imperfectly indicated in the transcription (especially bar 20, which I have idiosyncratically notated as 11/8).9

Example 6 shows the standard guitar ostinato for the flamenco guajira.

Example 6. Guajira guitar ostinato

Example 7, from a 1914 sheet-music song entitled “Azúcar Cande–Guajiras Gitanas” (Sugar Candy–Gypsy Guajiras), shows the commencement of another popular early flamenco guajira melody, with its clear hemiola pattern of six eighth-notes followed by a bar in 3/4.

The differences between the flamenco guajira and the Cuban punto can be seen to correspond to their somewhat distinct origins. On the one hand, there should be little doubt that the guajira’s vogue in Spain around the turn of the century owed much to the intensified travels of Spaniards to and from Cuba, including the tours and residences of flamenco singers such as El Mochuelo (Antonio Pozo, 1868–1937) and Pepe de la Matrona (1887–1980) in Cuba. However, by that time the flamenco guajira had already acquired a distinctive form; hence, for example, even the guajira recorded in 1906 by El Mochuelo in Cuba is in the distinctively Spanish guajira style rather than in Cuban punto form.10 These distinctive features of the flamenco guajira, rather than deriving from the contemporary
Example 7. “Guajiras Gitanas”

Cuban punto, can be found in and presumably derive from earlier peninsular music. One likely source, cited by Spanish musicologists (e.g., Molina and Espín 1991, 42–43), would comprise certain songs associated with light tonadilla theater. While as mentioned above, the hemiola figure became less common in Iberian music after the era of the zarabanda, it does appear in a few vernacular theater songs, notably the “pañol moruno” melody and rhythmically similar zarandillo songs from tonadillas, such as the “Tirana del Zarandillo,” excerpted as example 8 (from Pedrell 1958, 102–07):

Example 8. “Tirana del Zarandillo”
While musicologists regard such songs as peninsular precursors to the flamenco guajira, it is important to remember that, as mentioned above, the punto itself, in some form, had already established a presence in Spain from the 1700s.Alongside the aforementioned “punto de La Habana” of this period, inexpensive chapbooks (pliegos de cordel) sold in Andalusia in the early 1800s contained “Décimas nuevas para cantar los aficionados por el punto de La Habana” (New décimas for amateurs to sing to the [tune of] the punto de Havana) (Blas Vega 1982, 77). As such, some of the flamenco guajira’s distinctive features may well derive from archaic elements of the punto, which had long been domesticated in Andalusia. At the same time, it is also quite possible that the hemiola rhythm was seen as deriving more immediately from and evocative of the Americas, particularly Cuba. In that sense it may have functioned to some extent as a sort of iconic Latin Americanism (much, perhaps, like its role as a cliche of Latinoness in West Side Story’s “I like to live in Ame-ri-ca”).

Whether as a caricature of Cuban music or an elaboration of well-established peninsular genres, the flamenco guajira developed as a thoroughly Iberian entity. Accordingly, as noted above, the tunes it employs, from its earliest recordings, bear no particular resemblance to known Cuban punto melodies. Indeed, the process of indigenizing Caribbean musics—with its attendant elements of musical elaboration and refinement—was commented on as early as 1831, when Estébanez Calderón wrote, “It’s pointless to say that new songs and dances, however originally delightful and lascivious, arrive at Cádiz from the Indies; [for] they never take root unless, in passing through Seville, they leave as a foul sediment what is too clumsy” ([1831]1984, 15).

Molina and Espín (1991, chap. 2) stress that the “imported” guajira, as part of the flamenco repertoire, is in fact older than more quintessentially flamenco cantes like soleares and bulerías. Similarly, it is worth pointing out that while the Cuban punto may date in some form from the eighteenth century, the Spanish guajira’s appearance as an urban commercial song-form predates by several decades the emergence of any urban Cuban popular song-form by that name.

