



Fiesta de diez pesos: Music and Gay Identity in Special Period Cuba (SOAS Musicology Series)

Dr Moshe Morad

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The 'Special Period' in Cuba was an extended era of economic depression starting in the early 1990s, characterized by the collapse of revolutionary values and social norms, and a way of life conducted by improvised solutions for survival, including hustling and sex-work. During this time there developed a thriving, though constantly harassed and destabilized, clandestine gay scene (known as the 'ambiente'). In the course of eight visits between 1995 and 2007, the last dozen years of Fidel Castro's reign, Moshe Morad became absorbed in Havana's gay scene, where he created a wide social network, attended numerous secret gatherings-from clandestine parties to religious rituals-and observed patterns of behavior and communication. He discovered the role of music in this scene as a marker of identity, a source of queer codifications and identifications, a medium of interaction, an outlet for emotion and a way to escape from a reality of scarcity, oppression and despair.

Morad identified and conducted his research in different types of 'musical space,' from illegal clandestine parties held in changing locations, to ballet halls, drag-show bars, private living-rooms and kitchens and santería religious ceremonies. In this important study, the first on the subject, he argues that music plays a central role in providing the physical, emotional, and conceptual spaces which constitute this scene and in the formation of a new hybrid 'gay identity' in Special-Period Cuba.

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