

**Making Music in Latino Charlotte:
Politics and Community Formation in a
Globalizing City**

by

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Abstract

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“Making Music in Latino Charlotte: Politics and Community Formation in a Globalizing City” examines how Latina/o immigrant musicians and their audiences form local communities centered around music-making that link to hemispheric social networks and operate within the context of global flows of capital, labor, and cultural practices. Drawing on ethnographic data collected from 2008-2011, I place musical communities in the context of Charlotte’s political economy and document how musicians and audiences create musical community. Residential segregation, class divisions, and tensions around race and ethnicity divide Charlotte’s Latin music scene into three districts that loosely correspond to genre categories of *regional mexicano*, *música tropical*, and Latin rock. Musical genre distinguishes between different social groups within the Latino population, marking class, ethnic, linguistic, and status difference, but also facilitating collaboration between groups with common experiences. Working musicians labor in the vulnerable context of immigration crackdowns, low-paying, contingent jobs, and varied class-based views on training and professionalism. The study analyzes how musicians engage with politics in their music and personal lives, revealing a relative lack of overt political activism among working musicians, because of their multiple vulnerabilities. Yet, musicians carefully consider political questions through storytelling and meta-discourse about music, and, through the everyday act of making music, recognize themselves as a group having agency. Latino cultural festivals reveal how

community organizations market *latinidad*, drawing musicians and their labor practices into debates about cultural production and consumption. Local musicians draw on the agency they form through making music in Charlotte to engage with the uneven terrain of the global Latin music industry. I analyze what Charlotte's Latin music scene means for a conceptualization of the city as a center of music-making, for Southern literature, and for the future of Latino music in the US South.

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In memory of George Byrd, Ron Gall, and other musicians gone too soon.

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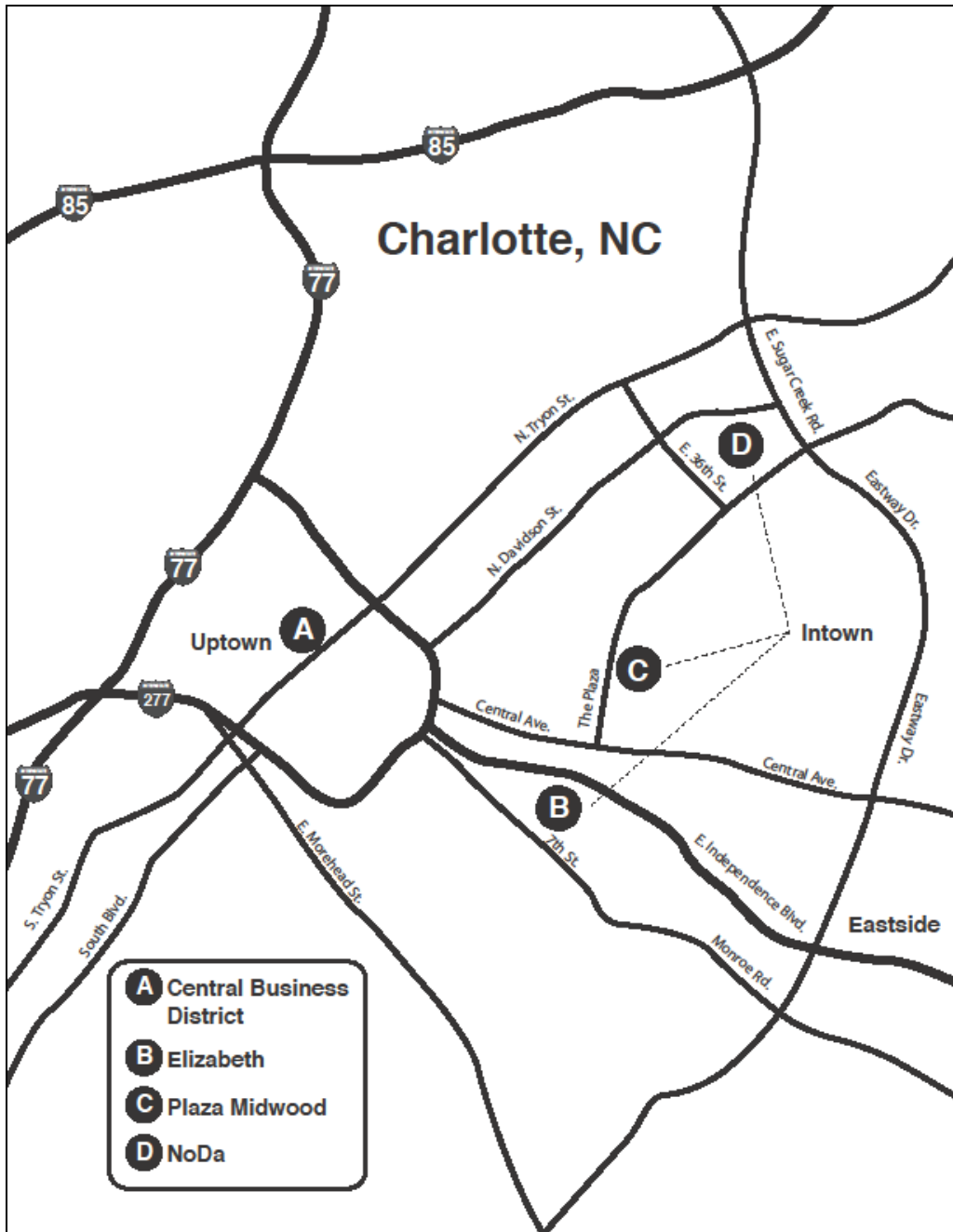
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Figure 1: Map of Charlotte's Neighborhoods and Musical Districts
(courtesy of Carlos Crespo)



Introduction

Over the past two decades in the United States, immigration, particularly from Latin America, has transformed both traditional centers of immigrant influxes and “new immigrant destinations” on a scale not seen since the last “great wave” of immigration in the late 19th century and early 20th century (Fry 2008, Suro & Singer 2002, Zúñiga & Hernández-León 2005). Battles over immigration policy, debates over the role of immigrants, evolving methods of policing and surveillance, and new iterations of the American racial hierarchy have accompanied this new era of globalization. The response to the current “great wave” of immigration is a sea change that betrays the narrative of a “nation of immigrants” and reveals instead a regime of militarization, racialization, and social segregation. This regime is built upon two important legal and political developments- the militarization of the US-Mexico border and US cities through the “War on Drugs” and the implementation of intensive surveillance and policing of immigrant communities after 9/11. Border Studies scholars have noted the damaging effects of this militarization on democratic participation, civil and human rights, mental and physical health, labor organizing, and women’s personal safety, to name a few. In effect, the border has moved north, as local and state governments have implemented policies that target undocumented immigrants and their families, such as the 287(g) program and state laws passed in Arizona, Utah, Georgia, South Carolina, and Alabama. In North Carolina, several counties, including Mecklenburg (where Charlotte is located), have signed on to the 287(g) program, and the state government has restricted undocumented immigrants’ access to driver’s licenses and higher education.

With these policy changes emerged new forms of social and structural racism, expressed in the racialization of Latina/o immigrants. For example, terms like “illegal” and “Mexican”

have become common in the public discourse and are belittling catch-all terms that group all Latinos as undesirable despite their varied national origins, legal statuses, and language competencies. Beyond name calling, the passage of anti-immigrant legislation in many Southern states and the everyday policing of immigrant bodies through checkpoints, denial of public university admission and refusal of access to social services for undocumented immigrants has led some to call the US South's new landscape *Juan Crow* (Lovato 2008). In essence, the US South has responded to globalization by erecting a system of oppressing a new working class of immigrants by marginalizing them through racial labeling, policing, social exclusion and delegitimizing their labor. Latina/o activists organizing to protest these conditions have mobilized mass marches and prominent actions, but face counter-protests, an entrenched class of policymakers who gain politically from targeting immigrant communities, and the failure of the federal government to construct a viable alternative to local devolution of immigration policy. The immigration reform movement has been unable, nonetheless, to alter the increasing number of deportations, to rectify the status of the DREAM generation of undocumented students, or to exert pressure to alleviate the poor working conditions and wage theft suffered by immigrant laborers.

This work looks at one small segment of the Latino immigrant population in Charlotte, musicians and audience members who, through their music-making, engage in processes of community formation and debate political questions relevant to their everyday lives as working musicians and residents of a globalizing city. During my research, the theme of *El Sueño Gris* ("The Gray Dream") described the trajectory of the dreams and aspirations of Latino immigrants to the US South. When I first came across the phrase in the liner notes of an album by Charlotte band Dorian Gris, I immediately recognized the play on words from the Oscar Wilde novel *The*

Picture of Dorian Gray (2008) and the phrase's significance for a band that plays heavy metal. In addition to their dark playing style, in the time between the recording of a live performance and its release several months later as *Live at the Dark Room*, the band had switched bass players and saw decreasing numbers of fans coming to their shows. Their dreams of staying together as a band and building an audience literally seemed to be fading. But it took me several months to piece together the broader significance of the "gray dream" for Latino immigrants to Charlotte and the region. The failure of efforts to pass comprehensive immigration reform and the increasing number of state and local laws targeting immigrants began to turn the skies gray. For musicians, this climate of fear, coupled with the economic recession hit hard, affecting turnout at concerts and threatening the sense of community that they had built around music-making.

Community Formation

Bearing witness to these developments, my analysis looks at how the "gray-ing" of the immigrant dream has important consequences for community formation and solidarity among Latina/o musicians and their audiences. I extract the implications of these political and economic developments through the music-making and common circumstances of members of Charlotte's Latin music scene. For some, these changes created internal tensions, leading to bands breaking up, disillusionment with the creative process, or a sense of stagnation. Others soldiered through difficulties and attempted to move their music forward in response to challenges. By looking at music-making, I examine one aspect of how Latino immigrants claim "cultural citizenship," a process which Renato Rosaldo describes as "the everyday practices through which Latinas/os claim space and their right to be full members of society" (Rosaldo 1994; 2012). Following from studies of community formation through local artistry (Crehan 2012, Finnegan 2007), I contend that music-making, the act of musicians working with audience

members to make music, is political in itself. The politics is in the act, the agency that musicians and audience members take on when they collaborate and negotiate in mutual musical decision-making. They live in common circumstances and engage in a daily labor of defining their musical scene, a dialectical process that often involves synthesizing disparate elements- nationalities, class backgrounds, ages, and migration experiences- into creative expression. As such, Latin music in Charlotte is not just a collection of sounds, but a process of defining a way to live and see the world through music-making. My research demonstrates that Latinos are creating, in the face of oppressive anti-immigrant policies, group solidarity and agency. They are recognizing themselves as having a common experience- as immigrants, as musically-inclined people, as speakers of a shared idiom- and forming a group “in itself” (Thompson 1966), a community.

“Community” is a term often used in popular depictions of and scholarship on small-scale groups, particularly groups that affiliate around a locale, identity, or activity. Gerald Creed cautions scholars to question what the focus on “community” and its deployment as a commonsense yet rarely defined term does, particularly the “sociological and ideological work” that results from using community as a concept (Creed 2006: p. 4). While I am aware of this critique and the nebulous mire that the term exists within, I find “community” a useful term for describing and analyzing the small-scale gatherings of musicians and audience around popular practice that I observed in Charlotte because of the shared sense of solidarity and common experience that musicians and audience members felt and expressed. However, I view “community” as arising from a process of community formation that gives it temporality and an “imagined” dimension, much like the nation (Anderson 2006), and is often uneven and

incomplete. In the contemporary urban setting, and particularly among populations with diverse cultural traditions, such as Latino immigrants, the formation of community is not a given.

An analysis of community must take into account the fragmentary and ad hoc nature of communities in real life and how definitions of community are particular to different historical eras and ideologies. Without going into an extensive exegesis of these debates, it is notable that three prominent philosophical contributions to a theorization of “community”- Tonnies’ comparison of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* (1887), Marx’s analysis of alienation of labor power and class formation (1976), and Durkheim’s collective consciousness (1997) - all arose from the rise of industrial capitalism and imperial projects in Europe. Early anthropologists, from Malinowski, Boas, and Evans-Pritchard to Lévi-Strauss, often saw community as timeless and rooted in non-Western kinship relations and belief systems. In the Latin American and Caribbean context (Mintz 1974, Steward 1956), anthropologists focused on the destruction of traditional forms and reconstitution of community in Spanish colonies, but also on how colonial bureaucracy, agricultural administration, and record keeping meant that society made “modern” before Europe (Silverblatt 2004, Mintz 1986). This brings the state into view, as we consider how the state encourages, regulates, prohibits, surveys, and interacts with communities. C.L.R. James (1963) framed the Haitian Revolution as a conflict over modernity- organized because of the dislocation and inhumanity of plantation slavery and based in the ideas of the Enlightenment and French and American revolutions.

In post-industrial and post-modern settings, debates about community are now centering on notions of “virtual” community formed through the internet, social networking websites, and digital media (Boellstorff 2010). Another focus has been on how transnational migration creates communities that exist across borders through migrants’ social networks and familial bonds

(Smith 2005, Ong 1999, Hirsch 2003). Community, as manufactured and mediated by the capitalist market, but practiced and reinterpreted by consumers and/or community members, has also become a topic of study, whether it is communities of video gamers, nature enthusiasts (Tsing 2005), ethnic groups (Comaroff & Comaroff 2009), or people attempting to exist outside or limit the purview of the market (e.g., free-cyclers, slum dwellers, subsistence farmers).

Musical Community

Because affiliations between the individuals I studied center on music-making, I use the term “musical community” to describe this process of community formation-acknowledging that community in this sense is temporal, threatened by outside forces, and often incomplete. For this study, I have defined “musical community” as a sense of belonging and shared affiliation around notions of class, ethnicity, language, style and taste expressed through music and other creative cultural expressions. I divide Charlotte’s Latin music scene into three distinct musical districts that each host bands and audience members who attempt to form musical community. These areas- Eastside, Intown, and Uptown- correspond to geographic and genre differences in music-making. The Eastside hosts *regional mexicano* and heavy metal bands that perform for working-class, Mexican and Central American immigrant audiences. The Intown area consists of Latin rock bands playing for “multicultural,” often middle-class audiences of South American immigrants and second generation youth. The Uptown area hosts bands performing *música tropical* and Brazilian music for audiences of Caribbean and Brazilian residents of Charlotte. While there is some occasional overlap between these districts, “musical community” usually formed in very specific contexts- around one band playing in a favorite club, for example- and rarely transferred to other areas outside of their neighborhoods where bands and audience members felt uncomfortable or did not dare to venture because of immigration policing.

