

DANGEROUS CROSSROADS

*Popular Music, Postmodernism
and the Poetics of Place*



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Kalfou Danjere



BOUKMAN EKSPERYANS

According to a story often told among jazz musicians, Clark Terry experienced some exasperating moments when he first joined the Duke Ellington orchestra in 1951. The great trumpet and flugelhorn player had rehearsed every complicated technical maneuver in his repertoire in anticipation of the opportunity to impress his new boss and band mates. But when he got to his audition, all Ellington wanted him to do was "to listen." Terry complained that he was a musician who needed a chance to play, that anyone could just sit and listen. But the ever enigmatic Ellington informed him, "There's listening and there's listening, but what I want you to do is to *listen*."

Eventually, Clark Terry came to see what Ellington wanted. He had been so preoccupied with his own skills, and what they could offer to the orchestra, that he had not taken time to hear what the other musicians needed from him. He had not yet learned to listen to the voices around him, or to understand the spaces and silences surrounding them. Ellington already knew that his young trumpeter had talent as a virtuoso, but he felt that Terry had to bring his virtuosity in harmony – both literally and figuratively – with the rest of the orchestra.

Ellington's admonition serves as a useful way of beginning to think about the problems, politics, and poetics of place within popular music in the contemporary world. At this moment of unprecedented danger and unprecedented opportunity, virtuosity entails *listening* as well as speaking. It requires patient explorations into spaces and silences as much as it demands bold and forthright articulation of ideas and interests. Most important, it calls for an understanding of how people make meaning for themselves, how they have already begun to engage in grass-roots theorizing about complicated realities, and why and when that theorizing might lead to substantive change for the better.

In our time, social and cultural crises often come to us in the form of struggles over place and displacement, over transformations in our relationships to both physical places and discursive spaces. The relationship between popular music and place offers a way of starting to understand the social world that we are losing – and a key to the one that is being built. Anxieties aired through popular music illumine important aspects of the cultural and political conflicts that lie ahead for us all.

Popular music has a peculiar relationship to the poetics and the politics of place. Recorded music travels from place to place, transcending physical and temporal barriers. It alters our understanding of the local and the immediate, making it possible for us to experience close contact with cultures from far away. Yet precisely because music travels, it also augments our appreciation of place. Commercial popular music

demonstrates and dramatizes contrasts between places by calling attention to how people from different places create culture in different ways.

A poetics of place permeates popular music, shaping significantly its contexts of production, distribution, and reception. New Orleans jazz and sambas from São Paulo circulate freely throughout the world, but they never completely lose the concerns and cultural qualities that give them determinate shape in their places of origin. Through music we learn about place and about displacement. Laments for lost places and narratives of exile and return often inform, inspire, and incite the production of popular music. Songs build engagement among audiences at least in part through references that tap memories and hopes about particular places. Intentionally and unintentionally, musicians use lyrics, musical forms, and specific styles of performance that evoke attachment to or alienation from particular places.

Like other forms of contemporary mass communication, popular music simultaneously undermines and reinforces our sense of place. Music that originally emerged from concrete historical experiences in places with clearly identifiable geographic boundaries now circulates as an interchangeable commodity marketed to consumers all over the globe. Recordings by indigenous Australians entertain audiences in North America. Jamaican music secures spectacular sales in Germany and Japan. Rap music from inner-city ghettos in the U.S.A. attracts the allegiance of teenagers from Amsterdam to Auckland. Juke boxes and elaborate "sound systems" in Colombia employ dance music from West Africa as the constitutive element of a dynamic local subculture, while Congolese entertainers draw upon Cuban traditions for the core vocabulary of their popular music.

These transactions transform – but do not erase – attachments to place. Through the conduits of commercial culture, music made by aggrieved inner-city populations in Canberra, Kingston, or Compton becomes part of everyday life and culture for affluent consumers in the suburbs of Cleveland, Coventry, or Cologne. At the same time, electric-techno-art music made in Germany serves as a staple for sampling within African-American hip hop; Spanish flamenco and paso doble music provide crucial subtexts for Algerian rai artists; and pedal steel guitars first developed by country and western musicians in the U.S.A. play a prominent role in Nigerian juju.

This dynamic dialogue, however, does not necessarily reflect relations of reciprocity and mutuality. Inter-cultural communication does not automatically lead to inter-cultural cooperation, especially when participants in the dialogue speak from positions of highly unequal access to power, opportunity, and life chances. Citizens in advanced industrialized nations have long enjoyed the opportunity of consuming cultural

commodities produced in colonized "hinterlands" both inside and outside of their national boundaries. Modernist literature, art, and music in Western countries has consistently spectacularized difference, titillating "respectable" audiences with sensational portrayals of "primitive," "exotic," and "oriental" outsiders.

The cross-cultural communication carried on within today's contemporary popular music retains residual contradictions of centuries of colonialism, class domination, and racism. But it also speaks to currents of culture and politics emerging from fundamentally new geopolitical and economic realities. The rapid mobility of capital and populations across the globe has problematized traditional understandings of place and made displacement a widely shared experience. Under these conditions, dispersed populations of migrant workers, emigrants, and exiles take on new roles as cross-cultural interpreters and analysts. As transnational corporations create integrated global markets and the nation state recedes as a source of identity and identification, popular culture becomes an ever more important public sphere.