The lyric content of the Spanish guajira also illustrates the senses in which it is at once imported and indigenized. The absence of references to Cuba in many songs reflects the extent to which the guajira, like the “Punto cubano” in Manuel de Falla’s Piezas españolas, could be regarded as simply a local idiom whose foreign origins were irrelevant. Somewhat in the manner of a free-floating signifier, the guajira could even be identified not with Cubans, but, as we have seen, with its local performers, the gypsies, as in the aforementioned “Guajiras gitanas” (“Gypsy guajiras”). For their part, peninsular guajira texts illustrate some of the ambivalences of Spaniards toward the island. Some texts sympathetically portray the Spanish colonial
soldier fighting the Cuban insurgents, or pining to be back in Spain. Yet although Cuba, for many soldiers, was a site of jungle, disease, and death, the guajira most typically portrayed Cuba as a land of sexy mulatto women and bucolic rural life, especially in accordance with the nostalgia with which many Spaniards regarded Cuba after 1898. Although having little in common with the more realistic Cuban punto itself, to a considerable extent these images parallel idealized portrayals by urban white Cubans of their own country, as we shall note below.

The décima of example 5 is typical in this sense, and also in its departure from the espinela form; this was one of the two most popular and recurrent décimas sung in Spanish guajiras:

A mí me gusta por la mañana
después del café bebido
pasear me por la sabana
con mi tabaco encendido.

Luego me siento en mi silla
y en mi silla o siletón
y saco en papelón
de esos que llaman diarios
y parezco un millonario

de esos de la población.

I like in the mornings,
after my cup of coffee,
to stroll through the savannah,
smoking my cigar,
and then I recline in my chair,
and in my big chair
I buy one of those big pieces of paper
they call the daily newspaper
so that I look like one of those
millionaires
about town.

In similar vein is the other most popular décima:

Contigo me caso indiana
si se muere tu papá
díseselo (sic) a tu mamá
hermosísima cubana.

Tengo una casa en La Habana
destinada para ti
y con un techo de marfí
y el piso de plata forma
para ti bella paloma
tengo yo la flor de l’

I marry you, woman of the Indies,
and if your father dies,
tell your mother,
most beautiful Cuban,
I’ve got a house in Havana,
destined for you,
with an ivory roof
and a silver floor,
for you, pretty dove,
and a fleur-de-lis.  

Both these décimas were recorded many times, becoming familiar stock texts in a manner atypical of the more varied Cuban décimas. The reiteration of these same few décimas reflected the absence of a strong tradition of vernacular or literary décima composition in contemporary Spain, unlike Cuba. The idealization of Cuban rural life becomes even more eccentric in guajiras such as that rendered, with the most florid and refined melismas, by La Niña de la Puebla around 1932, in which she sings of being a (male) plantation owner with a hundred black workers and a Mexican (!) slave.
A parallel and closely related form of Spanish *guajira* flourished in the turn-of-the-century decades in Spanish music theater (*zarzuela* and *sainete*, which replaced the humbler *tonadilla*). As mentioned, the early flamenco *guajira* appears to have had roots in *tonadilla* songs, and stylistic affinities between the theatrical and flamenco namesakes subsequently persisted. Both shared as their most distinctive feature the *sesquialtera* ostinato. In theater *guajiras*, as in early flamenco counterparts, the hemiola persists both in accompaniment patterns, and also in melodies, in the figure seen in example 7 above (six eighth-notes followed by a 3/4 pattern), and in the following excerpt, shown as example 9, of the well-known *guajira* from Ruberto Chapi’s *zarzuela* “La Revoltosa” (1897).

Example 9. Guajira from “La Revoltosa”

Like flamenco counterparts, but in accordance with the argument of the particular *zarzuela*, some Spanish theater *guajiras* were used to portray Cuba (such as Valverde’s “La Mulata”), while others functioned simply as abstract song-types. The *guajira* of “La Revoltosa” would fall in the latter category, with its text neither in *décima* form nor related to Cuba, its initial bVI-V harmonies more reminiscent of Andalusia than the Americas, and its prevailing character of a light art-song. Other theater *guajiras*, however, bear close similarities to the flamenco *guajira*. In general, it may be said that the Spanish theater *guajira* resembles its flamenco counterpart more than it does the Cuban *punto*. However, around the turn of the century, a Cuban theatrical form of *guajira* emerged with striking similarities to its peninsular namesake.