Musical community exists at the intersection of micro-local and mass consumption, often serving as a point of mediation between locally produced, “grassroots” expressions of music and nationally and globally popular mass expressions of music. Community can form as musicians pick and strum guitars on the porch with a few friends, jam in an intimate club, perform on stage at a festival attended by thousands, or play for a stadium of fans. The number of audience members is not important; audiences feel connections with musicians and fellow fans at each level. One setting may be more appropriate for a particular genre’s rules of interaction, but Latinos form and maintain musical community at all of these settings.

Musical community forms in the dialectical relationship between musicians and audience members where musicians perform and then respond to feedback from fans, hearing their opinions and reflecting their views through changes implemented in the music. Musicians (and some non-musicians) pursue the intellectual work of developing folk theories concerning the meaning of their music based on dialogue with their audiences. These individuals take on a role of “grassroots intellectual” (Gramsci 2000), outlining theories that explain the values and group identities of the band and its audience.¹ They analyze the process of music-making and reflect of the significance of performances, and, through this analysis, theorize about the political significance of their music in the context of immigration, the globalizing city, and anti-immigrant politics.

Charlotte’s musicians and audience form community at the micro-level, but also connect to global and transnational networks. Musicians are constantly referencing and interpreting music from the global scene, at least in their genre, but often from related and unrelated popular genres, because it is what fellow musicians and fans demand of them in their work. This is why

¹ I use the term “grassroots intellectual” rather than “organic intellectual” to differentiate musicians, who act as leaders in their musical community, from intellectual leaders involved in organizational or formal party politics. Latina/o musicians in Charlotte have little or no involvement in the latter type of formal political activism.

I found bands covering hit songs, introducing new instruments to their orchestration (auto-tune, keyboards, timbales), and attempting to blend and bend genre to suit the desires of an audience. When bands open for an international touring group, or share the lineup at a festival, they are grounding the visiting group's music in the local musical community by introducing it or providing local context and commentary through their own performance. While each musical community centers around particular genres of music and geographically separate areas of the city, their interaction with visiting musicians is always framed as representing Charlotte or putting Charlotte on the map. How successful a festival or concert is, how familiar bands from elsewhere are with Charlotte as a place to play music, and how visiting musicians are treated become points of pride in defense of Charlotte as a place where Latin music is viable.

On an even smaller scale, the personal relationships formed among musicians within bands often act as a form of community and as a fictive form of kinship. The band, particularly for young musicians who have left family back in the home country, becomes a second family. Fellow band members call each other *hermano* (brother), *pana* (friend) or *marico* (dude), share private details of their lives, and support each other during personal hardships and setbacks. There are disagreements and conflict, but musicians cherish the camaraderie and experiences they share with fellow band members. The band and the personal relationships created also become a prism through which musicians interpret the city. As Juan Miguel, drummer for La Rúa, recalls about his experience with the band:

“La Rúa, for all of us, was kind of like our first girlfriend, in a way. It was very important to our lives in Charlotte. I could not imagine my life in Charlotte without La Rúa and everything that came around what we were doing with La Rúa...”
(Interview with Author 7/18/2011)

Musicians' experience with the city varies, in large part based on which of Charlotte's three musical districts they perform in and how their band positions themselves in terms of labor

conditions, politics, genre boundaries, and moral and ethical questions. The music venue is not just a comfortable space; it becomes a place where people debate what it means to belong in the city. Facing residential and social segregation, some musical districts, such as the Eastside, have set up venues that cater exclusively to Latinos, while other audiences, for example Uptown *salsa* enthusiasts, because of their more secure legal status and affinity with non-Latino musical forms, have chosen (and find easier paths) to participating in music venues that offer space for Latin and non-Latin music side by side. Through participation in a musical community and attendance at venues, musicians and audiences put forth a vision of their Charlotte that asks whether the city should have segregated or integrated music spaces, stress mainstream or marginal voices, and allow Spanish-speaking voices to express popular performance practices. Music-making becomes a way to debate their role in the globalizing city as engaged urban residents.

Charlotte as Case Study

Charlotte is a site that can be an important case study of issues around immigration, cities, and music. By studying Charlotte residents, in particular, Latina/o immigrant musicians and their audiences, I look at the interactions between a specific place and general processes that are affecting urban life under globalization. Charlotte is compelling for several reasons. As a banking center, Charlotte embodies the trajectory of a neoliberal economic transformation that has shifted the city's economic base from textiles to finance. While globalization decimated much of the industrial base erected from the 1890s onward, it also allowed Charlotte to entice financial institutions to build headquarters in the center city. Charlotte is a "globalizing city" (Graves & Smith 2010) striving to join the ranks of other financial capitals but also to retain its Southern roots. Charlotte's growth has been based on a permissiveness and "progressive" vision of political liberalism that often accompanies the rise of a financial sector, but this stance is in

decline, or is at least being complicated by the city's implementation of anti-immigrant policies. A vast divide of class, access to rights, and race separates the city's elites from its immigrant working class. While the city's elites may celebrate the supposed global diversity of Charlotte through sponsorship of the arts, meals at Brazilian steakhouses, or promotional materials celebrating foreign companies with branch offices or factories in the metro areas, the actual global diversity of Charlotte takes place in immigrants' neighborhoods, music venues, non-profits, and places of worship. Moreover, elites' celebration of Charlotte's global culture neglects to mention the daily grind of police stops of Latino drivers, unprosecuted wage theft, dismal housing conditions, and uncertain future for undocumented students. While they sell Charlotte by directing global circuits of capital toward Uptown and displaying the city's worldliness, Charlotte's elites have erected structural barriers that segregate and contain immigrant working-class global culture to the margins of the city. Latina/o immigrant musicians are well aware of their secondary status in this hierarchy, but also take pride in what they see as their markedly greater sense of cosmopolitanism and connection to global cultural trends. They struggle to make ends meet playing for small audiences in segregated clubs, but also position themselves to take advantages of openings, like at Latino cultural festivals, where they can market their music to a wider audience.

Music-making in Charlotte

What can be learned from this case study of Charlotte is how to understand music, and particularly music-making, in a setting where a new, emerging urban, immigrant working class is on the cutting edge of defining what it means to be Southern in the age of globalization. Latina/o immigrant musicians and their audiences are doing this through their cultural expressions, their music and performances, their style and attitudes, and their development of ideologies and ways

of looking at the world. This is not a smooth process; there are fits and starts as Latino immigrants attempt to synthesize expressions out of diverse cultural traditions, to interpret new developments through the lens of longstanding musical genres, and to negotiate shifting boundaries of class, racial and ethnic identity, and status. The interactions between groups within the Latino population can be contentious and an analysis of these interactions complicates any simplistic version of an all-encompassing *latinidad* (see, for example, De Genova & Ramos-Zayas 2003). Often, community does not form out of these differences. But at times, the Latin music scene in Charlotte does produce moments of solidarity, where musicians and audience join together as one body. In these moments, Latina/o musicians in Charlotte actively negotiate with fans their music's direction. This type of folk practice, along with others like frequent collaborations with musicians from other genres, lends the music more weight, as it is more than a simple musical commodity; it embodies the process of being and becoming Latino in the US South. I argue that unique developments in Latin music are more likely to spring forth from Charlotte, or perhaps from a similar *Nuevo South* city, than from traditional centers of Latin musical production because of the way national and genre boundaries are being broken down here by musicians who are disregarded by the larger Latin music industry and who are not tied to long established Latin musical infrastructures.

Music and Politics

One research hypothesis was that musicians, as public performers of Latino culture in Charlotte and fellow immigrants, would insert political commentary in their music and be a vital part of social movement organizing for immigration reform. What I found instead was that many musicians avoided overt political statements and did not actively participate in the organized politics of immigrants' rights struggles. Why? I argue that Charlotte's Latino musicians face

circumstances that lead them to hold a vulnerable position: 1) as contingent, free-lance labor in poor working conditions they fear speaking up and losing access to gigs and audiences; 2) many of them come from Latin American contexts where civil society and public participation in politics has been quashed by military and/or one-party rule and undermined by drug and/or paramilitary violence (adding to this avoidance is their lack of integration to a US political system based on voting, citizenship and membership in the two major political parties); 3) many musicians are undocumented or are dependent upon work visas (from their 'day job') to stay in the US and express fears of speaking out and becoming targets for immigration authorities; and 4) they experience a daily policing of their neighborhoods and job sites that leads to uncertainty about the future because of the potential to be detained and/or deported at any time.

While musicians share these vulnerabilities with many immigrants in their audiences and neighborhoods, what makes musicians unique is the public role as performers that they have taken on and that leads them to pursue a strategy of self-censorship and political avoidance. Musicians' self-censorship is notable, especially compared with other immigrants, such as undocumented student DREAM activists, who by going public with their status intentionally put themselves in peril with the understanding that this action will bring greater attention to the plight of immigrants. This self-censoring attitude also contrasts with political leaders (pastors, community organizers, students, business people) in the Latino community who engage in activism around the immigration reform movement by organizing protests and marches, writing newspaper editorials, and giving public speeches. Musicians are in a complex and conflicted position, of supporting the immigration reform movement in private but curtailing their public involvement in politics- which may be why there have been no protest songs to accompany the immigration marches.

Yet, I argue that musicians and the Latin music scene in Charlotte do provide a basis for explaining the politics of everyday life for Latina/o immigrants (Street 1986). Through performance, the music pulls people together, and provides a space for working out social issues. Musicians use the music as a medium to act as grassroots intellectuals by expressing class and ethnic identity, negotiating ethical quandaries, and staking a claim to belonging to a neighborhood, city, and region of the United States. Some of this performance reinforces tradition, for example the continuation of music-making as a male-dominated profession and patriarchal gender roles in song lyrics and performance practices; while others signal new beginnings, like collaborations which attempt to break down national and genre boundaries between *bachata* and *regional mexicano* music and forge an intra-class alliance between working class Mexican and Dominican immigrants. Internal discussions among musicians display not just an awareness of their vulnerability as immigrants, but a nascent consciousness about working together to change their working conditions as musicians. Heavy metal band Dorian Gris, drawing on interactions between band members and working class fans, has shifted musical direction to a harder sound that represents their collective response to harsh working conditions, immigration policing, and economic insecurity. Other bands have begun to channel the bilingual and multicultural sentiments of young, second generation Latina/o residents, through mixtures of African-American and Afro-Caribbean song forms, such as R&B, *reggaetón*, rap, *merengue* and *bachata*. Musicians- by singing in Spanish *and* English, by constructing genealogies of musical taste that span Latin American and US styles, and by promoting Charlotte as a place of cosmopolitanism and intense cultural production- are laying the groundwork for a music scene that may truly express the diversity of *Latinidad* in one place.

Finally, I find it necessary to outline the concepts that this thesis challenges. Many works on popular music focus on famous musicians. While these types of studies can reveal much about music and music-making, they also reinforce the well-worn narrative of fame and reconstitute the inaccurate correlation between financial success and musical skill. My research is about ordinary musicians who seek but often fail to find fame, and their daily struggles to make music and make a living while being musicians. Other works focus on the music as text, analyzing song lyrics and/or notation by themselves as a way to understand a culture or social group. While this method can be useful (I have used it in the past), I feel the ethnographic evidence presents a more striking and complete picture of the lives of Charlotte's Latina/o musicians. Therefore I use lyrics sparingly, and primarily to support points musicians have made in describing their music or to illuminate my analysis of performance. Many books about Latin music focus on one genre, laying out the history and current iterations of *bachata*, *salsa*, *banda*, or *rock en español* as separate musical forms. But in Charlotte, I found all of these genres side by side, often with musicians knowledgeable of or even performing in multiple forms, at times forging new hybrid interpretations of genre. Yet there were also tensions within this cultural hybridity; genre boundaries are drawn in relation to other Latin genres and shift as musicians and audience negotiate how genre works, and how the songs come out of specific contexts of cultural production and genealogies of musical knowledge. By bringing an awareness of the limitations of these types of writings on music and instead documenting the lives of musicians through ethnographic analysis, interviews, photographs, and their own narratives and discourse about music, I hope to paint a better picture of what it means to be a Latina/o musician in Charlotte.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1, *Globalizing Charlotte*, seeks to understand Charlotte, NC as a city and a place where Latina/o immigrants have settled. Starting with recent studies that position Charlotte as a “globalizing city” (Graves & Smith 2010, Smith & Furuseth 2006) in a region (the US South) experiencing globalization (Peacock et al. 2005), I present a brief labor history of the city and region and then focus on the Central Avenue corridor, a thoroughfare that passes through several Latino neighborhoods and a place of concentrated ethnic businesses, including music venues. The contemporary Southern US city must be understood in terms of struggles over immigration and the “right to the city” that have come to the forefront of current politics, the vulnerability of immigrant populations within this setting, and the momentous economic shifts that have occurred over the past decades resulting in Charlotte’s rise as a center of financial industry.

Chapter 2 focuses on the Latin music scene by reconstructing, through oral history and personal networks observed in study, the brief history of Latino musicians in Charlotte. Relying on scholarship on music and cultural studies, I also examine the threads connecting US, Southern, and Latin American music(s) together up to the early 21st century. I outline the bands that were the focus of this study and describe their musical style.

Chapter 3, entitled “Bands Making Musical Community,” documents how bands and their audiences engage in a process of community formation around music. Working together to create music, they establish their political agency through negotiations of genre, style, and outlook, and through performance of music. The Latin music scene in Charlotte consists of the Eastside, Intown, and Uptown districts, each loosely corresponding to a geographic area of the city. Band-made communities within these districts highlight class divisions and tensions around race and ethnicity within the Latino community and between Latinos and non-Latinos.