In an innovative and original analysis, Arjun Appadurai argues that we need to draw a new cognitive map of the global cultural economy. Instead of dividing the world by continents or countries, Appadurai proposes that we think less of landscapes and more of the presence of concurrent ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, and ideoscapes. In other words, the dynamic movement of ethnic groups, images, technology, capital, and ideologies allows us all to inhabit many different "places" at once.¹

Yet, even under these circumstances of global integration, local identities and affiliations do not disappear. On the contrary, the transnational economy often makes itself felt most powerfully through the reorganization of spaces and the transformation of local experience – especially within and across urban areas. A century ago, the combined effects of state building, urbanization, and industrialization transformed popular perceptions about change over time, making *history* the constitutive problem of the age of industrialization. Today, the ever expanding reach and scope of electronic, computer chip, fiber optic, and satellite communication imposes a rationalized uniformity on production and consumption all over the world, making *place* the constitutive problem of the post-industrial era.

For more than a hundred years, struggles for social justice and equality have been waged as battles over the control of places – countries, cities, factories, and neighborhoods. But the division of labor and distribution of population within cities that characterized the industrial age has been supplanted by circuits and flows across cities

in our post-industrial age. New technologies that separate management from production, flexible forms of capital accumulation that discourage investments in infrastructure, and increased emphasis on consumption rather than on production in metropolitan centers, all increasingly make urban identity a matter of connections between places. The export of industrial production to poorer countries extends across continents the class conflicts that previously took place largely within individual cities and states. Allegiances to place honed by centuries of successful struggles to extract concessions from capital now start to erode as the mobility of capital renders such strategies obsolete. But the circuits and flows of commerce created in the wake of flexible capital accumulation create new circuits and flows for culture and politics as well.²

The social movements of the industrial era tried to trap capital in one place – to extract concessions from capital by withholding labor, stopping production, or using the power of government to regulate and tax corporations and individuals. Their physical presence in factories or their numbers among the electorate provided them with leverage in struggles for power, but they also invariably resorted to cultural creativity to build public spheres and shared spaces that reflected their values and interests.

 Today, shared cultural space no longer depends upon shared geographic place. What Henri Lefebvre called "theatrical or dramatized space" becomes increasingly important as a substitute for the lost public sphere of the industrial city.³ New discursive spaces allow for recognition of new networks and affiliations; they become crucibles for complex identities in formation that respond to the imperatives of place at the same time that they transcend them. The interdependence of people throughout the world has never been more evident. From popular culture to politics, from the adoption market to the drug trade, new technologies and trade patterns connect places as well as people, redefining local identities and identifications in the process.

Video tapes made in Paris help Islamic fundamentalists seize power in Iran. Iranian exiles in Los Angeles publish telephone directories in Farsi, helping bring an influx of capital to southern California banking institutions. Hollywood films intended to assuage the effects of the American defeat in Vietnam become icons for anti-American militia fighters in Beirut. Civil war in Lebanon leads to Western repression against Islamic countries, which in turn helps provoke terrorist violence against French nationals and other foreigners living in Algeria as well as state terrorism against Islamic fundamentalists challenging their exclusion from the Algerian state.

As people in different places around the world face similar and interconnected kinds of austerity, inequality, and social disintegration, a transnational culture speaking to shared social realities starts to emerge. Yet the things that divide people remain as important as those that bring them together. The uneven distribution of resources, opportunities, and life chances in the world makes communication between places more instructive and more urgent than ever before. A peculiar inversion takes place as people from colonized countries long connected to global migrations emerge as experts about displacement and the qualities needed to combat it. Music from aggrieved communities still serves traditional purposes of novelty, diversion, and exoticism for many consumers, but a poly-lateral dialogue among aggrieved populations and a crisis of confidence in declining industrialized nations gives new valence to the cultural creations emanating from aggrieved communities, making the relationship between "margins" and "center" dramatically different.

The promise and peril of popular music's new role in the world's economic, cultural, and political life appears dramatically in the actions of Boukman Eksperyans, a musical ensemble from Haiti. In May 1992, the six men and three women in the group gathered at the Audiotek Studios in Port-au-Prince to record an album featuring "Kalfou Danjere" ("Dangerous Crossroads"), the song that they had written especially for that year's carnival celebration. The Creole lyrics of their song warned "deceivers," "liars," "cheaters," and "assassins" of the dangers that awaited them at the "crossroads of the Congo people."⁴

In the wake of the military coup that had toppled the democratically-elected government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide in September 1991, "Kalfou Danjere" held unmistakable meaning for most Haitians. It drew upon the ideology and terminology of popular "voudou" religion to rebuke the corruption and brutality of the military dictatorship. Blending infectious indigenous voudou and rara rhythms with imported funk-rock and dance music, the musicians in Boukman Eksperyans used their time in the studio to produce an album that served as a vehicle for education and agitation among the Haitian people.