The Urban Cuban *Guajira*

In Havana in 1899, theater-music composer Jorge Anckermann (1877–1941), challenged to produce suitable music for a drama set in the Cuban countryside, composed a song that inaugurated a new form of “*guajira*.”
The song, “El arroyo que murmura” (The stream that murmurs), not only became a familiar evergreen in the Cuban popular song repertoire, but further served as the model for many (mostly less-inspired) guajiras to follow, by other composers of Cuban zarzuela and teatro bufo music. These included Moisés Simons, Gonzalo Roig, Eduardo Sánchez de Fuentes, Ernesto Lecuona, and Ackermann himself.

Like the Spanish guajira, the Cuban salon and theater guajira presented a naively exoticized and romanticized image of the Cuban countryside. Décimas composed and sung by actual campesinos abounded in realistic portrayals of poverty, landlessness, exploitation by Yankee landlords, and other decidedly non-idyllic aspects of rural life (see Ibarra 1985, chap. 5). However, the urban guajira largely avoided such topics, or if portraying poverty, depicted it as somehow quaint. Hence the popularization of familiar “June/moon” rhyme clichés, like “monte/sinsonte” (mountain/mockingbird), “bohío/rió” (hut/river), and “montaña/caña” (mountain/cane).

The Cuban theater guajira, in its stylization of aspects of rural music, can be seen as the product of a natural desire of urban composers to exploit and develop aspects of rural music, inspired both by nationalist and strictly musical considerations. As Argeliers León (1972, 98–100) has observed, it may also have been informed by the increased migration of white campesinos to the coastal cities in the latter 1800s. However, as León, Robin Moore (1997, 131–32), and others have insightfully discussed, such songs also had a less innocent dimension. At a time when an Afro-Cubanist artistic movement and lower-class Afro-Cuban music (especially the son) were coming to permeate urban culture, the social phenomenon of urban guajirismo could constitute for many Cubans an alternative form of national and cultural identity. As the nature of “Cubanness” was being contested and formed, even many urban blacks and mulattos found in guajirismo—including the stage guajira—a form of identity remote from the obstreperous rumba and santería music, which seemed to some like embarrassing relics of the slavery era.

In creating his guajira, Ackermann, like his successors, preserved certain iconic features of the punto and zapateo, including the sesquialtera ostinato, the use of décima form, the syllabic vocal style, and the invocations, however idealized, of the Cuban countryside. The most prominent departure from the punto, aside from the use of larger ensembles, was the use of a bipartite form in which an initial section in minor segues to one in the direct major key (often leading to a conclusion resembling a zapateo5). Example 10, showing the first bars of “El arroyo que murmura,” illustrates some of these features.

Cuban musicologists are clearly correct in describing Ackermann’s creation as a free stylization of elements of the punto and zapateo. Particularly obvious is the similarity between Ackermann’s guajira and Sancti Spiritus’s punto fijo styles such as example 3. Galán (1983, 49) also perceptively notes the sense in which the nineteenth-century Cuban contradanza
Example 10. “El arroyo que murmura,” by Jorge Anckermann

\[
\text{Fm} \quad \text{C7} \quad \text{Fm} \quad \text{C7} \\
\text{El arroyo que murmura y que la luna retra ta} \\
\text{Fm} \quad \text{C7} \quad \text{Fm} \quad \text{C7} \\
\text{cuando sus rayos de plata atraviesan la esperanza} \\
\text{D} \quad \text{A7} \quad \text{D} \quad \text{A7} \\
\text{El sinsonante de voz pura que alegra el monte y el llano}
\]

habanera, with its binary form, constituted another sort of model for the theater guajira and other contemporary stage songs. At the same time, it is quite likely that Anckermann may have been influenced by the Spanish theatrical guajira. Both (together with the punto spirituano) shared a rigidly formulaic melodic rhythm (six eighth-notes in 6/8 followed by a contrasting bar in 3/4). Also striking is the way in which Chapi’s aforementioned guajira of 1897, like Anckermann’s model of two years later, commences in minor and modulates to the direct major.