Having set the scene for Latino music in Charlotte, the following chapters each engage with a specific issue related to music-making among Latina/o immigrants. In Chapter 4, “Thursday is Bakalao’s Day”: Musicians at Work and Play, I analyze how musicians see their work: as freelance work, a full-time profession, a leisurely hobby, or as a craft. Defining and analyzing the concept of “working musician,” I position musicians’ labor in the context of immigration and class-based views on training and professionalism. The vulnerability of musicians as immigrant laborers plays a vital part in how they approach music-making and relate to fellow musicians. I show how musicians deal with the norm of low-paying, contingent music jobs and strategize about how to best pursue lives as working musicians.

In Chapter 5, “*El Sueño Gris*”: Music and Politics in Latino Charlotte, I examine how musicians engage with political and social issues in their music and personal lives. The analysis reveals the relative lack of overt political activism among working musicians, mainly because musicians are acutely aware of their multiple vulnerabilities. Yet, musicians carefully consider political questions through storytelling about personal experiences and meta-discourse about music in a way that lends intellectual depth to song performances that on the surface appear apolitical. I demonstrate how the everyday act of making music (and its associated folk practices) is political because it helps Latino immigrants recognize themselves as a group having a common experience and a path to making community.

Chapter 6, *Shifting Urban Genres*, examines the political history of Latin genre categories, showing how genre emerges out of the contested spaces of nationalism and ethnic identity formation in Latin American and the United States. Genre categories mark musical expressions and provide distinction between social groups (Bourdieu 1984). By providing a set of rules and common assumptions, genre boundaries help foster musical community through a sense of belonging, but also

exclude others through difference. A major part of the agency of Latino musicians and their audience is how they negotiate genre boundaries together in a dialectical process, often through direct feedback during performances but also through informal conversations and online social networking sites. This process creates grassroots intellectuals who act as leaders guiding new musical developments. Deploying and, at times, bending genre rules is how musicians enact and embody the common circumstances they share with their audience; they claim ownership over a method of making music. Drawing on numerous instances when distinct genre performances butted against one another, this chapter analyzes how musicians justified these boundaries as necessary for distinguishing between diverse strains of *latinidad*, but also a trend toward musicians collaborating across genre in an attempt to construct a pan-Latino vision of belonging to the city.

Chapter 7, *The Festival: Marketing Latinidad*, gives a behind-the-scenes look at how Latino cultural festivals are organized, how organizers market “Latino” culture, and the role of musicians in these events. The festival highlights the contingent nature of musicians’ labor, but also their irreplaceable role as bearers of cultural capital. Musicians are irreplaceable because they do the hard work of forming community around music-making in the local setting of the club, creating culturally “authentic” expressions that can then be inserted into a commodified festival presentation. Musicians engage in heated intellectual debates about the “proper” way to organize festivals and treat performers, constructing social rules that guide their sense of ethics and their judgments about the “success” of an event. These ethical sensibilities stem from musicians’ training, whether in a music school or informal setting, and their relationships with fellow musicians and audience members that shape what constitutes “professional” behavior. By situating musicians’ labor in the nexus of cultural production and consumption practices associated with festivals, the analysis shows how “working musicians” face many of the same

political and economic limitations that dull to gray the immigrant dream. Moreover, the internal divisions and structural constraints that festival organizers face illustrate how difficult constructing an accurate vision of *latinidad* is, even on the scale of the city.

Chapter 8, *Local Power Brokers and Global Connections*, analyzes the connections between local musical expressions and global and transnational networks of music. Some Charlotte musicians tour and travel in order to “jump scales” and present their music to a wider audience. While the Latin music industry neglects Charlotte in its estimation of what constitutes marketable Latin music, Charlotte musicians are proceeding with strategies to distribute their music through websites and touring and to insert themselves in global networks of music-making. The question of access is political, and I argue that local musicians draw on the agency they form through making music in Charlotte’s Latin music scene to challenge the chauvinism and disregard of the larger Latin music industry for their music; the result is projects, like audio recordings and a documentary, that bypass traditional channels and rely on personal relationships with famous musicians who have visited Charlotte and admired the local musical community.

The conclusion contextualizes the Latin music scene by reexamining national and regional struggles over immigration policy. I reiterate how making music constitutes a form of political action and builds community through dialectical collaboration between musicians and audience members. I analyze what this research means for a conceptualization of the city as a center of music-making, for Southern literature, and for the future of Latino music in the US South.

Methods

I began the ethnographic field study knowing virtually no one in Charlotte’s Latin music scene. Luckily, as I pursued participant observation, musicians welcomed me into their world. Several people were intrigued enough with my project to not just answer my questions, but to

constantly update me on how things were going with their bands. Many saw my project as another form of promotion, part and parcel with the process of interactions with club owners, festival organizers, and radio staff to get their band's music out in front of the public. Although several musicians were difficult to interview because of their busy schedules, no one outright rejected my request for an interview or desire to observe the goings-on backstage.

In my research, I was greatly aided by my affiliation with the Latin American Coalition. I began volunteering there in preparation for the 2009 Festival Latinoamericano with the thought that through this festival I would meet local musicians and see how a local music festival was put on. It turned out that the event manager there, Tony Arreaza, is also a guitar player, concert promoter, and has numerous connections in the music scene in Charlotte. Tony served as an entre, and I was quickly connected to several prominent local groups. After the festival, I continued working at the Latin American Coalition as a part-time event planner and apprentice to Tony. Thus, I was able to participate in and document the planning of several concerts and festivals, including the 2010 Festival Latinoamericano.

Over time I selected several bands to follow closely, along with numerous other groups that I kept in peripheral view. I attended performances of each band, taking pictures, chatting with band and audience members during breaks in the music, and observing the bands as they performed live. I interviewed musicians from each group, asking them about the band's history, influences, style, and internal dynamics. I observed rehearsals in practice spaces and watched as two bands recorded albums and demos. I also witnessed several band leaders as they booked gigs for their band, observing their interactions with club managers, restaurant owners and festival organizers (including myself).

While I concentrated on documenting local musicians, I had several opportunities to watch national and international bands, such as Los Amigos Invisibles, Los Aterciopelados, and Los Tucanes de Tijuana, perform as they toured through Charlotte. Often, a local group would play as the opening act, and I compared the performances, musician and audience interaction at venues of local and non-local groups. By attending concerts on multiple occasions, I was able to document the ambience of clubs and restaurants and compare how different groups were received at the same venue.

I collected various primary sources concerning the Latin music scene, including newspaper articles and advertisements for concerts and events. I wrote field notes in a journal about each day's experience, recording subjective opinions and observed details. I also started a blog called "Sam's Sounds" that presented my topical observations and analysis to the public. Online, I posted photographs and wrote synopses of concerts and festivals; the blog also served as a way to solicit feedback from musicians and audience members about my ideas. Musicians and audience members read my posts and commented online or in person on what I had written. This was a way for me to confirm whether my initial impressions of performances matched what others had seen or heard, and these posts helped spark dialogues about several themes that run throughout this book.

Photographs and visual evidence play a major role in my analysis. As I snapped photographs and collected copies of concert posters and flyers, I began to realize that visual representations helped me to understand the lives of musicians in greater detail. Whether it was the chaotic dancing of Dorian Gris' fans, the onstage antics of Bakalao Stars, or the artistry of Carlotan Rock's promotional posters, I realized that the visual and musical elements of

performance were often inseparable (see Feld 1976); therefore I have included numerous examples of photographs and posters throughout the work that substantiate my arguments.

I lived in two parts of Charlotte with a high concentration of Latina/o immigrants. First I lived for five months in the South Boulevard area, then, I moved to East Charlotte for the next eight months of the project. Both locations offered proximity to Latino nightclubs and restaurants and everyday interactions with Latinos in the neighborhood, on public transportation, and in stores. Although my focus was on Latino musicians, I kept abreast of the political, economic, and social issues facing the Latino and overall community in Charlotte. These issues, particularly the debate surrounding immigration reform and the continuing economic recession, were a constant concern for musicians and the rest of the Latino community alike.

Finally, I had the opportunity to travel to three other cities- Atlanta, Raleigh, and New York- to attend Latin music concerts and get a comparative sense of the scenes in these places. I attended the 2010 Latin Alternative Music Conference in New York, which helped put Charlotte's scene in perspective with other US and international cities that produce Latin music. In Atlanta and Raleigh, I attended music festivals similar to festivals hosted in Charlotte. These festivals allowed me to observe how Southern cities of comparable heft in terms of their Latin music scenes present performances. Using these experiences and the knowledge gained from organizing festivals in Charlotte, I am able to position Charlotte in the nexus of regional, national and international configurations of Latin music.

Chapter 1:

Charlotte: Globalizing City

“Charlotte, North Carolina, is not a “global city.” It is, however, a globalizing one.” Heather A. Smith & William Graves²

“... es solo Carlotan Rock pero me gusta (It’s only Carlotan Rock, but I like it)”
Ricardo de Los Cobos³

This study is about musicians and their communities, but it is also about a city, Charlotte, North Carolina. Why Charlotte? Often during my time in Charlotte, people would ask me that question, wondering why I had come to study music in the “Queen City,” with the subtext of astonishment that this place could be worthy of serious contemplation. Perhaps Charlotte (or its residents) has an inferiority complex, although this question may stem from struggles to define what Charlotte really is. Is it a Southern city, a “progressive” city, a rising center of finance, a city obsessed with out-competing other cities, a site of suburban sprawl, a new urban, gentrifying, mixed-use, condominium boom town, a NASCAR and football (and fútbol)-loving sports center, music-loving and foodie town, a new gateway city for immigration or the most populous city in a swing state? Charlotte contains elements of all these descriptions; its diversity of forms and location within a region experiencing globalizing processes make it a city of complex and contradictory transformation.

This chapter will outline why Charlotte is an important city to consider for urban anthropology. First, I will situate Charlotte in the literature on global cities and discuss its role as a “globalizing” city in the US South. Second, I will briefly summarize the labor history of Charlotte and its development to the present. Third, I will discuss the diversity of today’s Charlotte, focusing on the Central Avenue corridor, a thoroughfare that passes through several

² Graves & Smith, *Charlotte, NC: the Global Evolution of a New South City*, 2010, p. 1.

³ De los Cobos, *Mi Gente*, 8/4/2009, p.30-1.

Latino neighborhoods and a place of concentrated ethnic businesses, including music venues. The contemporary Southern US city must be understood in terms of struggles over immigration and the “right to the city” that have come to the forefront of current politics, the vulnerability of immigrant populations within this setting, and the momentous economic shifts that have occurred over the past decades resulting in Charlotte’s rise as a center of financial industry.

Globalizing City

In an edited volume focusing on Charlotte, geographers Heather Smith and William Graves summarize recent scholarship that examines how “the external forces of globalization combine with the city’s internal dynamics and history to reshape local structures, landscapes, and identities of a once quintessentially southern place (Smith & Graves 2010, p. 3).” They stress the importance of studying the process of places *becoming* global, not just researching places that have already become global. By inserting process into the study of globalization, my analysis connects the “globalizing city” to how music as a commodity and music-making are becoming global; in Charlotte’s case in the same place, but in different and segregated social spheres. This is a move that questions the focus of previous studies of “global cities” that have tended to focus on prominent places like New York, London, and Tokyo, while still adhering to the main theoretical tenets that underpin an analysis of globalization and urban life in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Smith and Graves are quick to admit, as the epigraph states, that Charlotte is not a “global city;” they hold no delusions of the city’s grandeur. However, they make a strong case, which I would like to piggyback on, that Charlotte is worth studying precisely because it neither center nor periphery, that it is undergoing a chaotic process of globalizing while retaining its unique regional, Southern identity. In fact, by marketing the city’s Southernness, city boosters hope to benefit from the distinctiveness of place (in terms of

“Southern charm,” low real estate prices, and anti-union labor laws). Turning the chauvinism of the global city on its head, Graves and Smith conclude, “In many cases the driving question for our authors is how the global fits into the Southern and not the other way around (p.3).”

The literature on the “global city” has focused on several themes important to this study and the recent history of the city of Charlotte. First, global capital flows and the development of a culture of international finance have surfaced in Charlotte through the rise of two major banks and several other financial institutions that make their headquarters in the city. The Charlotte banking industry played a major part in two banking/financial innovations of the past thirty years- the rise of the Automatic Teller Machine (ATM) and the deregulation of interstate banking that allowed the merger of smaller regional banks into conglomerates such as Bank of America (see below). Second, as Saskia Sassen theorized, the development of a financial sector is accompanied by a parallel low-wage service sector that supports high-wage finance managers (Sassen 1988; 1992). In Charlotte, this has spurred increased migration of college-educated bankers from Northern cities as well as immigration from Latin America of service workers- the janitors, restaurant employees, landscapers, construction workers, couriers, and domestics that make the city’s upper-middle class lives run smoothly. A third labor migration, of middle-class African Americans from Northern cities, has provided mid-level employees for banks and government agencies. Third, a globalizing Charlotte has meant changes in the city’s culture and ambience. There are pressures: from the city’s elite to form a “world-class” center city; from poor residents to provide better social services, housing, and public transportation; from newcomers to create a sense of community; from established residents and environmentalists to curb the city’s outward growth; and from Latino immigrants for recognition, access, and a stop to police profiling and deportations. These pressures, and the conflicts and negotiations that

result, reveal that Charlotte still has an unclear identity in formation; and the basic crossroads, as already mentioned, is the intersection of global and Southern cultures.