The song "Kalfou Danjere" invoked ancestral spirits, natural forces, minor deities, and the Supreme Being to predict a dangerous future for those who abused the Haitian people. By threatening trouble at the "crossroads," the song highlighted a place of crucial importance in African folklore and Caribbean voudou. Collisions occur at the crossroads; decisions must be made there. But the crossroads can also provide a

unique perspective, a vantage point where one can see in more than one direction. In "Kalfou Danjere," Boukman Eksperyans described the crossroads as dangerous for the "deceivers," because there they would be called to judgment by the deities who protect the farmers, villagers, mountain dwellers, and urban poor who practice voodoo.

In announcing the dangerous fate awaiting their enemies at the crossroads, the members of Boukman Eksperyans courted danger themselves. The Haitian government banned "Kalfou Danjere" from official carnival celebrations, and issued an order forbidding radio stations from broadcasting it. Military officials contended that the song posed a threat to public order, that it was "too violent" for people to hear – even though the lyrics of "Kalfou Danjere" expressly rejected violence. (At one point the lyrics affirm "we're not doing any killing, we're not going to play that game.") Unfortunately, the military's new-found, sudden, and decidedly short-lived aversion to "violence" – as expressed in this song – did not lead the government to curtail any of its own extensive repression, brutality, and terrorism against potential opponents. On the contrary, the military dictatorship increased its efforts at intimidation through a broad range of repressive measures including assassination and imprisonment.

Ever since their recording debut in 1989, the members of Boukman Eksperyans have been making music rendering them both dangerous and endangered. They won the Haitian Konou Mizik competition in 1989 with their song "Wet Chen" ("Break the Chain"). Their 1990 carnival song, "Ke'-m Pa Sote" ("My Heart Doesn't Leap, You Don't Scare Me") played a part in the popular revitalization of voodoo, helping to spark the *Lavalas* movement ("the cleansing flood") – the mass mobilization that swept Aristide to power.⁵ By connecting the dance hall with the voodoo temple, "Ke'-m Pa Sote" also united town dwellers and rural peasants in opposition to the corruption that permeates Haitian politics. Its powerful polyrhythms and anthemic chorus enlisted listeners in an exciting and joyous collectivity that called into being through performance the kind of confident communality described by the song's lyrics.

Boukman Eksperyans, and the insurgent movement it helped inspire, sought to transform voodoo from primarily an instrument of state repression to a vehicle for popular power. Under the dictatorial regimes of "Papa Doc" Duvalier, his son "Baby Doc," and their successors from the 1950s to the present, the Haitian government has used local voodoo priests to recruit paramilitary forces known as *tontons macoutes*, creating an extra-legal network of loyalty and intimidation parallel to the state. Through its music, Boukman Eksperyans inverted, subverted, and reappropriated for revolutionary ends the rituals and symbols long employed by the *tontons macoutes* to preserve tyrannical rule. By the same token, they attempted to use the commodity

culture brought to Haiti over centuries by foreign investment and foreign invasion as a focal point of resistance to the exploitation and oppression perpetrated on the people by outside powers and the country's own comprador elite.

Haitian military commanders dispatched soldiers, *tontons macoutes*, and civilian thugs (known as *attachés*) to Boukman Eksperyans concerts to prevent the group from performing "Ke'-m Pa Sote" and "Kalfou Danjere." The government subsequently banned "Innocent Christmas," another song from the *Kalfou Danjere* album, as well, because its lyrics asked listeners to "look at the route they want us to take to lose our freedom," to look "how they don't want us to say what we think."⁶ But Boukman Eksperyans and its fans effectively foiled the government's strategy of silencing all opposition by circulating compact discs and cassettes (often copied on home recorders) throughout Haiti – as well as in exile communities in Miami, Montreal, New York, and Paris – helping to make "Kalfou Danjere" and "Ke'-m Pa Sote" ineradicable parts of the popular movement for democracy and justice in Haiti.⁷

Celebrating a legacy of insurgency and struggle deeply rooted in Haiti's history, Boukman Eksperyans adopted its name as a tribute to Joseph Boukman, the ex-slave and voodoo *papaloi* (high priest) who played a prominent role in instigating the slave uprising and war for national independence in Haiti at the end of the eighteenth century. Described by C.L.R. James as "the first of that line of great leaders whom the slaves were to throw up in such profusion and rapidity in the years which followed," Boukman holds a special place in the hearts of Haitians as part of the pantheon of dark-skinned revolutionary heroes (along with Toussaint and Dessalines) who helped win independence for the nation. At the start of the 1791 insurrection, Boukman gathered his followers in the forests of Morne Rouge to assure them that unlike the god of the whites who sanctioned oppression, the god of the slaves "orders us to revenge our wrongs."⁸ When Boukman died in battle, colonial officials had his head cut off and displayed in public as a warning to other potential rebels. But the brutality of their rulers only convinced the masses that they had no alternative to rebellion; their numbers grew to nearly 100,000 after Boukman's death.⁹

Two hundred years later, Boukman's name still serves as an impetus for insurgency in Haiti, in part because of the popularity of the musical group named after him. "We belong to the revolution," claims Theodore "Lolo" Beaubrun, Jr., the group's lead singer and keyboard, piano, and tambou player. "We have to find an alternative to the capitalism and the communism."¹⁰ Lyrics in Boukman Eksperyans songs emphasize the African presence within Haiti's culture through mention of the *ginen* people – a reference to Guinea in West Africa, to the idea of an African homeland where voodoo

gods live, and to the state of spiritual awareness attained by those who practice voodoo. By deploying signs and symbols from voodoo, and by honoring Boukman, the group identifies itself with the dark-skinned masses and their heroes Toussaint and Dessalines, rather than with the tradition of the Catholic Creole elite and their historical heroes like Petion and Rigaud.¹¹

But Boukman Eksperyans is a business as well as a political force. Its music circulates as a commodity in a global market. It serves as a source of speculative investment for multinational corporations engaged in marketing music all over the world. The group's historical references, Creole lyrics, and voodoo metaphysics speak to distinctly Haitian realities, but its finished products also circulate as nodes in a network of global cultural commerce.