It is highly probable that Anckermann was familiar with the peninsular guajira. Zarzuela troupes constantly went back and forth between Cuba and Andalusia during this era, which also saw an intensified migration of Spaniards to Cuba (see León 1972, 99). Cuban nationalism notwithstanding, Spanish music remained popular in Cuba throughout this period, and as we have mentioned, many peninsular musicians visited or even resided in the island, including El Mochuelo, who recorded a flamenco-style guajira there in 1906. While we have mentioned the presence of such Spanish musicians as a possible conduit for transplanting Cuban music to the metropole, they would certainly have exerted an influence in the other direction, especially since they were performers of flamenco—including the flamenco guajira—, not Cuban music. In general, the relation between the Spanish and Cuban theater guajiras merits further investigation.

The Cuban theater guajira, aside from its formal similarities to its Spanish namesake, followed a somewhat similar trajectory. The guajira in Lecuona’s zarzuela “El Cafetal” (1929), with its orchestral accompaniment and light-operatic vocal rendering, can be seen as a sort of Cuban counterpart to Chapi’s guajira in “La Revoltosa.” Also like the peninsular zarzuela guajira, the Anckermann-style guajira declined dramatically in the 1940s, to some extent along with light Cuban music-theater in general.
That decline, however, by no means constituted the end of the "guajira" in Cuba. In the 1930s an entirely new guajira emerged, as popularized by performers like Guillermo Portabales, the Trio Matamoros, and Nico Saquito. The new guajira de salón resembled its predecessor in being an urban creation with no particular rural appeal, in its very occasional use of décima form, and in its lyrics presenting an idyllic, bucolic image of guajiro life. Although it could conceivably be performed by a horn-based ensemble, more typically its accompaniment suggested a rural, Hispanic-derived flavor by foregrounding acoustic guitars, with light percussion. In other respects, however, the new guajira was quite distinct from its predecessor, being essentially a substyle of the Cuban son, in quadratic meter, with the characteristic syncopated rhythm of that genre.

The most typical and unpretentious guajira would reiterate a simple do-sol-fa (e.g., C-F-G) chordal ostinato (although it might end on the fa or G, in a way that should make us hesitate to call that chord the "dominant"). In this pattern is by far the most famous guajira of all, the song "Guajira Guantanamera" (Peasant woman of Guantánamo), composed around 1940 by Joseito Fernández. In his daily radio programs, Fernández would sing new verses (in décima form) to the stock tune of "Guantanamera," using the catchy title chorus as a punctuating refrain. The song was internationally popularized with verses by José Martí. Other guajiras might have more varied chordal progressions, again reflecting their origins among urban professional composers. Traditional features, such as the use of décima and final cadences on the "dominant," became exceptions rather than the norm. In general, the new guajira bore so scanty a resemblance to that of Anckermann that it can only be regarded as a successor, rather than a descendant, of that genre. Since the mid-century decades, the 6/8 Anckermann-style guajira has been largely forgotten in Cuba, and in popular Cuban musical discourse the term "guajira" invariably denotes the subsequent style, which, as musicologists note, should more properly be called "guajira-son." In general, the rise of the guajira-son reflects the predominance of the son in Cuban popular music and, as I shall suggest further, a broader process in which ternary-metered folk-derived forms give way to quadratic-metered popular and Afro-Caribbean-derived ones. This binarization process is particularly evident in the way that the eighteenth-century punto melody shown in example 4 above resurfaces—in 4/4—in nueva trova singer Pablo Milanés's song "Canción," whose opening line is presented here as example 11.

Example 11. "Canción," by Pablo Milanés

\[
\text{Quién le dijo que yo era risa siem-pre nunca llanto?}
\]
The Guajira between Cuba and Spain