Figure 2: The Charlotte Uptown skyline at night

What makes a city a city? Scholarship on cities has often discussed typologies of cities that describe physical structures, zones, and architectural styles, while situating cities within the social, economic, and political structures of historical epochs (Mumford 1961, Drake & Clayton 1945, Garreau 1992, Low 1996, Sawers & Tabb 1984). Other authors have defined cities through the processes of inequality and crisis-making that shape how urban life is made and remade (Schneider & Susser 2003, O'Connor 1973, Davis 2006, Caldeira 1999). Still others have attempted to unmask the surface reality of cities to reveal the underlying drama of daily urban life (Benjamin 1999, Harvey 2006, Jacobs 1961). My study of Charlotte builds upon these works, but also accounts for the ways a city can be a “musical city.” By “musical city,” I refer to how the city becomes a site for music and shapes and directs how music-making occurs among

its residents. All cities have a cacophony of everyday sounds; yet these sounds do not always produce music. Musicians make the “musical city” not just because they make pleasant sounds- that is a subjective judgment that relates to fans of a particular type of music- but because they attempt to form community around music-making. The “musical city” is a process that builds (and sometimes dismembers) the brick and mortar places, demographics, social relationships, consumption and production patterns, and popular practices that make music possible. These processes, to a degree, happen in every city, but the specificity of the Latin music scene in Charlotte emerged out of an influx of Latino immigrants, opening of bars and clubs, friendships established between musicians, learned leisure habits of dancing, drinking, listening to music, and “going out,” and a need to belong to a musically-framed community of peers.

Charlotte presents an important case study for understanding how immigrants interact with the city through music. The general processes of globalization happening in Charlotte have a specific impact on how Latina/o immigrants make music; for example, the diversity of immigrants from across Latin America and the recent history of immigration have meant that Charlotte’s Latin music scene does not have one genre or nationality that dominates music-making (unlike other centers of Latin music in the United States). Latino immigrants interact with Charlotte, but also bring their knowledge of urban life in Mexico City, Guayaquil, Santo Domingo, Caracas, and New York to bear on how they build social ties through music. They remain in constant contact with these other cities and their music scenes, while also branching out to nearby Southern cities to position Charlotte in a continuum of musical cities.

In my theorization of the “musical city,” I draw on Aaron Fox’s discussion of musical communities that engage in “popular practice” (Fox 2004) that are separate from the music industry’s fields of production and consumption. Everyday practices of music-making can be

essential to establishing and maintaining class and social identity. In the US South, this notion of a musical city has special meaning, whether it is New Orleans, Memphis, Nashville, or Atlanta, or “Southern” cities in the North, like Chicago (Berry et al. 1986, Sublette 2009, Touchet & Bagneris 1998, Regis 1999, Smith 1994, Booth 2000, Helm & Davis 2000, Malone 1979, Peckwold 2007, Sarig 2007). A discussion of musical cities in the US South should be paired with mention of Latin American musical cities, including Havana (Sublette 2004), Mexico City (Zolov 1999), and Rio de Janeiro (McCann 2004), and Latin American cities in the United States- Los Angeles (Simonett 2001, Loza 1993), Miami, and New York (Washburne 2008, Roberts 1999, Flores 2000).

Charlotte is a musical city (although obviously not as well-known as some others) that merges some of the attributes of Southern and Latin American musical cities. Charlotte is also a city that can be accounted for through an analysis of its zones, a periodization of its growth into an urban center, an examination of its social segregation, and a depiction of the daily lives of its inhabitants. Although Charlotte also hosts a thriving rock scene, and has important historical ties to gospel and bluegrass music, Charlotte’s Latin music scene presents the most compelling assemblage of musical acts that span genres and instrumentation. Charlotte’s Latino musicians are well aware of the US South’s regional musical history and the part they now play in redefining its boundaries. As an article in the Spanish-language newspaper *Mi Gente* celebrating the reunion concert of rock band La Rúa in the 2009 Carlotan Rock festival emphatically stated, channeling the Rolling Stones (1974) in Spanish, “*es solo Carlotan Rock, pero me gusta* [It’s only Carlotan Rock, but I like it] (De los Cobos 2009).” The remaining sections of this chapter will briefly summarize the history of Charlotte, the current crises of banking/real estate and

immigration shaping the city, and the recent formation of diverse neighborhoods, so-called “salad bowl suburbs”(Hanchett 2010) in Charlotte.

Early History of Charlotte

Charlotte began as an outpost by European settlers on the intersection of two Native American trading paths during the mid-18th century. The city was named after Queen Charlotte, German-born wife of King George III. After the American Revolution, gold was found nearby, and the subsequent gold rush led to an influx of prospectors and eventually the establishment of a US Mint in 1837. Charlotte was mainly bypassed by the Civil War, and it was after the war, when new railroads were built, that Charlotte had its first boom as a cotton processing center (Hanchett 1996). Cotton farmers from nearby counties in North and South Carolina would bring their crop by wagon into town, where it would be shipped to the coast by rail.

The post-Civil War era, particularly after the end of the Reconstruction period, was a time of urbanization and industrialization in the US South. The piedmont region of the Carolinas and Georgia, stretching from just north of Charlotte southwest to Atlanta, became home to a thriving textile industry, as Northern industrialists and their Southern partners realized that cheap labor costs and proximity to raw materials (namely cotton) made for favorable conditions for industry in the region. As several scholars have noted, the establishment of mill towns in the region marked a shift in the cultural and economic trajectory for places like Charlotte (Hall et al. 1987, Cobb 1988, Pope 1942). While during slavery and after emancipation, much of the South remained dependent on agriculture and what James Cobb (1988) calls “plantation industries,”- namely lumber, turpentine, mining, and other extractive pursuits, the establishment of textile mills signaled a rearrangement of labor and capital. This rearrangement corresponded with the general movement toward what Henry Grady famously coined as the “New South,” outlined as

the diversification of the region's economy, the rise of a new political class distinct from antebellum plantation owners, and, ever hopeful, a fresh image to replace the tarnish of the disastrous Civil War and tumultuous Reconstruction period. Of course, this vision of the New South was quickly undermined, perhaps because it was in many ways complicit with the reestablishment of a system of white supremacy throughout the US South. During the 1870s, the reversal of many of the political gains made by African-Americans was paired with a campaign of terror to re-establish social segregation and the erosion of economic access promised to freed slaves at the end of the Civil War.

This period of "Redemption" (Woodward 1971) extended to places like Charlotte, whose poor soil and relative isolation had limited the proliferation of large slaveholding plantations. Newly built textile factories, where black men labored in limited capacity as cleaners and haulers, for less pay and usually in areas of the factory separate and apart from white workers, formulated a racial order that extended to the housing segregation of newly built company mill towns. For some Southern cities like Charlotte, the New South order of racially delineated neighborhoods represented a departure from antebellum city life, where whites, free blacks and slaves lived in close proximity (Hanchett 1997, Jones 2008).

While bustling mill towns proved strong symbols for the region's boosters to promoting their New South vision, the transformation to an industrial labor force was more gradual. In-migrating workers, often from economically depressed areas of Appalachia, while working in factories often retained ties to rural farms, returning seasonally to plant or pick crops. As several scholars have documented, Appalachian migrants brought rural practices, conceptions of time, and social attitudes to the workplace and their home life, often upsetting the regimentation desired by factory owners and managers (Hall et al. 1987, Pope 1942). Whether it was "Blue

Mondays,” evangelical religious beliefs, or backyard vegetable gardens, these grains of sand in the machine slowed the transition to an urban, industrialized workforce (Flynt 1979, Anglin 2002, Miller 1974). By the same token, factory managers implemented regimes of discipline, timekeeping, and education campaigns to attempt to stymie behavior they saw as harmful to production and unbecoming of proper citizens (Cobb 1988, Tullos 1989).

Out of this transition to factory work emerged new social classes and political struggles. A wealthy social group, composed of textile mill owners, railroad and transportation developers, electrical power plant investors, and financiers rose to rival old agricultural and extractive industry elites who had reasserted themselves at the end of the Civil War (Woodward 1971, Doyle 1990). These new elites, made up of striving Southerners and Northerners gone south, held a sometimes allied and otherwise conflicted relationship with the old guard. While opposed to electoral structures that favored rural areas over cities and embarrassed by the horrific racial violence embodied in lynchings, these new elites were quick to realize advantage in the Southern labor system, built upon racial and class inequalities and paternalistic relationships.

In the factories, another class of increasingly proletarianized workers emerged in the 1910s and 1920s. Work that had started off as seasonal and an endeavor for the entire family- where husband, wife and children worked in the same factory- became year-round, more mechanized, off-limits to children (with child labor laws) and more compartmentalized. Developments such as Henry Ford’s moving assembly line and Taylor’s measured management of factory floor tasks led to a more standardized and regimented textile mill, with higher productivity and less down-time for workers. These changes, coupled with stagnant wages in the face of inflation, led to labor unrest in the late 1920s.

The “Great Strike” of 1927 was the culmination of years of smaller strikes by workers in Southern textile factories (Pope 1942, Miller 1974). While the “Roaring Twenties” signaled economic recovery for most of the nation after the post-World War I recession of 1919, factory workers (and most of the working class in the South) did not benefit from this boom economy. After slowly building strength and organizing mills, labor unions undertook a series of strikes in the late 1920s and early 1930s, perhaps the most famous being the Communist-led Loray strike in Gastonia, NC, a few miles west of Charlotte (Pope 1942). Many of these strikes were met with military and police violence, and a strategy of isolation of strikers from the larger working-class community led to the breakup of strikes. Although the Roosevelt administration attempted to shore up unions in the region during the 1930s, this period of organizing and strikes marked the high tide for labor unionism in the piedmont South (Schulman 1991).

Beginning in the 1910s and continuing in the decades after, the “Great Migration” of African-Americans from the rural US South to cities in the North and Midwest had a major impact on politics, labor, and race relations (Grossman 1991, Lemann 1991). Many black sharecroppers and tenant farmers moved north to escape debt schemes and racial codes that prevented them from making a living in agriculture. Labor recruiters canvassed the South, risking the ire of white landowners and law enforcement, to entice blacks to come work in factory jobs, steel and rubber plants, and meatpacking houses. The entrance of the United States in World War I meant the enlistment of many Northern factory workers in the military and the ramping up of industrial production; black Southerners filled these vacancies. As large communities of African-Americans settled in Northern cities, neighborhoods such as Harlem in Manhattan, Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn, and Chicago’s South Side became centers of black cultural production and even today retain links to the South through a constant influx of Southern

migrants. The Great Depression, World War II, and the mechanization of cotton-picking all contributed to the continuation of this migration, as did factors such as intensification of racial violence, such as a series of lynchings in the 1920s (Wilkerson 2010).

The post-World War II South saw a continuation of segregation and a retrenchment of anti-unionism, but also increasing urbanization and industrialization. But by the late 1950s, the Civil Rights movement began to put pressure on the established racial order in the region. Winning gains in civil rights and labor law, particularly in the 1960s, African-Americans began to integrate the factory floor and corporate offices, moving into jobs previously reserved for whites. Labor organizers began to reinvigorate strategies of cross-racial organizing among workers, scoring some victories, but also encountering fierce resistance from pro-business forces in the region (Miller 1974). Women workers played vital roles in many of these resurgent movements, lending a militancy and enthusiasm that helped turn momentary strikes or job actions into lasting struggles (Sacks & Remy 1984, Kingsolver 1991, Harlan County USA 1976). City boosters in Charlotte and nearby urban areas, like Greenville-Spartanburg (South Carolina), usually led by politicians and chambers of commerce, often paired their promotion of a city's bright points with an aggressive anti-unionism, so much so that corporations less hostile to unions were dissuaded from relocating to the area (Miller 1974).

By the 1980s and 1990s, the rural South had been transformed as farmers shifted from long-dominant crops like cotton and tobacco to new mass-marketed products like Vidalia onions, Christmas trees, cucumbers, and tomatoes. Agriculture industrialized as poultry and hog producers consolidated into larger and vertically-integrated corporations. New farm labor relations emerged as many African-American and white residents moved to cities and were replaced by migrants from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. While some labor

organizing has been successful among workers in these “factory farms,” the difficulties of cross-ethnic and –racial collaboration among workers and the contingent status of immigrant workers hampers efforts to organize for safer and better-compensated workplaces (Striffler 2005, Fink 2002, Griffith 2006).

Post-War Charlotte

By the 1950s and 1960s, Charlotte, while retaining its ties to textile mills, was in danger of losing its position as key economic center in the Carolinas to an upstart region, the Research Triangle. The Research Triangle, the geographic nomenclature of an economic development program centered in the small cities of Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill, used federal, state and private money to foster the establishment of new businesses, mainly in high-tech sectors of computing, medical science, and research offshoots of area universities. At the same time, Charlotte felt the heat from a rival city to the southwest, Atlanta, which embarked on a development strategy centered on transportation, namely the rapid and massive expansion of its airport and its geographic position along three newly built interstate highway corridors. For a while, Charlotte had no answer to this type of post-Fordist economic development. To add insult, by the 1970s, the domestic textile industry had begun its long and devastating (for Southern workers) march to free trade zones and *maquiladoras* overseas (Nash & Fernández-Kelly 2001, Fernández-Kelly 1983).

However, a change in banking law, deregulation which allowed banks to have more branches in states where they were not headquartered, proved to be the catalyst that launched a new era in Charlotte’s economic history (Hood 1996). Charlotte banks, long prominent in the state because of Charlotte’s link to textile mills and regional transportation networks, quickly seized opportunities to expand to nearby states. These banks also saw promise in a newly

emerging technology of computerized transactions, soon to take shape in Automated Teller Machines (ATMs), and were among the first to install the machines in their branches. Through a combination of boosterism, cheap land and tax incentives, and lower labor costs, Charlotte was able to entice other banks to relocate headquarters to the city (often after they had taken over smaller regional banks), landing two of the nation's largest banks by the 1990s- Bank of America and Wachovia.