Boukman Eksperyans got started in the music business with the help of an American who owns a hotel in Haiti.¹² The group's manager lives in Montreal, and its British-based recording label arranged for post-production work on *Kalfou Danjere* in London and Miami. The members of the group blend Haitian voodoo and rara drumming with Afro-American funk rock and South African dance music. Critic Jon Pareles described the group's sound as a mixture of "the cutting guitar of Santana" (the Mexican-born rock guitarist who moved to the U.S.A. as a teenager and found fame in the 1960s playing blues licks and Afro-Cuban rhythms) and "the three-chord bounce" of mbaqanga (the popular South African dance music).¹³ Although its name honors one of Haiti's greatest heroes, it also offers a Creole rendering of "experience" — a name more likely to make international audiences think of Jimi Hendrix (who named his band the Jimi Hendrix Experience) than Joseph Boukman.¹⁴

Yet internationalism is hardly new to Haiti. U.S. marines occupied the country for almost two decades, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt wrote the country's constitution when he was Under-Secretary of the U.S. Navy. Sugar companies owned by American and other foreign investors have profited from low wages and low taxes on business in Haiti, and the U.S. government has been a perpetual source of direct and indirect support for totalitarian rule in the country.¹⁵ The same circuits of investment and commerce that bring low-wage jobs to Haiti's factories and fields carry the music of Boukman Eksperyans to a wider world audience. The same connections between U.S. multinationals and Haitian poverty that insures a perpetual presence on the island by the American security state also makes the visibility of Boukman Eksperyans in the U.S.A. a strategic resource for the group as they try to criticize their government and still stay alive.

In "Kalfou Danjere," the members of Boukman Eksperyans warn their enemies about a dangerous crossroads – and consequently subject themselves to danger as well. But their own fusions of politics and popular culture, of nationalism and internationalism, of religion and revolution demarcate other crossroads and other dangers. Boukman Eksperyans lead singer Lolo Beaubrun claims that the group wants to help Haiti find an alternative to capitalism and socialism, but it still sells its songs as commodities in a capitalist market structure. Boukman Eksperyans tries to educate and agitate Haitians for social change, yet still serve the tastes of international audiences. The group attempts to use the traditions of voodoo and nationalism for democratic ends, but runs the risk of being used by those traditions as well, of substituting superstition and fear for analysis and action.

The musicians in Boukman Eksperyans face serious contradictions as they attempt to address the volatile political and social conditions in Haiti at the same time that they address consumers around the globe as prospective customers. The influence of South African mbaqanga music on Boukman Eksperyans may testify to a dialogue between liberation struggles on different continents, but it also reflects the ability of commercial culture to collapse boundaries and render historically specific cultural expressions little more than fashions to be appropriated far from their conditions of creation. Music fans who may know nothing about Haitian history, voodoo metaphysics, or Creole speech still "enjoy" the music of Boukman Eksperyans. They might use this music to become informed and connected to the life-and-death issues of revolutionary struggle in an impoverished Third World country, but they are just as likely to use the music of Boukman Eksperyans to turn the pain and strife in Haiti into just one more exotic spectacle, one more novelty, one more diversion for jaded consumers living in wealthy Western countries.

Yet, the international visibility enjoyed by the members of Boukman Eksperyans also helps protect them from repression by a government that has shown little reluctance to imprison and even assassinate its opponents. Their role in the global economy enables them to sharpen consciousness within their country about what it means to be Haitian. At the same time, U.S. hegemony over Haiti changes the U.S.A. as well.

Haitians fleeing poverty and oppression flock to Miami and New York, where their presence and impact on local employment and culture changes what it means to be Black, Cuban, Puerto Rican, and white in those cities. Incarceration of refugees from Haiti exposes the racist biases still permeating U.S. immigration policy, offending African Americans and discomfoting other immigrant communities of color. The special health needs of Haitian immigrants expose the inequities and injustices of

federal policies for the testing and treatment of AIDS, creating coalitions between immigrants and activists from gay and lesbian communities in some American cities. All of the populations held together by the presence of foreign capital in Haiti do not enjoy equal relations to one another or to power, but their destinies are linked in ways that become very visible once we start looking into the conditions that make the production of recorded music by Boukman Eksperyans possible.

The members of Boukman Eksperyans are not the only contemporary musicians whose work takes them to these dangerous crossroads. For many musicians around the world, the "popular" has become a dangerous crossroads, an intersection between the undeniable saturation of commercial culture in every area of human endeavor and the emergence of a new public sphere that uses the circuits of commodity production and circulation to envision and activate new social relations.