The Vuelta, Part II; Postlude to the Flamenco Guajira

As we have mentioned, the popularity of the flamenco guajira subsided in the mid-century decades, and the zarzuela counterpart declined even earlier. In the latter part of its heyday, however, the flamenco guajira contributed at least indirectly to the emergence of a new cante bonito flamenco cante, called “colombiana” (or “colombianas”\(^\text{(24)}\)). The most distinctive feature of the colombiana is the guitar ostinato, in 4/4, with a strong 3-3-2 syncopation, alternating bars of dominant and tonic (typically, in E7-A fingerings). In flamenco discourse, it is common to read or hear that this genre, as its name suggests, is a stylization of music from Colombia. In fact, as has been well documented, the colombiana was invented by cante-bonito singer Pepe Marchena in 1931 (with the guitar accompaniment conventions created by Ramón Montoya). Why Marchena chose that name, and what his sources of melodic inspiration were, remain unclear (see, e.g., Molina and Espín 1991, chap. 6), but there is no evidence linking the cante in any way to Colombia. Nevertheless, the customary categorization of colombianas as a cante de ida y vuelta is not entirely without justification, for the syncopated guitar rhythm and tonic-dominant ostinati do suggest links to the Americas, although to Cuba rather than Colombia. Hence, colombianas are often paired with the guajira, and are sometimes spoken of as having the aire or feel of the guajira, although in duple rather than ternary meter. While it would be inaccurate to regard the colombiana as a simple derivative of the guajira, there is a certain sort of parental as well as filial relationship between the two.

In the subsequent few decades, the colombiana enjoyed considerable popularity, which, like the appeal of Marchena’s music in general, was based on the general public rather than serious flamenco listeners, who have generally scorned cante bonito. By the 1970s, the colombiana, together with the guajira, was definitively out of favor. However, it is during this decade that a somewhat similar genre, or set of genres, called “rumba,” came to attain even greater mass appeal than the colombiana. The term “rumba” has historically been used with great flexibility. Originally denoting a traditional Afro-Cuban voice-and-percussion dance-music genre, in early-twentieth-century Cuban comic theater (teatro bufo) the rumba denoted a stylized stage song often more similar to the contemporary son. In the United States in the 1930s and 1940s, diluted versions of the son were marketed under the name “rumba” (or rhumba), while in Spain, the term came to designate light, duple-metered flamenco-style songs, also more akin to son than to traditional rumba. In 1974, innovative flamenco guitarist Paco de Lucia enjoyed a smash hit with a bouncy instrumental jam in 4/4 entitled “Entre dos Aguas,” also labeled a “rumba.” In the same period, a Catalan-based pop-song style called “rumba,” with a somewhat similar rhythm, came to enjoy national appeal.\(^\text{(25)}\) The next decades, including the
present, have seen a tremendous vogue of pop “nuevo flamenco,” whose core genre is “rumba,” a term which now designates any light, pop flamenco song in 4/4, with accented upbeats (2 and 4).

The pop flamenco rumba neither evokes Cuba nor bears any particular stylistic relation with Cuban music, and should only in the most indirect sense be categorized as an *ida y vuelta* genre. However, although Spanish “flamencologists” do not describe it as a derivative of the *colombiana*, the rumba can certainly be seen as a successor, occupying the same status as a light, pop flamenco substyle in 4/4, which enjoys mass appeal. Insofar as one can in this sense posit a certain line of continuity from *guajira*, through *colombiana* to rumba, the transition from ternary to binary meter is perhaps the most conspicuous change. The parallels with Cuba are equally manifest: In both cases one can outline a line of development—with various external influences—from Cuban *música guajira* eventually leading to a more Afro-Cuban-flavored mainstream pop song-form in quadratic meter.

Some Concluding Perspectives

An essay on the *guajira* complex which aspired to true elegance might endeavor to conclude with a single over-arching theme. Perhaps, however, such an unwieldy musical family as the *guajira*, spanning disparate centuries, continents, and social strata, may not lend itself to any such coherent analysis. Given such considerations, in lieu of a proper conclusion, I present here a set of considerations which, although emerging from the data, may have broader implications for the study of Spanish and Cuban music, Hispanic-American cultural exchanges, and the general dynamics of musical travel, transformation, and rearticulation.

One theme that emerges from the study of the *guajira* complex is the sheer difficulty of reconstructing—and hence, drawing conclusions from—the evolution of vernacular musical forms prior to the twentieth century. The process is further confounded by the often arbitrary and misleading way that names and terms come to be used—for instance, the early flamenco “rumba” which is in fact an adaptation of the *son*; the *colombiana* which has nothing to do with Colombia; and entities like a recent Spanish pop salsa-style song, confusingly labeled “punto cubano” (presumably because it contains quatrains by José Martí).26