This economic change led to a physical and political transformation as well. In Charlotte's center city, corporate office towers, high-end steakhouses, and luxury condominiums replaced empty early twentieth century storefronts abandoned during mid-century suburbanization. Suburban corporate campuses were situated among neighborhoods of large single-family homes, all convenient to interstate highway connectors. Politically, the money of bank executives led to a local oligarchy with a "progressive" vision of the city's future that included urban density encouraged by zoning and public transit rail lines and smarter suburban communities centered around sprawl-containing "town" centers with centralized shopping, entertainment, and corporate offices. This vision extended to social policy as well. The city encouraged a racial meritocracy tied to profit-making- perhaps first coined in Atlanta, the city "too busy to hate"- but taken up by Charlotte through its (relatively quick) implementation of school busing in the late 1960s and election of African-American, pro-business mayor Harvey Gantt in the 1980s. This move distanced Charlotte from deeper South cities that resisted civil rights measures with greater vigor. For example, Birmingham, once an industrial center, suffered in the post- Civil Rights era from its negative image stemming from violent confrontations with marchers. The "progressive" Southern vision included an appreciation of cultural diversity that extended to new immigrants to Charlotte from Asia and Latin America,

coupled with the realization that globalization, from the rise of Japan and China as major US trading partners to the establishment of NAFTA and other free trade agreements in the Americas, had direct impacts on the financial industry.

Immigration Politics

A new civil rights struggle has erupted in the past decade over immigration. In the wake of a failure by the US Congress to pass new immigration legislation, several Southern states stepped into the void and passed their own laws targeting unauthorized immigration. However, the legitimacy of many of these laws is being challenged, in whole or in part, in federal courts both because of their potential usurpation of federal authority of immigration enforcement granted in the US Constitution and for their potential to violate federal civil rights codes.

But these laws are only the most prominent of a series of local and state laws that have been proposed and often passed in Southern states as a result of activism by groups opposed to “illegal” immigration. These anti-immigrant groups face off against groups of Latino activists and their allies, who support comprehensive immigration reform at the federal level and oppose these state laws. What is taking shape is a battle over immigration politics that activists on both sides frame in the language of rights to the public sphere, or what can be conceptualized as the “right to the city” (Lefebvre 1996, Harvey 1973). Anti-immigrant groups deploy the idea of freedom from “illegality” and the right of taxpayers and citizens to deal with government waste through denial of social services to undocumented immigrants. Immigration reform groups frame their protests in the language of anti-discrimination and anti-racism, but also basic human rights and immigrants’ desires to become “American.”

Since 2006, when immigration reform marches were widespread in many US cities, activists have failed to realize their primary goal- pressuring the US Congress and President to

pass comprehensive immigration reform legislation. However, these shortcomings provide important lessons for the immigrants' rights movement in Charlotte. As scholars have pointed out (Piven & Cloward 1978, Edelman 2001), studying the missteps and failures of social movements can be just as productive as focusing on their successes. Although the movement models itself loosely on the Civil Rights Movement of African-American Southerners of the 1950s-1960s, it so far has been unable or unwilling to exert the sustained pressure of protests, boycotts, and marches that the Civil Rights Movement initiated with the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955 (Branch 1989, Caro 2002). Nor has the immigration movement created a body of political language and radical thought that was also distilled during the Civil Rights era among black intellectuals and political leaders (Kelley 2002, Carmichael & Hamilton 1967, Marable 2011). Furthermore, although immigrants' rights marchers captured the nation's attention with a series of marches in 2006-7, these did not result in legislative victories; unlike the 1963 March on Washington which in hindsight marked a turning point leading to progressive legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968. The immigrants' rights movement still awaits its turning point in history, the moment when it may begin to claim success.

Although many might argue that the immigration movement belongs in the category of New Social Movements (Meyer 2007, Buechler 1999) that focus on "issue-based" politics, recognition of difference (Fraser 2000), or ethnic identity, the movement arguably has much/more in common with the broad coalition-based politics of the Civil Rights Movement and other earlier social movements, such as labor and poor-people's movements. While immigrant rights' activists sometimes pursue campaigns based around narrow issues- for example, the Latin

American Coalition undertook a 2011 project called “Drop the I Word”⁴ to convince people to not use the word “illegal” to describe immigrants, or the campaign to pass the DREAM Act legalizing undocumented students- the underlying concerns of the movement are the human and civil rights of immigrants, both those with undocumented or unresolved status and their families, friends, co-ethnics and neighbors who are all negatively affected by legislation and policies that target “illegal” immigration. Beyond the semantics of defining legality and illegality is a question of power. Under a neoliberal reorganization that began in the 1980s and intensified in the 1990s and 2000s, the US federal government deepened the militarization of its border enforcement (Dunn 1996), privatized imprisonment and detention aspects of immigration enforcement, and passed enforcement authority on to local and state governments (through the 287(g) program and Secure Communities). Meanwhile, the federal government has punted on passing legislation that might clarify the separation of powers between state and federal governments on immigration or rectify the unsettled legal status of an estimated 11 million immigrants. State governments have stepped into this breach, some passing legislation that targets “illegal” immigrants for deportation (Arizona, Georgia) or punishes those who might assist immigrants with, say, a ride to church (Alabama)⁵, while other states have declined to participate in federal enforcement programs like Secure Communities (New York, Illinois) or have allowed municipalities to create sanctuary zones where undocumented immigrants find safe harbor. Yet the immigration question is at heart a constitutional issue, since the US Constitution gives the federal government authority to regulate immigration and recent state laws are being contested in court. Resolution of this issue will most likely require a series of federal laws, court

⁴ Ailen Arreaza, “Dropping the i-word from the immigration debate.” Charlotte Viewpoint, June 16, 2011. <http://www.charlotteviewpoint.org/article/2442/Dropping-the-i-word-from-the-immigration-debate>

⁵ Bob Johnson, “Controversial Ala. immigration law goes before judge.” Associated Press, August 24, 2011.

judgments, and executive actions, just as the Civil Rights era concluded with a string of federal actions that superseded the recalcitrance of Southern states to desegregate.

Two other aspects of the immigration movement point to the need for a broad coalition-based campaign in order to reform immigration laws. First, the link between immigration and a low-wage labor force provides cause for framing the immigration debate in economic terms. At times, activists have pursued a dual strategy, highlighting the important role immigrants play in making agriculture and service industries profitable, and allying themselves with labor unions advocating for improved wages and working conditions for workers in these industries.⁶ This strategy is contradictory, but not without benefits. First, agribusiness and other corporations can be powerful allies; if pressured enough, business lobbies could use their influence to push for a path to legalization for undocumented workers.⁷ Much as the Civil Rights movement leveraged businessmen in Southern cities to end segregation in restaurants and department stores, immigrant activists may find an unlikely ally in those who at first opposed their efforts. A class-based coalition with labor unions and working-class activism (anti-sweatshop, living wage, right to the city) provides another pressure point for immigrants' rights activism. Immigrants have been a major force revitalizing labor unions in the service sector in the past two decades (Zlolniski 2006); deepening these connections could provide a broader base of support and resources for a sustained campaign. Second, immigrants' rights activists working in the US can find allies with immigrant activists in Europe. Although immigration is often posed as a national issue- of protecting borders, language, culture and national identity- in fact immigration exists as part of global flows of capital, labor, and information- sped up by circuits created through a

⁶ Diego Barahona A. "La economía se beneficiaría con Reforma Migratoria." La Noticia, January 13, 2010, p. 9.

⁷ Studies are underway to see the impact of anti-immigrant policies on agriculture, for example, Georgia's recent law: Lee Shearer, "Immigration Law: Prof will study loss by farmers." OnlineAthens/Athens Banner-Herald, July 14, 2011.

process of “globalization” but existing for centuries (Harvey 2005, Castells 1983, Wolf 1997, Manning 2005). But freedom of movement and access to legal status for immigrants is unequally granted, often benefitting the wealthy, educated, and Westernized immigrant over the poor, unskilled, non-white, and non-Christian immigrant. Similar to Latino immigrants in the US, Asian and African immigrants to Europe face discrimination and unsettled legal status as they are shoehorned into the “savage” slot of racialized and cultural stereotypes (Silverstein 2005). US immigrants’ rights activists may begin to position their struggle in its global context, pairing their demands for immigration reform with international efforts fighting for the rights of immigrants and refugees, such as conventions on the rights of migrant workers by the International Labor Organization and the United Nations (ILO 2003).

Diverse Charlotte

From this a more diverse Charlotte has developed- a city demographically transformed by in-migration and immigration and economically tied to a global financial system. This shift also signaled the establishment of a new class and racial hierarchy that began to supersede the old order of black and white in the late 1980s, a trend that has continued to the present. White in-migrants, many from elite Northern universities, filled the ranks of financial industry workers, becoming highly-paid analysts, accountants, and underwriters in banking, insurance, and the home mortgage field. Joining these “Yankees,” for lack of a better term, were a surprising number of immigrants from Ireland and Britain. Middle-class African-Americans, returning children and grandchildren of the Great Migration (Stack 1996), often chose to move not to rural farmland where their mothers and grandfathers had originated but to booming urban centers like Charlotte where professional, highly-educated blacks found employment and long-established black cultural institutions. Another group appearing in Charlotte during this period was

international technology workers who arrived on H-1 visas, often from India, China, and other countries in Asia, but also from Africa, South America, and Europe.

If these three groups make up the new elite and middle-class of Charlotte, another wave of newcomers joined many native-born African-Americans in the working class and impoverished sectors of the city's economy. Latino immigrants, mostly from Mexico and Central America, and Vietnamese and Laotian immigrants, found jobs in construction, landscaping, domestic service, restaurants, and other service sectors. This mirrors what Sassen (1990) and others (Florida 2003, Inda & Rosaldo 2008) have observed for globalized cities, where service workers provide vital services at low cost to undergird the efficiency and profitability of technology, banking, and finance- key sectors of the "new (global) economy."

As the US Census data shows (see Table 1), the population of Latino residents in Charlotte more than doubled in the decade between 2000 and 2010. White, African-American and Asian populations also increased, but at a lesser rate. Latinos now make up around 7.5% of the city's population according to the census (although this number may not fully account for undocumented and mobile individuals who are often undercounted). While growth rates for the Latino population in Charlotte and North Carolina have slowed (from almost 500 percent from 1990-2000 to 100 percent in the last decade (see Smith & Furuseth 2006), the Latino population now represents a significant proportion of the city's population.

With these newcomers, Charlotte also witnessed the displacement and diminishing influence of traditional economic sectors and social groups in the geography of city life. For example, one could not have the trendy NoDa neighborhood, with its music clubs, restaurants, art galleries, and luxury loft condos, if the textile industry still thrived in the Carolinas, because the district was once a working-class mill town (the mills themselves have been renovated into loft

condominiums). Gentrification aside, impoverished African-Americans struggle to find affordable housing in neighborhoods where Latino and Asian immigrant families have moved in.

But perhaps the best example of this displacement comes from efforts by Charlotte residents to position themselves on issues around immigration. Starting in the late 1990s, anti-immigrant backlash began to take shape in the form of city, county, and state policies targeting immigrant communities, particularly Latino neighborhoods. Beginning in 2006, Mecklenburg County (where Charlotte is located) sheriff Jim Pendergraph was instrumental in setting up the 287(g) program, which gives local police power to arrest and hand over undocumented immigrants to federal immigration authorities, both in Mecklenburg County and in other municipalities (who chose to participate) nationwide (Nguyen & Gill 2010). Other anti-immigrant policies, including denying undocumented immigrants access to state driver’s licenses or community colleges, mirrored earlier efforts in California and other Southwestern states. These policies became part of a coordinated regional and national campaign to curtail immigrants’ access to social services and circumscribe any claims they might have to civil rights or local citizenship (DeParle 2011, Vidales et al. 2009).

Table 1: US Census Data for Charlotte 2000-2010 (US Census 2010)

2000 US Census/ Race & Ethnicity

Race/ Ethnicity	Population
Total	540,828
Hispanic	39,800
Not Hispanic/Latino	501,028
One Race	531,831
White Alone	297,845
Black or African-American	180,371
American Indian	3,806
Asian alone	20,446
Some other race	23,743
Two or more races	8,997

2010 US Census/ Race & Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Population
Total	731,424
Hispanic or Latino	95, 688
Not Hispanic/Latino	635,736
Population of One Race	622,313
White alone	329,345
Black or African-American	252,007
American Indian	2,250
Asian alone	36,115
Some other race	1,960
Two or more races	13,423

In response, a local movement pushing for immigration reform also arose during the 1990s. Led by immigrant groups, and mainly Latino activists who had cut their teeth in struggles in California, New York, and Texas over similar issues, immigration reform activists found allies in business elites who recognized that the idea of a “diverse” city was favorable to attracting international business and who were fearful of negative publicity of anti-immigrant rhetoric that could take a racist tone. Another ally was the non-profit and philanthropic community, which, after a 2001 survey by Harvard researcher Robert Putnam (Saguaro Seminar 2001) that ranked Charlotte near the bottom of American cities in terms of interracial trust and dialogue, organized a collaborative effort to foster more inclusive and multicultural planning processes for the city’s future (Zoder 2010). Immigration reform activism took the form of protest rallies over policies targeting immigrant communities, such as the 287(g) program and civil rights violations that accompanied the enforcement of immigration law by local police. Activists also registered new voters, engaged in street theatre, and held numerous fora to educate community members about immigration law and enforcement policies.

Latino Corridors

Demographers describe Charlotte as having three “Latino immigrant corridors” corresponding to US Census data concerning where Hispanic residents have settled (Smith & Furuseth 2006). These corridors consist of residential neighborhoods that flank commercial thoroughfares, with community institutions such as churches, non-profit organizations, businesses, and restaurants that help solidify social ties. The three corridors are: the North Tryon Street corridor, the Central Avenue corridor, and the South Boulevard corridor (Smith & Furuseth 2006). Both the North Tryon Street and Central Avenue corridors are located on the Eastside of Charlotte (see figure 1), an area that has the longest history of residency by Latino

immigrants. The South Boulevard corridor is located on the Southside of Charlotte, in a transitional area between high income, mostly white residential neighborhoods and low income African American neighborhoods on Charlotte's western half. The LYNX light rail system literally marks a division "across the tracks" of racial and class segregation between these areas of the city.