For example, Thomas Mapfumo's chimurenga music played a vital role in the struggle for national liberation in Zimbabwe in the 1970s and 1980s at the same time that it won a global following as a form of "world beat" music.¹⁶ Rock singer and songwriter Freddie Aguilar encouraged opposition to the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines with his recording of "Katarungang" ("Justice"), and his version of a traditional patriotic tune, "Bayan Ko," served as the theme song of anti-Marcos opposition in the 1986 election campaign.¹⁷ Soul Vibrations – a calypso/reggae/salsa band composed of English-speaking Black Nicaraguan Indians – emerged on the world market in the late 1980s with songs that praised their country's government for its solidarity with Mozambique, but at the same time condemned it for denying autonomy to the indigenous population along the Atlantic coast.¹⁸

In Germany in 1992, Jens Muller, a twenty-one-year-old rap singer calling himself "J," used his \$40,000 advance from a recording company to finance *Germany Alert*, an anti-racist newsletter designed to combat growing violence in his country against people of Turkish, Vietnamese, and African ancestry.¹⁹ Like the music of Fela Kuti in Nigeria, Ruben Blades in Panama, or Yothu Yindi in Australia, the music of Mapfumo, Aguilar, Soul Vibrations, J, and Boukman Eksperyans illustrates the emergence of a kind of politics that takes commodity culture for granted and the emergence of a kind of cultural practice that aspires to political significance. They evidence the early stirrings of efforts to theorize the emerging world order from the grass roots, to speak to and through the systems of communication and commerce that signal the emergence of fundamentally new opportunities and dangers.

In some cases, the politics of contemporary popular music emerge as much from the reception strategies of audiences as from the intentions of artists. People fight with the

means at their disposal; in a world characterized by the circulation of commodities, commercial culture can provide an effective means of receiving and sending messages in unexpected ways. Jamaican reggae singer Bob Marley's visit to Australia in 1979 helped launch a "Black power" movement among that country's indigenous activists. They interpreted Marley's message that "all Black men are brothers" as meant for them. Consequently, when indigenous bands including Kuckles, No Fixed Address, and Coloured Stone began to record protest songs against their mistreatment by white Australians, they used reggae as a prominent means of expression.²⁰

Similarly, a massive anti-racism movement (SOS-Racisme) in France in the mid-1980s promoted Algerian rai music – a synthesis of North African and European popular musics – as an emblem of inter-cultural cooperation. Subsequent anti-government rioters in Algiers in 1988 took rai singer Cheb Khaled's "El Harba Wine" ("Where to Flee?") as their anthem, even though the song itself had no intentional political content.²¹ Nicaraguans disgusted with the Sandinista government's glorification of Cuban socialism in the late 1980s rejected the didactic folk revival sponsored by their own government in favor of a commercial recording. This recording, "Juana, La Cubana," is a Mexican version of a Colombian song that made fun of Cubans, and became popular because it provided disgruntled Nicaraguans with an opportunity to express some not very covert resentments against their leaders.²²

When indigenous Australians draw their forms of cultural resistance from diasporic Africans in Jamaica, when French anti-racists use music initially created by the collision between French imperialism and Arab cabaret singers in Algeria, when Algerian rebels take up rai music popular in Paris as an emblem of modernization, when Nicaraguans shun a government-sponsored "new song" movement and instead use the salacious lyrics of an international popular song as an expression of "their" politics, they illustrate the many kinds of crossroads and the many kinds of dangers embedded in the cultural conduits of our time. If political activity could ever have been seen simply as the province of the nation state, it can be seen that way no longer.

New technologies, mass migrations, and the rapid movement of ideas, images, and expressions across the globe have created new networks of identification and affiliation that render obsolete some traditional political practices and identities while creating complicated and complex new cultural fusions with profound political implications. For example, one of the leading traditional taiko drummers in Japan recently was a Chicano from East Los Angeles named Maceo Hernandez-Delgado. He learned about Japanese cultural traditions while growing up in multi-cultural Los Angeles, and traveled to Japan to study music as a kind of return to a homeland that he had never

known.²³ At the same time, one of the world's most accomplished Afro-Caribbean salsa bands, Orquesta de la Luz, comes from Japan. The cover of one of the band's compact discs presents a portrait of the Orquesta members' distinctly Japanese faces juxtaposed against the album's title: *Somos Diferentes (We Are Different)*. Reggae music from Jamaica and Elvis Presley songs from the U.S.A. enjoy popularity in Japan, in part because Japanese listeners hear reggae as similar to Japanese O-Bon festival music, and they interpret Presley's songs as a variant of Japanese enka music.²⁴ Koreans listening to African-American rap music compare it to sasui, a Korean lyrical form within folk dramas known as pansori.²⁵ Leila K, a Moroccan teenager who records dance-hall rap music in Sweden, had a U.S. hit with "Got to Get" in 1990, while "Sadness" became a 1991 international hit as a song based on Gregorian chants put together in a Spanish studio by a producer born in Rumania.²⁶ In Los Angeles, one of the most important producers of Chicano artists creating African-American-based rap music is Steve Yano, a Japanese American raised in a Chicano neighborhood, who began his business selling rap cassettes at Chicano swap meets and whose recording studio occupies an office that previously housed a Chinese-language cable television company.²⁷