The complex dynamics of musical flows and exchanges constitute at once a further impediment to easy analysis and a significant developmental feature in themselves. The *guajira* complex contains a particularly intricate and contradictory set of persistent marginal survivals, on the one hand, and ephemeral and spontaneous changes and fads, on the other. Thus, the peninsular-derived Mixolydian modality eclipsed centuries ago in Spain, but survives in the Cuban *punto* and even in the modern *guajira-son*. Con-
versely, the flamenco guajira may contain features derived from Cuban-derived melodic models, such as the eighteenth-century “Punto de La Habana,” which are no longer found in Cuba. Similarly, the hemiola phrasing basic to Anckermann’s urban guajira, although perhaps ultimately of Latin American (Mexican?) origin, may have derived more directly from the Spanish zarzuela and flamenco guajira. Such continuities notwithstanding, one must also note the senses in which certain developments, including entire genres, derive not from collective, folk-style gestations, but from the innovations of particular individuals, such as Anckermann and Pepe Marchena.

As the guajira family shows, the musical exchanges between Cuba and Spain seem to constitute neither a regular and constant circular flow, nor an easily discernible sequence of one-way transmissions. Rather, the historical record seems to suggest an irregular and often overlapping series of ebbs and flows, whether circular or unidirectional, with eddies and backwaters, involving particular movements at particular times. These would include, for example, the early migrations of Canary Islanders to Cuba in the 1690s;27 the subsequent migratory flow from the Canaries (especially La Palma) in the nineteenth century, and its reversal in the mid-1900s; the presence of Spanish soldiers in Cuba during its wars of independence; and—of particular importance—the travels of Spanish zarzuela and tonadilla troupes back and forth between Cuba and Spain in the latter nineteenth century.

A related, and striking aspect of the interactions between Cuba and Spain is the particular combination of, on the one hand, resilient and distinctive local traditions and developments, and on the other, transcontinental exchanges. In both Spain and Cuba, local traditions had particular sorts of tenacity and importance. As Romualdo Molina told me, “Even in my youth, in one barrio of Seville, people had a particular accent, a way of telling jokes, of dancing, and of singing fandango, while in another barrio, five hundred meters away, everything would be different” (personal interview). Distinctions between musical traditions of different towns and regions were (and in many respects remain) even more marked, especially since until the late 1800s Spanish roads were primitive and infested with robbers. Inland travel in contemporary Cuba was no better; at a time when as many as two thousand ships might visit Havana yearly, overland conveyances between there and not-so-distant Cienfuegos occurred only once weekly (Thomas 1971, 136, 149). Musical traditions—such as local varieties of punto—were correspondingly diverse. Thus, while sea travel was not without its vicissitudes, in many respects the Andalusian ports of Seville and Cádiz were closer linked to Havana than to Madrid, while Havana itself was in some ways nearer to those peninsular sister cities than to inland Cuban towns like Camagüey.28

Such conditions fostered idiosyncratic forms of transnational and local interactions. In many respects, the guajira complex evolved as a transcontinental
entity, easily straddling the Atlantic charca or pond, which was traversed by zarzuela troupes, immigrants, soldiers, touring musicians, and eventually, phonograph records. In other respects, the complex developed particular local features. Hence, for example, the extent to which one could speak of a distinctive Córdoba style of singing flamenco guajira (Molina and Espin 1992, 53), and the way that the tradition of improvising spoken décimas, after a long hiatus in the peninsula, seems to have curiously taken root, under Cuban influence, in the Alpujarra hills of Spain (Checa 1994, 309).

The circulation involved not only the transmission of stylistic and structural features but also their affective resignification. Most obvious in this category was the way that the guajira in Spain could either function simply as an abstract musical genre, or as one somehow redolent of gypsies (hence, the “guajiras gitanas”), or, most often, as a style evocative of an idyllic and sensual Cuba (like the choral habaneras still sung in various parts of Spain). In a series of exoticizations, Spain served as the “Orient” of Europe, Andalusia as the Orient of greater Spain, and Cuba as the Orient of Andalusia. Even in Cuba itself, the urban guajira—whether of Anckermann or Portabales—functioned similarly, exoticizing and romanticizing campesino life for the entertainment of urban audiences.