Although research took me to all three areas, I selected the Central Avenue corridor as the main focus of the study for several reasons. First, many of the main music venues frequented by bands and their audiences were located in this corridor. Second, the Latin American Coalition, a local non-profit providing social services to the Latino community, is located in this corridor. Their offices are located at an important hub of the Latino community in Charlotte, next to several prominent restaurants and retail stores. I used their offices as an unofficial headquarters where I interviewed musicians and took stock of important developments in the Latino community. Third, the Central Avenue corridor proved convenient because of its proximity to other locations where musical performances occurred, including the neighborhoods of Uptown, NoDa, and Plaza-Midwood. Finally, I spent most of my time in Charlotte living in the Central Avenue corridor (after spending a few months in the South Boulevard area), which deepened my understanding of what life is like there.

Central Avenue

Central Avenue starts at the intersection of Kings Drive and 7th Street on the edge of center city Charlotte, just across Interstate 277 from Uptown. At its starting point lies Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC), symbolically important for many Latinos in Charlotte because of a recent battle over whether undocumented students would be allowed to attend community colleges in North Carolina. CPCC also represents educational opportunity for many

Latino immigrants who, although highly trained and educated in their home countries, have gone there to achieve English proficiency or gain certification in their profession. For example, one musician remembers attending classes at CPCC when he barely spoke English and had just arrived in Charlotte to join his sister. He would bring his guitar with him to school and make friends playing outside between classes. Another musician recently took classes at CPCC in an attempt to complete his college degree. Other community members I spoke to have received certification in medical, accounting, notary, and other fields, often as a way to legitimize degrees they already held from their home countries that did not transfer to practice in the United States.

During my time in Charlotte, CPCC also hosted several concerts and other events that appealed to the Latino community. Latin jazz group Rhythm + performed a concert as part of a week-long music festival hosted by the college. The Spanish-language radio station organized a day-long indoor concert featuring *regional mexicano* bands. Two professional soccer teams, one from Mexico and one from Honduras, staged a friendly match at the college's football stadium. But as I state elsewhere, CPCC's Intown location hampered attempts to bring in many Latinos, particularly Mexican and Central American residents of the Eastside, because many feared being caught in police stops and deported under the 287(g) program.

Moving east, Central Avenue passes through the Intown neighborhood of Plaza Midwood. Plaza Midwood is a gentrifying area with a mix of restored bungalows from one of the city's first suburbs and new apartment buildings filling in the interstices of abandoned lots and urban renewal teardown projects. Trendy restaurants and bars sit next to older businesses, including some of the most cherished remnants of "classic" Charlotte, such as the Penguin Diner.⁸

⁸ The Penguin Diner is consistently rated one of the top places to eat in Charlotte and is one of the oldest restaurants in the area, dating from the 1950s. In late 2010, the Penguin Diner was bought by new owners who instituted menu

However, the economic recession slowed gentrification in the neighborhood. Newly-built apartments featuring cutting edge architecture and balconies with skyline views stood vacant. A major mixed-use development, Morningside Village (HipHoods 2008), with apartments, stores, and walk-able, “urban” streetscapes remained un-built next to Veterans Park because of the economic recession. The project had begun as an urban renewal scheme by Atlanta-based Post Properties that tore down a series of 1950s row apartments that, according to longtime neighborhood residents, were a hotbed of crime and delinquency. In their place were left streets paved in the shape of a neighborhood with empty grass and mud flats where apartments might have stood. A large sign at the entrance promised that this development was in the planning stage and would one day be built, but no construction happened during my time in Charlotte. Instead, local residents walked their dogs in the grass while drivers used the development’s imagined streets as a shortcut to avoid traffic lights on Central Avenue.

Plaza Midwood juxtaposes both the wealth and the poverty that is created in a contemporary city. On a Friday night, while middle-class in-town residents frequented the neighborhood’s latest hotspot, homeless men gathered on a street corner, smoking cigarettes and asking passersby for change. In one direction off Central Avenue lay immaculately maintained bungalows on tree-lined streets, in another, gated apartments that tried but failed to hide the fact that they were public housing. Remnants of their neighborhood’s working-class history remained, such as 1950s small detached houses still occupied by their original owners, or rented out by enterprising Vietnamese immigrants to newcomers to the city. A nondescript building on Central Avenue served as a bar frequented by working-class gay men, while next door an “internet café” served as an illicit gambling club formed by elderly African-American men.

and decorative changes, and are attempting to open other locations. Many local residents were appalled and some stopped eating there, instead frequenting the Diamond restaurant, another old diner down the street that had just reopened after a hiatus.

Down the hill from Plaza Midwood, the language of the business signs changes on Central Avenue. The linguistic landscape (Gorter 2004, Hill 1999, Irvine & Gal 2000) shifts to include neon placards in Vietnamese, Spanish, and Polish. Several blocks of Vietnamese businesses include fish markets, restaurants, nail salons, and groceries. Interspersed are signs in Spanish, for law firms, notary publics, and translation services. By the time one reaches Eastway Drive, the signs are almost entirely in Spanish, signaling that this is the heart of Latino Charlotte, the Eastside. Churches advertise bilingual and Spanish-language services. Restaurants feature Mexican regional cuisines, but also the foods of El Salvador and Honduras. Corner stores advertise remittance rates and telephone cards for immigrants wanting contact back home. Grocery stores feature Latin American food: plantains, rice, corn tortillas, mangos, and chorizo. The neighborhoods of the Eastside feature 1950s suburban-style detached houses and 1970s-1980s era apartment buildings. While the apartments provide low-cost housing for recently arrived immigrants, management companies sometimes neglect upkeep for the aging buildings. In 2010, residents of one large apartment complex organized and protested against deteriorating conditions there, including lack of heat and mice and roaches. However, this organizing effort was weakened by the demise of ACORN, a national housing advocacy group that had been active in gathering evidence against delinquent apartment landlords in Charlotte.⁹

At the intersection of Sharon Amity Road and Central Avenue, one can also see the intersection of old and new Charlotte, through some of the contradictions that have formed the Eastside as it is today. In one direction stands the Eastland Mall, an abandoned hunk of concrete surrounded by acres of parking lots. One of the first indoor shopping malls built in Charlotte, it opened in 1975 with major department stores anchoring several floors of retail stores. By the

⁹ ACORN was targeted by right-wing activists who posed as a pimp and prostitute seeking government-subsidized housing. This also can be seen as a right vs. left wing fight over the “right to the city.”

late 1990s, the major stores had left for more suburban locations. A new owner attempted to refashion the mall by featuring local African-American and Latino businesses in the mall. For several years, the mall remained open, even though many of its storefronts were empty. Local soccer leagues played games on its indoor court (originally an ice skating rink). By 2010, the mall closed. Although the city government and several developers have proposed creating a more “urban” mixed-use development at the site, so far it remains abandoned (Urban Land Institute 2007; Funk et al. 2010). Across Central Avenue from the Eastland Mall, Compare Foods occupies an old supermarket that has been recently renovated and repainted bright orange. Compare Foods is a supermarket chain owned and operated by a Dominican immigrant family. With numerous locations in Charlotte, across North Carolina, and in New York and New Jersey, Compare Foods represents a success story of ethnic entrepreneurs who started small and created wealth by catering to the burgeoning consumerism of Latino immigrants in the United States. Compare Foods began as a store that provided Caribbean fruits, vegetables, and staples to Dominican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican residents of Washington Heights and New Jersey, but the owners saw a potential market in the US South and moved their headquarters and concentrated their efforts in and around Charlotte. In this transition, they also recalibrated their products to provide foods that covered the diversity of Latino immigrants in Charlotte, including Mexican, Central American, and South American-style goods. The stores gained a reputation as having the cheapest prices and the best selection of foods for cooking Latin American dishes. Although many Eastside residents were quick to point out the diversity of their ethnic backgrounds and highlight the differences between, say, a Mexican and a Colombian immigrant, almost all residents I met shopped at Compare Foods. This common consumer experience is perhaps the best example of a unifying Latino culture being created among a diverse body of immigrants;

while maintaining national/regional foodways, Latino immigrants create new markets for “ethnic” or “Latin” foods.¹⁰

Compare Foods also provides entry-level jobs for many recent immigrants arriving in Charlotte. One musician worked for several months there as a stockperson, until his work and band schedule came into conflict and he had to find work elsewhere. Since almost all the clientele are Spanish-speaking and the food products are familiar, the work environment is less daunting than an “American” grocery store.

Across Sharon Amity Road from Compare Foods on Central Avenue sits the Latin American Coalition. The Latin American Coalition, also known by its Spanish name, La Coalición Latinoamericana, is a non-profit organization that provides services for the Latino community in Charlotte. On any given weekday, a small lobby in the organization’s offices is filled with women and their young children, sometimes interspersed with a few men, waiting to be seen by staff and volunteers of the resource center. The Coalition’s resource center is often the first place that community members journey to for advice or help with problems; they feel more comfortable here because of the long history of the organization’s involvement in the community and because interactions here are bilingual and culturally appropriate. Interactions in the resource center can run from the simple- helping someone figure out which bus to take- to the complex- documenting and fighting wage theft. Staff members meet with clients in cramped offices and, after listening to their stories, they make phone calls, search the internet, or ask around the office to gather the best advice for that person. At times, they refer community members to classes and programs offered by the Coalition, for example, someone who is trying

¹⁰ A marketing campaign by a rival supermarket chain, “Food Lion Sabor Latino” began in 2009. Food Lion, a southern supermarket chain, created “Latin” food sections at their stores and promoted their products in the Latino community through advertisements on radio, in newspapers, and sponsorship of festivals, including the Festival Latinoamericano.

to rectify their immigration status might see Adriana in the Immigration Services department upstairs. Other times, staff will refer clients to outside agencies with which the Coalition has a long-standing relationship. During the economic recession, many community members faced economic hardship and came to the Coalition's offices for help; staff would refer them to Crisis Assistance Ministry, a non-profit that provides emergency financial assistance to prevent eviction or utilities being cut off, or to local food banks to receive food assistance.

On the first floor, behind the resource center, is a computer lab where staff give computer classes and host a job bank. Several local employers have built relationships with the organization and notify them if they have job openings. Before community members use the job bank, they are given a course on labor rights so that they can avoid pay-to-work scams and be wary of potential wage theft. Staff members sometimes sit with less tech-savvy clients and guide them through using the internet to search for jobs. Upstairs, a large conference room hosts most of the Coalition's other classes, from English as a Second Language (ESL) courses to homeownership and small business seminars. Across the hall are the executive offices where a small staff works on grants and fundraising efforts, advocacy, accounting, and the day-to-day operations of the organization. Finally, in an office behind the conference room, the cultural events staff operates. Tony Arreaza, the events manager, and his assistant (for a year, me) sit and make phone calls and e-mail potential bands, sponsors, and vendors for cultural events such as the Festival Latinoamericano. Next door, the Volunteer Coordinator recruits and interviews potential volunteers; some volunteer in the Coalition offices, but for cultural events, the Coalition needs a large number of volunteers for one day's work.

One afternoon in September 2010, I helped Jess George, the Executive Director of the Coalition, move old furniture and boxes of papers out of the offices to be thrown away to make

room for a new computer lab. On a bookshelf, we discovered several photo albums and took a break to flip through the albums. In one album we found photographs of the founding members of the Latin American Coalition, including one of Reverend Salvador Negrin.



Figure 3: The offices of the Latin American Coalition

Negrin and 35 other community members founded the non-profit in 1990 to provide Spanish-language services to a small but growing Latino community in Charlotte.¹¹ There were photos of some of the first meetings of the board of directors and of the first Festival Latinoamericano. Jess and I marveled at the transformation from a small project in 1990 to what the Coalition and Festival had become twenty years later. We were also able to identify many people still active today, from early Coalition employees to business leaders and political activists. This act of remembering revealed the deep roots the Coalition has in the Latino community, while the new

¹¹ The first Latino residents to Charlotte had arrived by 1970, when the US Census registered 638 persons of Latin American descent, with nearly 51 percent being Cuban refugees. Small numbers of South American and Central American immigrants arrived during the 1980s (Smith & Furuseth 2006: p. 196).

computer lab and busy resource center demonstrated the organization's continued relevance. Twenty years have meant several relocations of the organization's offices, professionalization of its staff, leadership transitions, and expanded programs and festivals, but never an abandonment of its central mission of serving the community.

These three corners of Central Avenue and Sharon Amity form a kind of nexus for the Eastside Latino community, particularly when one includes nearby restaurants and shops. The thriving business, particularly Compare Foods, and non-profit anchors contrast with the post-suburban decay of the Eastland Mall. In many ways this once suburban area has been re-urbanized: as suburbs move further east and north of the city; as empty lots are filled in by denser apartment development, and as public transportation and pedestrian movement become more common ways of moving through the neighborhood. As historian Tom Hanchett (2010) argues, these "salad-bowl" suburbs are also becoming more youthful, multicultural, and "Latinized" as immigrants from across Latin America, but also South East Asia and elsewhere, move in and replace an aging white and black population in East Charlotte. The "Latinization" of the Eastside changes not just the linguistic landscape of neon signs and advertisements, but the feel of the neighborhood. Latino immigrants are modifying housing (remodeling houses for extended families, adding satellite dishes), changing the dominant sports played in parks (from basketball to baseball and soccer), offering discount auto repair with refurbished parts, teaching the latest Latin American dance moves at a storefront studio, and staking claim to their identity in the street by taking the bus wearing a Mayan *huipil* or driving a truck tricked out with airbrushed Mexican flags on the hood.

The Latino corridor of Central Avenue provides a setting for community, but location is just one of several contributing factors that lead Latino immigrants to form communities in this

part of Charlotte. Music is a vital force in forging community in Latino Charlotte, especially when it is paired with other community-making activities, such as food and alcohol consumption, dancing, festival-going, or religious worship. Musical communities formed around bands and their audiences overlap with networks formed by patrons of nightclubs and restaurants, clients at the Latin American Coalition, student groups at local colleges, church congregations, and radio station listeners. The Latin American Coalition draws clients into the orbit of musical communities by organizing festivals and advertising concerts in their offices and online. Other prominent institutions, for example local businesses, mesh their customer base with musical communities by sponsoring shows, having a booth at a festival, or allowing promoters to advertise in their store. Bars and restaurants integrate their clientele within musical communities by hiring a band to perform on a busy night. Several churches have bands, which sometimes feature well-known local musicians, extending the musical community to Sunday morning. The main attraction for a musical community is the music and personality of the band, but these other community-forming institutions help to augment the strength of a musical community.