The inter-cultural communication encoded in these musical performances has complicated origins and implications. In an era when every continent seems convulsed by ethnic, religious, and racial violence, examples of cross-national and multi-racial music offer hope for a better future. Yet, certain kinds of multi-culturalism and internationalism are also essential elements in the project of transnational capital to erase local differences and distinctions in the hope of making all cultural and political units equally susceptible to investment, exploitation, and the sale of mass-produced commodities that make the love of gain and the lure of accumulation the only cultural qualities that count. But while very much a product of the ever expanding reach and scope of capital, these cultural creations also testify to the ways in which artists from aggrieved communities can use the very instruments of their displacement and dispossession to forge a new public sphere with emancipatory potential.

In 1993, audiences around the world began hearing the music of an artist calling himself "Apache Indian." Because of his stage name and the title of his first album, *No Reservations*, some speculated that he might be an American Indian. But his music had the hard edge of Jamaican raggamuffin dance-hall rap, suggesting that he might be West Indian. In fact, Apache Indian turned out to be Steve Kapur, a former welder from Handsworth in England whose parents were Punjabi immigrants from the

southwest Asian nation of India. Kapur grew up in the same racially-mixed neighborhood that produced the inter-racial reggae band UB40, and took his stage name in honor of his idol, the West Indian artist Wild Apache, aka Super Cat, both because Kapur admired his music and because Wild Apache himself included Caribbean East Indians among his ancestors.²⁸

Apache Indian's music mixes hip hop, reggae, and Anglo-American pop styles with the Asian-Indian dance music bhangra, leading some commentators to call his music bhangramuffin. "I grew up in a very multi-cultural place," he explains, "where you can't get away from the reggae sound, and as an Asian, you can't get away from the bhangra sound, and living in this country, you can't get away from pop. All these flavors just came out."²⁹ Kapur developed an early interest in music as a fan of Elvis Presley; he met his girlfriend Harj at a swap meet organized by an Elvis Presley fan club. But he was also strongly influenced by the music and Rastafarian religion of Bob Marley, in part because of the Jamaican's success as an artist of color in attracting an international audience, but also because Marley's philosophy and values spoke powerfully to Kapur's life as a diasporic Indian in Britain. As a teenager, Kapur wore his hair in dreadlocks and painted his bedroom red, gold, and green – the colors of Black nationalism popularized by Marley and other Rastafarians.³⁰

Apache Indian's recordings enjoyed phenomenal sales among the diasporic Indian community in Toronto, largely because young Indian Canadians saw his use of bhangra as a sign of respect for Indian traditions. But when Kapur toured India he found that he had an image as a rebel because of songs like "Arranged Marriage" that criticized the caste system, because he lived with but did not marry his Sikh girlfriend, and because his music adhered to Western rather than to traditional Indian standards of excellence. In England, Apache Indian's music became an important icon of unity between Afro-Caribbeans and Afro-Asians who had long been divided despite their common identification as "Black" Britons. Reggae musicians in Jamaica welcomed Apache Indian as an artist worthy of respect and as an ally in their cultural and political projects. The Jamaican singer Maxi Priest contributed to Apache Indian's recording session at Tuff Gong studios in Kingston by singing in Punjabi. "He doesn't have to tap into the Indian market," commented a grateful and admiring Apache Indian in respect of Priest's efforts, "he just wanted to do it."³¹

The emergence of an artist like Apache Indian underscores some important aspects of the relationship between cultural space and physical place in our time. The exchange of populations and cultural commodities across the globe creates an interconnectedness with enormous implications for culture and politics. Constance Sutton

describes New York as "the Caribbean crossroads of the world," because it has a Caribbean population larger than the combined populations of Kingston (Jamaica), San Juan (Puerto Rico), and Port-of-Spain (Trinidad). Islanders who identify themselves as from Barbados or Grenada at home become something new – "Caribbean" or "West Indian" – in New York, Miami, Toronto, Montreal, London, and Paris.³² One reason why carnival celebrations in London have become important to that city's Afro-Caribbean population is that they have emerged as important sites for creating a composite "West Indian" identity that transcends affiliations to individual islands.³³ Similarly, Paris now serves as a more convenient meeting place for African intellectuals and artists than any city on the African continent.

Of course, imperial capitals have always served as important sites for diasporic colonial populations, but never before have diasporic immigrants played such a vital role in global economy and culture. As the pernicious effects of global capitalism come home, as the austerity imposed on the Third World by the International Monetary Fund and other agents of transnational capital continues to destroy life chances around the globe, diasporic populations speak powerfully about realities that are all too familiar to them but relatively novel to inhabitants of advanced industrialized countries. This is one reason why music from Asia, Africa, and Latin America is more than a novel diversion in Europe and North America these days; its affect and power and lyrical eloquence stems in part from the understandings it conveys about capitalism and coercion. A peculiar prestige from below accompanies the rise of "world beat" music, in part because it seems as complicated as the rest of contemporary cultural life and to reflect the insights of artists who appear "a day older in history than everybody else."³⁴

Models of cultural imperialism based on binary oppositions between a metropolis and its periphery inadequately describe the poly-lateral relations across countries and cultures that characterize contemporary cultural production. Political strategies based solely on seizing state power underestimate the interconnectedness of the global economy and the capacity of capital to neutralize the nation state. Concepts of cultural practice that privilege autonomous, "authentic," and non-commercial culture as the only path to emancipation do not reflect adequately the complexities of culture and commerce in the contemporary world.