Among the many formal developments and transformations involved in the trajectories of the guajira complex, one broad trend, mentioned above in passing, merits further comment. Both in Spain and Cuba, guajira-related musics can be seen to exhibit a binarization process by which ternary-metered traditional folk forms transform into duple-metered ones when they develop into mainstream commercial popular music genres. Thus, the 3/4-6/8 flamenco guajira, after enjoying several decades of vitality, gives way to the 4/4 colombiana and the pop rumba, and Anckermann’s similarly ternary guajira is eclipsed by the quadratic guajira-son. Such processes extend to Spanish and Cuban popular musics as a whole. Despite the legendary Spanish fondness for triple meter, and the popularity of the 12/8 cantes like bulerías and soleares in flamenco proper, the dominant popular music genres in Spain are overwhelmingly duple-metered, whether the pop flamenco rumba and tango, the pop ballad, or rock en español. Similarly, Cuban traditional genres in ternary meter, from the zapateo to the punto, have either remained marginal or died out altogether, drowned out in the popular music sphere by duple-metered son, salsa, rumba, mambo, danzón, and rap. The same process, indeed, can be seen in the Americas as a whole, wherein triple-metered or 6/8 traditional forms, such as the vals, cueca, huapango, and bambuco, while perhaps surviving in folkloric capacities, give way to duple-metered mainstream commercial genres like samba, tango, porro, cumbia, ranchera, and rock. Cuban musicologist Pérez Fernández (1986) made an ambitious, if problematic, attempt to survey aspects of this process, which clearly involves a certain sort of Afro-Latin influence. However, this rather fundamental and vast musical development warrants further attention.
The trajectory of the guajira complex can, in a related sense, be seen to reflect a certain triumph of Afro-Latin musical forms over what must be regarded as a musically weak Cuban campesino tradition. Alejo Carpentier incisively commented on the rather limited musical raw materials that guajiro music offered to the serious composer, writing, “Those who claimed to utilize guajiro music in larger-scale works were surprised that after a first score nothing else was left to be done” ([1946] 2001, 266). Nevertheless, of course, the punto did inspire, however indirectly, a flamenco cante that flourished for some seven decades, and at least one form of Cuban urban music. Yet ultimately these genres proved ephemeral or marginal, swept aside by the tide of sensuous Afro-Latin rhythms dominating the commercial music scene. Ironically, while various forms of urban guajira flowered and then declined, in his marginal but stable cultural niche, the Cuban guajiro has gone on singing the punto, whether in state-run competitions, on the radio, in Miami clubs, or under the proverbial palm tree.

Notes

1. A clarification may be useful: While punto is the main genre in the category of música guajira or guajiro music (a category which would also include, for example, the zapateo), the term “guajira,” as the name of a musical genre, does not denote punto. Rather, “guajira” (aside from meaning “Cuban peasant woman”) would, depending on context, designate one of three distinct genres: the flamenco guajira, the Cuban early-twentieth-century theater guajira, or the subsequent urban Cuban guajira-son.

2. A similar tonal ambiguity obtains in the minority of puntos—called punto carvajal or punto español—that oscillate between major and minor chords, as in the configuration Am-E major.

3. León 1979, 23. The singing, by two voices, in parallel thirds is a typical feature of this punto spirituano style.

4. See, e.g., the song presented by Francisco Salinas in his De Musica Libri Septem (1577), extracted in Pérez Fernández 1986, 70.

5. E.g., García Matos and Hipólito Rossy (in Molina and Espín 1991, 25, 47) claim a peninsular origin for the hemiola, while Molina and Espín themselves seem to suggest the opposite (1991, 47).

6. The authenticity of this melody is dismissed by García Matos (1972, 38), but it remains of interest, especially in relation to ex. 11.

7. See Molina and Espín 1991, 45.

9. “A mí me gusta por la mañana,” from Manuel Escacena, Un maestro del cante (Sonifolk 20103). The guitar fingering is that of E7-A, using a capo on the third fret. During this period, A7-D patterns were also used.

10. See, e.g., III:6 (the familiar “Al amanecer el día”) on Los cantes hispanoamericanos en el mundo del flamenco: Ida y vuelta (Pasarela CDP8/858).

11. From the tonadilla “Los novios y la maja,” by Pablo Esteva y Grimena. A very similar zarandillo is excerpted and discussed in Grenet 1939, xvi. For further discussion of the paño moruno melody, see Galán (1983, 39–41).