Musical Charlotte

To understand the Latin music scene in Charlotte, it is important to outline the history of music recording and live performances in Charlotte during the last century. The Latin music scene builds upon the infrastructure and networks of musical production already in Charlotte, but also exists on a somewhat separate plane. As stated earlier, Charlotte is not known as a thriving music center, yet there are intriguing musical precedents for its current flowering of Latin music.

From the 1920s to the 1940s, Charlotte was a major center in the US South for recording musicians and for concerts and radio broadcasts. Charlotte became a prime spot to record early

country music, so-called “hillbilly records,” because of the migration of poor whites from Appalachia to the mill towns of the piedmont (Hanchett 1985). Country musicians would travel on a circuit throughout piedmont mill towns, playing dance halls and broadcasting live on area radio stations. In August 1927, Ralph Peer of Victor began his first of many recording sessions in Charlotte. Through the 1930s, Victor/RCA recorded country musicians in Charlotte, including the Carter Family, Bill Monroe, and Jimmie Davis. Blues and gospel groups also were recorded during these sessions, as Charlotte was part of a parallel, but segregated circuit of black musicians, the “chitlin’ circuit” (Lauterbach 2011, Booth 1993). The heyday of musical recording faded in the 1940s, as most country recording sessions shifted to Nashville (Malone 1993, Hawkins 2006).

However, Charlotte continued to host thriving musical communities in the post-war era. Radio station WBT in Charlotte was known for its popular weekend broadcasts of live country music throughout the 1940s and early 1950s, until the advent of television and rock & roll dethroned country music (Rumble n/d). Black Gospel music continued to thrive in Charlotte, both in area churches and through recordings produced in small studios in the city. Rock band REM, from Athens, GA, so admired the sound produced at Reflection Sound Studios (a local gospel studio) that they recorded several albums there.¹²

Charlotte, like other Southern cities, hosted many prominent rock bands during the 1960s and 1970s. This was an era of turmoil and dramatic change brought on by the Civil Rights Movement, including court-ordered desegregation of schools and conservative retrenchment in the presidential campaign of George Wallace and emergence of a (white) Southern Republican party (Carter 1996, Greenhaw 1982). But a younger generation of white and black Southerners

¹² Some speculate that the song “So. Central Rain (I’m Sorry), on REM’s second album, *Reckoning* (1984), was written while in Charlotte. Reflection Sound Studios is located on Central Avenue.

was attempting to chart a new path through music. As journalist Mark Kemp remembers-“the feeling of community that southern rock engendered during the early 1970s was the beginning of a healing process- in me and in many southerners of my generation- that continues to this day” (Kemp 2004). Musical groups like the Allman Brothers bridged white and black musical traditions that had become separated, combining country, blues, jazz, and gospel into rock songs. While recording sessions in the 1920s and 1930s separated black and white music into “race” and “hillbilly” records to be marketed to segregated audiences, and 1950s white rock & roll artists often riffed (and ripped) off of black rhythm & blues singers without acknowledgement, Southern rock musicians openly included black musicians in their bands, wrote songs commenting on racism, and formulated new, alternative ways of being Southern with their audiences. Songs such as the Allman Brothers cover of Blind Willie McTell’s “Statesboro Blues” (1971) and Lynyrd Skynyrd’s “The Ballad of Curtis Loew” (1974) celebrated the shared musical traditions of Southern blacks and whites, revealing hidden narratives of interracial musical production that stretched back at least a century (Conway 1995, Smith 1997, Russell 1970).¹³ Other groups that traced Southern roots, such as The Band, constructed a meta-narrative about Southern musical traditions through their music (Helm & Davis 2000).

By the 1980s and 1990s, Southern rock had been transformed by the emergence of scenes in college towns such as Athens, GA and Chapel Hill, NC. Charlotte, with its suburban commuter university, UNC-Charlotte, seems to have been mainly left out of this development. However, small pockets of rock musicians did emerge in the late 1990s in Intown neighborhoods

¹³ In 1952, collector Harry Smith assembled the *Anthology of American Music* (Smith 1997) from commercial records released between 1927 and 1935, marking perhaps the first of many future efforts to preserve these important commercial recordings. The *Anthology* has had a far-reaching influence on folk musicians, but was also unique for its time in that it assembled songs based on theme and not on the race of the musicians. Some listeners had difficulty discerning whether certain, lesser-known artists were black or white. British music historian Tony Russell in *Blacks, Whites, and Blues* (1970) puts forth the simple but striking thesis that only with the advent of phonograph recordings did black and white music in the US South began to travel on separate paths.

as Charlotte attracted newcomers from other cities, such as the band FireHouse. In the 2000s, Charlotte witnessed a revival of its black musical communities, as African-Americans from Northern cities flocked southward, and local artists such as Anthony Hamilton, Jocelyn Ellis, and American Idol winner Fantasia Barrino recorded hit songs.

On this tableau we place Latino musical communities in Charlotte. While many Latino musicians and audience members operate in a separate sphere from white and black music in Charlotte, there are some points of intersection and interaction. Many Latino rock musicians follow local bands and have conversations with fellow musicians in bars and clubs or at a rehearsal space. Bakalao Stars' most recent album features a collaboration with RasCongo, a Jamaican immigrant reggae singer, and they recently teamed up with a local reggae group to hold a concert together at the Neighborhood Theatre. Eddy Trevino, a Mexican American musician from South Texas, moved to Charlotte in 2002 to start Loco Sound Studios, which records local *regional mexicano*, rock, *reggaetón*, and rap artists. Local clubs that once hosted rock and R&B acts are now being converted to Latin clubs in neighborhoods where Latino immigrants have settled. For example, an industrial warehouse space east of NoDa that during 2009 held heavy metal and punk bands for white audiences, by late 2010 had reopened as Calentano, a club featuring *regional mexicano* groups and occasional Latin rock concerts.

This conversion process did not always go smoothly. A Dominican promoter opened a club, BLVD, in a building he leased from its African-American owners. The spacious club had DJs and live music on the weekends, mostly featuring *música tropical- salsa, merengue, bachata*, and *reggaetón*. Occasionally, the club hosted black stand-up comics for the African-American audience who still frequented the area. I visited the club one Friday night to listen to performances by Furia Tropical and Bachata Flow, two local groups, and was amazed by how

empty the place seemed. Sure enough, a few weeks later, driving by the building, I noticed the BLVD sign had been covered and the club was closed. Inquiring among several community members, I reconstructed the demise of BLVD; the Latino promoter had overstretched his budget and failed to pay rent to the building's owners. He organized a concert featuring a major international *salsa* singer, which he promoted in the newspapers and on radio. The night of the concert, the building's owners showed up with several physically imposing security guards and occupied the building, including the ticket office, and kicked out the Latino promoter. The concert proceeded as planned, but the building's owners appropriated all the ticket sales to compensate them for rent due (it is typical for many Latino concertgoers to buy tickets the day of a concert). The next day, the club was no longer known as BLVD.

Conclusion

The two epigraphs at the beginning of this chapter raise questions of scale regarding Charlotte. First, Charlotte is a “globalizing” city, one that is striving to reach the heights of global city-dom desired by Chamber of Commerce boosters (and many residents) through efforts to build infrastructure (roads, international flights, public transportation), develop high profile real estate (skyscrapers, luxury hotels and condominiums), grow centers of higher learning (the constantly expanding UNC-Charlotte), and position itself economically (banking mergers, attracting new industry). But there is a cultural aspect to becoming a global city as well. In Charlotte, this includes efforts to manufacture an urban, artistic center through the creation of a “cultural campus” in downtown Charlotte housing art museums, fine arts theaters, and outdoor public art. Another campaign encourages local artistic production- through gallery crawls in trendy neighborhoods like NoDa, free concerts and festivals in the center city, and arts patronage by corporations and foundations. Through these efforts a globally aware, elite class of bankers

and businesspeople have forged a fairly “progressive” vision of what they would like Charlotte to become- a global city that is cosmopolitan yet retains its Southern roots.

Largely ignored in this elite conception are the creative expressions bubbling up from Charlotte’s Latino community (except in the most superficial, “increasing diversity” sense). I argue that the Latin music scene presents a case of the local grassroots talking back to elite conceptions, whether as part of “right to the city” struggles or as part of “globalization from below” where Latinos are staking claim to spaces and cultural tropes that position them as citizens of Charlotte the city, sometimes in opposition, sometimes in agreement with the globalizing vision of its future. This claim to citizenship through using the city’s name is nowhere more clear than a journalist’s turn of phrase, “it’s only Carlotan Rock, but I like it” written in Spanish in an article celebrating the history of the grassroots rock scene fostered by the promoters of Carlotan Rock and their band La Rúa. The journalist stresses the community feeling and foresight that bandmembers had in creating a forum for local Latin rock musicians to grow and develop. As we shall see in later chapters, Latino immigrant musicians have their own vision of what a future Charlotte might hold.

Chapter 2: The Latin Music Scene in Charlotte

The Latin music scene

The frame of reference for this study is Latin music in the Southern US city of Charlotte. What is the Latin music scene in Charlotte? At first glance this seems like an easy question. Surely Latin music includes music sung in Spanish by Latino immigrants originating from Latin America in music venues that make up a local scene. But what about music sung in English by Latino immigrants? What about Latino immigrants singing American pop songs? Or performances by Latin groups in clubs owned and managed by whites or African-Americans? And where to draw the line around Latin America- should we include Brazilian immigrants, US-born Latinos from New York, Puerto Rico, or California, and non-Latino salsa enthusiasts?

For this project, I included all of the above. This chapter outlines the Latin music scene by reconstructing, through oral history and personal networks observed in study, the brief history of Latino musicians in Charlotte. Relying on scholarship on music and cultural studies, I also examine the threads connecting US, Southern, and Latin American music(s) together. I outline the bands that were the focus of this study and describe their musical style.

As many scholars have commented, the term Latino (and its linguistic partner, Hispanic) is a nebulous term (Stavans 1995, Oboler 2006, Delgado & Stefancic 1998). While Spanish language proficiency proved to be a key tie uniting members of Charlotte's scene, many musicians chose to sing songs written in English, and conversations between and with musicians invariably took a Spanglish form, with individuals mixing vernacular forms of English and Spanish to describe their music, instrumentation, and sound. Most Latin groups performed in clubs catering to Latinos and owned and managed by ethnic entrepreneurs, but, in certain cases,

groups played concerts at clubs owned by non-Latinos. I have considered all of these performances for my study; the concerts at non-Latino owned clubs reveal just as much, if not more, than those at Latin clubs. Brazilian immigrants, although they speak a different language and originate from a different place, have much in common with Spanish-speaking Latino immigrants. Many US-born Latinos have Latina/o immigrants among their families and friends; I have counted them as part of the Latin music scene even while I am careful to pay attention to the differences in legal status and citizenship between these groups. I also consider a small but dedicated group of non-Latino fans of Latin music, mainly salsa dancers, but also rock enthusiasts who attend concerts and participate in the music scene.

More than any of these parameters, the evidence points to one characteristic that defines the Latin music scene in Charlotte. Namely, everyone involved in the Latin music scene is part of a large social network, with a continuum of loose and tight ties uniting them in membership. It was rare to attend a concert of Latin music in Charlotte, even if I had no anticipation of seeing anyone I had met previously, without running into someone I knew. Perhaps this is a facet of the smallness of Charlotte's Latino community, even though it has grown in large percentages since the 1990s. Latinos are still less than 10 percent of the city's population, numbering approximately 95,000 (US Census 2010).

But I found much evidence that it was for other reasons. Musicians entered into relationships of mutual assistance, to find jobs, to borrow instruments and sound equipment, to provide expertise in recording and promoting their music. Musicians and audience members belonged to the same social spheres, from church congregations, work colleagues and school ties, to home countries and hometowns. Musicians and restaurant and club owners relied on each other; musicians needed to promote and perform their music, the music venue needed to sell food and

drinks. At face value, monetary transactions guided all of these relationships, but people rarely mentioned money as the defining aspect of these social ties. While an audience member might pay to enter the club, it is the experience of listening to music and connecting to the group onstage and fellow audience members that stands out as important. Club owners might make money from a cover charge and drinks, but creating that more ethereal comfortable atmosphere for the audience's enjoyment of music might prove to be better for business over the long run.

The Latin music scene also proved to be a series of places and occasions where people could see and be seen. But it was not just a compartmentalized set of concerts divided by genre or nationality because Latinos ventured out to events to see family, friends and acquaintances, to meet and fall in love, to dress up and let loose. I have chosen the term "scene" to evoke the visual image of cinema and painting, to capture moments in a 13-month period in Charlotte when this project documents what happened in Latin music there.

"Scene" is a common term used to refer to social networks and moments of musical genre creation, with cues taken from the theater and dramatic arts as a way to bracket the space and temporality of musical expression. Erving Goffman (1959) proposed that in face-to-face interactions, individuals frame the context of their interactions and the roles they take on, much as a theatrical scene of picture frame includes some details and excludes others. But in Vincent Crapanzano's (2006) exploration of the difference between "objective" reality and the scene, he cautions against reducing the scene to the merely subjective, instead stressing the inter-subjective, interpersonal experience of the "shadowy dimensions of social and cultural existence (p.388)." In my descriptions and analysis, I can "objectively" convey the reality of musicians performing and audiences cheering, describe the rituals that create a sense of community (Turner 1969), or "subjectively" convey the emotions and personal experiences of fieldwork, but the

scene also exists in a third realm. Between the observed and felt, the ideal and real, the objective and subjective, are moments of mystery and magic that anyone who has experienced music understands, yet these moments are socially constructed in that musicians have a talent for evoking and gathering together the necessary elements for listeners and participants to feel these sorts of social connections. As Crapanzano notes, the scene contains an indexical process of naming and pointing out “what it is- the contextualizing element, the context, but also what it is not” (Crapanzano 2006: p. 399). As we shall see, the Latin music scene often performs this double move as musicians and audience position themselves as members of one musical community and not another, as listeners to genres mark distinctions from other musical styles, as musicians assess their political role, and as they debate aesthetics and morality. To begin to understand this, first we must explore a bit of Latin music history.