Long histories of avant-garde art and vanguard politics demonstrate the overwhelming failure of efforts to transform society by imagining that we can stand outside it, by seeking transcendent critiques untainted by dominant ideologies and interests. The strategies that emerge from today's global realities point to another path, to the efforts

by Boukman Eksperyans, Apache Indian, and others to produce an immanent critique of contemporary social relations, to work through the conduits of commercial culture in order to illumine affinities, resemblances, and potentials for alliances among a world population that now must be as dynamic and as mobile as the forces of capital.

The dangerous crossroads created constantly within contemporary cultural production, distribution, and exchange require neither simple celebration nor surrender masquerading as cynical critique. Instead, we need to think through the promise and peril of the present situation. Faced with what Nestor Garcia Canclini astutely identifies as "hybrid transformations generated by the horizontal coexistence of a number of symbolic systems,"³⁵ we need to think realistically about the ways in which the world's population has been divided and segmented into very different relationships with a centralized global economy. Moreover, we need to explore the potential of popular culture as a mechanism of communication and education, as a site for experimentation with cultural and social roles not yet possible in politics.

This book is an effort to take advantage of the unique perspectives afforded by the many crossroads of contemporary culture, but to face up to their dangers as well. In it, I examine a plurality of practices within popular music to understand how popular culture contains different meanings in different countries. But I also examine how the interconnectedness of capitalist culture might help create collective solutions to the systematic and unrelenting injustice and austerity which characterizes life for so many people on this planet. The book is based on the premise that the power of transnational capital means that all of us must become transnational too.

In writing a book about dangerous crossroads, I inevitably run the risk of making dangerous distortions and errors of my own. As a North American limited by the parochialism and prejudices of my life and my culture, I know that my efforts to interpret and analyze political and cultural practices from contexts far different from my own are likely to fall short in ways that I can not anticipate. Readers interested in a comprehensive survey of world music or a guide to its appreciation and interpretation will surely be disappointed by my choice to study music as a social force. Many dimensions of music's local and global uses and effects remain outside my purview as well, since I focus on issues of place and politics. But the most important thing is to begin to recognize the voices that already exist in the world expressing important theoretical insights into the crises that bind us all, albeit to different degrees and with different consequences. For cultural creators, critics, and consumers alike, risks are necessary; continuing to address only familiar issues and questions posed solely within ethnocentric national categories would be far worse than the possibility of making a

few errors while asking questions that address appropriately the complexity of the cultural and political tasks facing us. These crossroads are dangerous for all of us, but the greatest danger would come from pretending that we can ignore them. As Charles Péguy once observed, "No one could suspect that times were coming . . . when the man who did not gamble would lose all the time, even more surely than he who gambled."³⁶

In an incisive formulation that illumines powerfully the poetics and politics of place in our time, Deborah Pacini Hernandez explains that the spread of "international" music paradoxically often encourages "deeper exploration of national musics"; when music travels across cultures, artists and audiences notice peculiarities of place that would otherwise remain hidden from them without the opportunity for comparison.³⁷ Consequently, international music can make local and national knowledge *more* important rather than less. The reach and scope of transnational capital makes indigenous Haitian traditions all that much more powerful as forms of resistance for Boukman Eksperyans. The disintegration of the Canadian nation state as a consequence of the disastrous North American Free Trade Agreement and the abandonment of the social wage by the Mulroney government, gives renewed hope to Québécois nationalists because their province enjoys distinct cultural differences from Canada *and* from the U.S.A. History does not disappear in our age of simultaneity. Often, repressed elements of the past surge to the surface as part of the present.

Just as the internationally-inflected music of Boukman Eksperyans helped them rediscover the specificities of Haitian culture and history, many of the fusions that seem to be recent developments made possible only by global economy and culture actually reflect enduring traditions and legacies firmly rooted in the inequalities and inequities of the histories of particular places. They are not postmodern fusions, but present manifestations of the long history of inter-cultural communication among the world's peoples over hundreds of years. Some of the novel combinations that characterize contemporary culture (like the popularity of Nigerian highlife music in Hamburg, Germany or the importance of Brazilian samba music in Lagos, Nigeria) reflect real historical connections and affinities, not just a serendipitous exchange of signs and symbols across cultures.

For example, consider the importance to the emergence of postmodern fusion music all around the world of cities that have been seaports. Algerian rai music comes from Oran, long a center for cross-cultural communication among Arab, Black, French, and Spanish people and cultures. The Australian indigenous bands Kuckles and Sunburn that mixed calypso, reggae, pop, and indigenous musics so effectively in the 1980s

began playing music in Broome, a pearling center known for its demographic mixture of European, Japanese, Filipino, and indigenous residents.