12. Cf. Marchena’s remark: “The guajira, which is a cante brought from Cuba and flamenco-ized, has declined there and here has taken root in such a way that it’s become our own.” Interview with Marchena, in ABC(newspaper, Andalucia), 12/12/72, reprinted in booklet accompanying Los cantes hispanoamericanos en el mundo del flamenco: Ida y vuelta (Pasarela CDP8/858). All translations from the Spanish are by the author.

13. The hemiola figure is also basic to both Mexican son huasteco “La Petenera” and early flamenco versions of the cante “Peteneras,” which are also remarkably similar in their chords and melodies. The origin of this song/cante remains unclear. See Molina and Espin 1991, chap. 4.

14. A less charitable view is offered by Rafael Marín in his flamenco guitar manual of 1902, in which he writes of the guajira, “This cante is Cuban, except that it is adorned differently here, but often in such poor taste that Cubans would scarcely recognize it” ([1902] 1995, 70).

15. Such considerations have generated some misleading accounts of the guajira’s origin. For example, composer Joaquín Turina wrote in 1928, “The indigenous [Cuban] whites, that is, the campesinos, sang and still sing a series of songs they call ‘punto cubano,’ which is nothing but our own Andalusian guajira . . . Ernesto Lecuona has verified that the so-called punto cubano is of Spanish origin and derives from the Andalusian guajira, brought to Cuba by the first colonizers” (Turina 1982, 32–33). Whatever original Andalusian source existed for the Cuban punto would certainly not have been designated by the Cuban term “guajira.”

16. In this vein is the décima “Al amanecer el día,” recorded several times around the turn of the century.

17. The naivete of such verses was not lost on Spaniards, inspiring parodies such as one recorded in 1933: “I married you, creole woman/but not your mother; /tell her to go in exile to Spain/tell her she can visit tomorrow/but not while I’m home/and if she comes while I’m still here/I’ll throw her out the window/and if she’s lucky she’ll land on her feet” (on Los cantes hispanoamericanos en el mundo del flamenco: Ida y vuelta (Pasarela CDP8/858), III:4) (Yo contigo me caso indiana/pero no con tu mamá/dile que se vaya/a la España desterra'/Dile que venga
mañana pero cuando yo no estoy si entra aquí una ve'de casa no sale ya/la tiro por la ventana/ya a lo mejor cae de pie.

18. On *La Niña de la Puebla* (DIENC CD 116, 6).
19. The *zapateo* was a popular rural instrumental dance-music form, with standardized melodic figures in fast 6/8, typically played on *tres* or other stringed instruments.
20. Also worthy of mention are the *guajira*-inspired pieces by composer Amadeo Roldán, such as his “Guajira vueltabajera” of 1928 for cello and piano, which exploits, in a sort of Debussy/Golliwog modernist manner, some of the genre’s distinctive features. In another essay (Manuel 2002), I discuss Roldán’s adaptation of Mixolydian tonality; also noteworthy is how the cello and piano playfully toss back and forth fragments in 6/8 and 3/4 tempi.
21. Galán (1983, 51) notes how the theater *guajira* can be seen as the progenitor of the early twentieth-century *clave* and *criolla* song-forms, but these enjoyed relatively ephemeral popularity.
22. See, e.g., Benny Moré’s big-band “Soy campesino” on *Sonero Mayor* (EGREM LD-3974).
23. On *Lilia Vera y Pablo Milanés* (EGREM LD-3988). I have transposed this excerpt from the original E major to C major to facilitate comparison with example 4.
24. Note the somewhat interchangeable use of plural and singular forms of flamenco *cante* names; hence, one may sing “una colombiana,” or, more often, “por colombianas,” lit., “in colombianas.”
25. For further discussion of the Spanish pop rumba see Manuel 1988, 121–26.
27. The Cuban city of Matanzas is said to have been founded by Canary immigrants in 1693 (Thomas 1971, 97).
28. This combination of local insularity and transcontinental travel was particularly marked in the Canaries. López Viera (2003, 39) describes how until recent decades, many peasants in the island of Gomera never traveled more than a few miles from their isolated native villages in the hills, except, in many cases, to travel to Cuba for several years to work.

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