Manu Dibango from Cameroon first developed his eclectic combination of African, American, European, and Cuban music in his home town of Douala, a port serving sailors from all over the world. Black musicians in New Orleans regularly turned to Cuban, Haitian, Trinidadian, and Jamaican musical forms in part because of the extensive sea traffic between their city and Mantanzas, Havana, Port-au-Prince, Port-of-Spain, and Kingston. Similarly, it is no accident that seaport cities like Cartagena (Colombia) and Hamburg (Germany) became centers for African musical influences or that the Beatles would come from Liverpool, the British port most involved in the slave trade with Africa and the Caribbean.³⁸ Much that seems new in contemporary culture carries within itself unresolved contradictions of the past. The solutions to what seem like our newest problems may well be found in communities that have been struggling with them for centuries. The most "modern" people in the world that is emerging may be those from nations that have been considered "backward."

The crossroads we confront contain both residual and emergent elements; they encompass both dangers and opportunities. Following Nestor Garcia Canclini we can see that the nation states and social movements that have traditionally been patrons of culture have lost power and influence in the age of transnational capital, while cultural activity "linked to the expanding modes of capitalist development" (like corporations and cultural foundations) is ascendant.³⁹ These developments call for new forms of social theory capable of explaining new connections between culture and politics, as well as for new forms of cultural criticism suited to seeing beyond the surface content of cultural expressions to understand and analyze their conditions of production. The aim here is not to produce another theory for interpreting culture, but rather to come toward a better theorized understanding of social relations by understanding the interplay of art, culture, and commerce within them.

The violence that emerged with such destructive fury in the Los Angeles rebellion of 1992, in murderous attacks on "foreigners" in Germany during 1992-1993, and in racial, religious, and ethnic conflicts across the globe in recent years dramatize the dangers emerging at various crossroads of commerce and culture. Anxiety and xenophobia fueled by a sense of cultural loss, the very real deprivation of displaced populations, anger emanating from a permanent austerity economy, and the surveillance and suppression necessary for the perpetuation of privilege provide preconditions for explosions everywhere. The interconnectedness of cultures displayed by world music is not without utopian possibilities, but the ravages of unimpeded capital

accumulation create grave dangers as well. These crossroads are dangerous for all of us; how well we negotiate them may determine what kind of future we will face – or whether we will face any future at all. Dangers await at the crossroads, but never with more peril than when we refuse to face them.

NOTES

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3. Quote by Lefebvre from Joseph Kling, "Complex Society/Complex Cities," 36.
4. Boukman Eksperyans, *Kalfou Danjere*, liner notes, Mango Records 162-539-927-2, 1992.
5. Chris Tilly, "Haiti's Agony," *Dollars and Sense* no.192 (March/April) 1994, 16.
6. "Innocent Christmas," Boukman Eksperyans, *Kalfou Danjere*, liner notes.
7. Larry Birnbaum, "Boukman Eksperyans," *Down Beat* (March) 1993, 45; Gene Santoro, "South of the Border," *Nation*, February 1, 1993, 139; Jon Pareles, "Boukman Eksperyans," *New York Times*, November 19, 1992.
8. C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: Vintage, 1963) 86, 87.
9. C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, 96.
10. Jon Pareles, "Boukman Eksperyans."
11. James Ferguson, "Voodoo and Haitian Politics," *Race and Class*, p.95; C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, 147–8, 369–70, 372, 54, 58, 411, 99, 108, 234–5.
12. Philip Sweeney, *The Virgin Directory of World Music* (New York: Henry Holt, 1991), 214.
13. Jon Pareles, "Boukman Eksperyans."
14. Because Hendrix named his band "The Jimi Hendrix Experience" and is known for his song "Have You Ever Been Experienced?"
15. Chris Tilley, "Haiti's Agony," 16–19, 36, 37.
16. Julie Frederikse, *None But Ourselves: Masses vs. Media in the Making of Zimbabwe* (Exeter, NH: Heinemann, 1992); Don Snowden, "Zimbabwe Singer's Dream Helps Make the Revolution," *Los Angeles Times*, October 21, 1989, F6.
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21. David McMurray and Ted Swedenburg, "Rai Tide Rising," *Middle East Report* (March–April) 1991, 42.
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28. Brooke Wentz, "Apache Indian," *Vibe* (November) 1993, 86.
29. Thom Duffy, "Apache Indian's Asian-Indian Pop Scores U.K. Hit," *Billboard*, February 20, 1993, 82.
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34. I appropriate this phrase from another context, from Robert Warshow's "Clifford Odets: Poet of the Jewish Middle Class," in Robert Warshow, *The Immediate Experience* (New York: Atheneum, 1979), 63.
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36. Quoted in C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), viii.
38. Deborah Pacini Hernandez, "Bachata: From the Margins to the Mainstream," *Popular Music* vol.11 no.3 (1992), 360. See also the eloquent formulation advanced by Jocelyne Guilbault in "On Redefining the 'Local' Through World Music," *Popscriptum* (forthcoming).
38. Paul Gilroy notes that the German edition of Frederick Douglass's *My Bondage, My Freedom* was published in Hamburg in 1860: Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 60.
39. Nestor Garcia Canclini, "Cultural Reconversion," 33.