The Latin Tinge

The connections between Latin American music and music in the United States go back centuries. John Storm Roberts (1979), in his historical study *The Latin Tinge*, outlines the influences Latin American musicians and styles have had on US popular music since the late nineteenth century. A more recent volume by Timothy Brennan (2008) adds a sociopolitical analysis to this history, detailing the links between this Latin tinge and the imperial projects of the United States, particularly in the Caribbean. Of particular note are the rhythmic and melodic themes that passed from Cuba and Mexico into popular forms such as ragtime, jazz, and swing in the early 20th century. If this is history hidden or forgotten, then listening to a few early recordings quickly reveals this influence. For example, Louis Armstrong’s 1928 recording “Sugar Foot Strut” (Armstrong 1989) reveals the rhythmic connections between New Orleans Jazz and Cuban dance styles while Bob Wills’ 1945 recording “New Spanish Two Step” (Wills

1992) tells the story of melodic cross-border trading between Mexican and white Country & Western musicians.

However, it would be a mistake to overstate the influence of Latin styles on US popular music, because that would risk devaluing the myriad other influences from within the United States that led to a flowering of popular music during the 20th century. In fact, what is remarkable listening to early recordings of American music (for example, from Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Music*) is the diversity of styles that up until the 1920s had been passed down orally and often were confined to very specific locales throughout the country, of which only a few made the transition to radio and popular recordings. One is struck by the many alternate paths of rhythm, vocal inflection, dominant instrumentation, and melodic themes that US popular music could have taken. Some of this era's music sounds as alien and disjointed to us as surely our popular recordings with auto-tuning, electronic beats, and multi-track recording would sound to listeners in that bygone era. We stare across a great divide of technological and social change listening to something that sounds familiar and strange at the same time.

The steady accumulation of Latin-tinged music, whether it happened in stages as Roberts argues (the *tango* craze, the *mambo* craze, *boogaloo* and *salsa*) or flowed through influential conduits (Dizzy Gillespie's revelation of Latin Jazz, Freddy Fender giving country music a Spanish translation), parallels (but should not always be directly correlated with) the increasing presence of Latinos in the United States. Throughout the development of the youth music of the 1950s and 1960s (rock & roll, rhythm & blues, and soul¹⁴), for example, there was a smattering of Latin-themed or rhythmically Latin songs, and even a few popular artists who were Mexican-American, Puerto Rican or of Latin American ancestry. Thus, Richie Valens could sing "La

¹⁴ I use the term "rhythm & blues" and "soul" to refer to respective African-American musical genres from the 1950s to 1970s; whereas I use the term "R&B" to refer to the African-American musical genre from the 1980s to the present following from its music industry designation and popular terminology.

Bamba” (1958), while the Coasters told a story about what happened “Down in Mexico” (1956) and the Everly Brothers lamented “Wake Up Little Susie” (1957) to a syncopated Latin beat.

Regional Latin music scenes resulted in several musical developments during the 1950s and 1960s that were important in their own right and as precursors to Latin popular music as we know it today. In the Southwest, musicians modernized the Mexican *corrido* and *ranchera* into *Norteño* music that appealed to recent immigrants from rural, northern Mexico (Ragland 2009). The *mambo* craze of the early 1950s morphed into a Latin music scene in New York that drew on Cuban and Puerto Rican forms (Garcia 2006), resulting in *boogaloo* and eventually *salsa*. Latino immigrants in California helped transform the rock scene, for example, in the late 1960s, Carlos Santana emerged as a prominent bandleader in San Francisco who merged Latin rhythms and musical themes into his songs. Interestingly, during this time, Latin music had a more integrated cast- with band members who were African-American, Italian-American and Jewish as well as Latino- and open recognition of the co-mingling of Latin and American forms- such as *boogaloo* musicians’ dialogue with soul- than later Latin genres would have. Perhaps this was a result of generational shifts, or the large influx of Latino immigrants in the 1980s, or the fragmentation of pop radio and music marketing by the late 1970s, but during this era the crosscurrents between Latin and American musical forms was particularly strong.

By the 1970s, the Latin tinge had transformed into full blown Latin music markets in the United States, particularly in New York, the Southwest and California. In New York, Fania Records harnessed an explosion of Caribbean-influenced styles into the broad genre of salsa music (Washburne 2008). Out west, the longstanding traditions of Tejano music came into increasing contact with Mexican immigrant musicians to form the emerging styles of *regional mexicano*. Thus, Los Angeles and New York became centers of the Latin music industry,

rivaling and then overtaking traditional centers like Havana and Mexico City. By the 1980s, Miami joined these two cities as a prominent center of recording and musical promotion for Latin artists performing in the US and across Latin America.

In 1970s Latin America, musicians drew upon folkloric and literary forms from the region to create *nueva canción* or *nueva trova*, a new “folk” genre that adopted an explicit political stance commenting on and satirizing military dictatorships and social issues (Antequera Ortiz 2011, Delgado 1996). Facing censorship and even death (one of the most popular *nueva canción* singer, Victor Jara, was tortured and killed by the Chilean military), many musicians went underground or joined other artists, activists, and intellectuals in exile, creating a hemispheric network of musicians connected by common values rooted in leftist ideas of popular revolution, Liberation Theology, and human rights. *Nueva canción* was influential not just in its own right, but in the development of *rock en español* (particular in Chile and Argentina) and with musicians attempting to construct pan-Latino visions of popular genres, such as Dominican singer Juan Luis Guerra (Pacini Hernandez 1995).

The development of Brazilian *bossa nova* in the 1960s initiated a series of musical exchanges between Brazilian, American and Latin American musicians, most notably in the jazz of Stan Getz and crossover appeal of Antonio Carlos Jobim (Castro 2003). *Bossa nova* and other popular Brazilian forms of the era emerged in the context of nationalist efforts to modernize and the music took on deeper political significance as Brazil moved into a military dictatorship. Forms like Tropicália, MBP, and Global Funk came out of an era of harsh state repression, intensive urbanization, and economic turmoil and represent diverse and sometimes conflicting ideas of musicianship that continue to stream through Brazilian music (Perrone & Dunn 2001).

Scholar Josh Kun (2005) and journalist Mark Kemp have both written extensively about the musical development of *rock en español* in the US during the 1990s. In certain urban centers, namely Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay area, and New York, Latino artists developed and refined rock music sung in Spanish. These viable local scenes were self-contained in clubs and venues that catered to the geographic concentrations of Latinos in these American cities, but also globally connected to Latin American musical centers such as Mexico City, Bogotá, and Buenos Aires. Looking at *rock en español* and popular Latin artists such as Selena and Marc Anthony, many predicted an eminent “Latin music explosion” that mostly didn’t happen. Instead, Latin music continued to remain segmented into genres with limited crossover, except by a few musical groups who managed to find a popular niche. It is difficult to fully explain this failure; was it a miscalculation of changing musical tastes, an aversion to songs in Spanish (except for novelty songs like “La Macarena”), or a lack of understanding of the diversity of Latin musical styles that made these styles unable to be distilled into one marketable trend?

These developments of the 1990s ran parallel with a major shift in the music industry, as the rise of digital music and the internet marked the end of an era (a brief era that really only had began in the 1960s and consolidated by the late 1970s) dominated by large record companies and the rise of “indie” labels and smaller scale production of new musical recordings. Perhaps this structural shift in the music industry helps explain things; major record labels no longer retained the power to shape popular tastes that they had in the 1970s and 1980s. While the digital revolution gave listeners the power to choose music that is finely attuned to their liking and empowered many lesser known bands and labels to self-promote at lower cost, it also erased much of the common collective experience of discovering new music through the mass media of radio and television. It is no wonder, then, that MTV stopped airing music videos and turned to

reality shows. Instead, the process of discovering new music shifted to internet sites such as Youtube, MySpace, iTunes, Amazon, and Pandora that cater to personally selected tastes. The social experience of musical discovery shifted online as well, through social networks of sharing music as data, such as Napster and BitTorrent, and through shared video hyperlinks that reveal micro-trends of popularity on platform sites like Facebook. Music videos continue to be made and watched, but structural changes in the music industry have resulted in a further fragmentation of music listening practices away from mass audiences and toward a solipsistic and micro-communal form of musical entertainment (Katz 2010). Bobby McFerrin's "I'm My Own Walkman" (1984) has become literal as individual listeners can fabricate their own listening worlds on portable iPods and smart phones and take them anywhere.

America in Latin America

As I went about my research conversing with and interviewing Charlotte's Latino musicians, individual after individual impressed upon me the important role "American" music played in their early development as musicians. By "American" music, I loosely refer to popular music originating in the United States that has made its way around the world. Scholars have bemoaned the hegemony and reach of US popular culture, often to the detriment of local musical forms (Stokes 2004, Inda & Rosaldo 2008). This concern extends to when Western musicians, particularly from the United States, turn their gaze upon the rest (of the world) and "discover" (often for the second or third time) the music of another land. Thus, even well-intentioned Western musicians, such as Ry Cooder with his Buena Vista Social Club project (1997), can promote one vision of world music that, while showcasing very talented musicians, overlooks thriving local scenes of musical production. The series of recordings made under the aegis of the Buena Vista Social Club, by promulgating an image of timeless and nostalgic Cuban music,

ignored the innovative forms of Cuban music happening concurrent to these late 1990s and early 2000s recordings, and the erasure of Cuban musical influences on Latino and US popular music in the post-revolutionary era (Washburne 2008). However, we must account for the ways that people customize and reinterpret Western cultural forms and make them their own (Inda & Rosaldo 2008). For example, at the same time as the Buena Vista Social Club, other Cuban salsa musicians were making records that skillfully fused contemporary jazz and Cuban popular forms (Cubanismo 1996) and Cuban hip-hop musicians were using rap to formulate a new vision of Afro-Cuban political awareness (Orishas 2000, Fernandes 2006).

North American recording companies have long had a prominent and at times dominant role in the Latin American music market. Many of the major labels formed in the early decades of the 20th century- RCA/Victor, CBS, and Capitol- quickly formed Latin American divisions that set up recording sessions in capital cities such as Mexico City, Havana, and Buenos Aires.

In his seminal work on the history of Mexican rock music, Eric Zolov (1999) details the development of rock bands in the late 1950s and through the 1960s, most of whom began singing in English. At first imitating the American groups they heard on imported records smuggled in from the US, these groups began to develop their own unique styles. While to the Mexican government, this music represented the long arm of US imperialism and the degradation of folkloric Mexican musical forms, to a new generation of listeners, rock and roll represented the rebelliousness and liberating power of youth culture in the States. Many of the same battles between generations and between the political establishment and popular political movements challenging the status quo played out in Mexico on a parallel track to the United States. The United States had its Civil Rights and anti-war demonstrations, while Mexico had its student strikes and Tlateloco. Musically, the United States had Woodstock while Mexico had its

Avándaro, a festival of Mexican rock music where musicians and audience challenged the stifling paternalistic morality and repressive Mexican state.

Other Latin American countries went through periods where music served as a powerful medium for challenging social and political oppression, such as the activist solidarity that Argentine *nueva canción* and rock bands fomented in the early 1980s against the military dictatorship, or the way that Dominican *bachata* served as a source of pride for working-class rural migrants to Santo Domingo in the face of elite disapproval (Pacini Hernandez 1995, Bachata Roja 2007). On the other hand, some musical forms served a more complicated and complicit role in their relation to national governments, from the promotion of *merengue* as a national music by Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo to the conflicted relationship between Cuban *nueva trova* music and the reign of Fidel Castro.

Alongside this complicated history, young musicians in Latin America found themselves to be fans of “American” music. Rather than viewing American music and Latin (American) music as diametrically opposed, budding musicians digested both canons as part of the same personal repertoire. Informants spoke of growing up listening to Journey and Los Jaguares, the Cure and Caetano Veloso, Guns & Roses and El Tri. To them, there was no separation in the music store aisles and their listening habits crossed genre boundaries with ease; all of this was *their* music.

Charlotte

Latin music travelled to Charlotte with immigrants from Latin America who began arriving in the city in the 1980s. According to musicians and journalists, the first Latino musician in town was Alex Peralta, who in the late 1980s played in a hair band in the style of Def Leppard and Bon Jovi. The group sang in English, and Peralta has since moved to Miami,

FL and become a producer of rap and R&B artists. The next documented cases of Latino musicians in Charlotte come in the mid-1990s; Tony Arreaza, just out of high school, moved to the Queen City from Venezuela to live with his sister who had arrived several years earlier. In between English classes at a local community college, he would strum his guitar on the campus lawn. Eventually, he began playing at a dive bar on Independence Boulevard for tips, where other Latino immigrants started to gather to hear him play or join in with their own instruments.

Fred Figueroa, another Venezuelan immigrant, remembers going to hear rock bands play at clubs on the east side of Charlotte when he first moved to the city. In one of the bands, the guitar player had a Venezuelan flag stitched on his jeans. The guitar player, Tony, thought to himself, “why is this guy (Fred) staring at me, who is he?” Talking after the show, they discovered their common nationality, and within a few months they had formed their own band playing covers of classic Latin rock songs.

By the late 1990s, immigration from Mexico to Charlotte had taken off and this demographic shift began to be felt in the music scene. As Fred remembers,

“The Latino community when I got here was very little. You didn’t see a lot of Mexican people, or any other race for that matter, and in the late nineties it was just like a big boom. You started seeing all these Mexican people and vans with ladders and paint crews going here and there, and sheet rock crews and landscaping; so it was a total takeover by the Mexican population...”

“As far as the music scene, it’s changed in the same way...once the Latin community came in, obviously the Latin community wants to be catered to, so more Spanish acts started coming in here, and in between those Spanish acts, Tony and I started looking at opportunities to entertain that community with what we like doing, which was rock. And within the Spanish community, as you know, rock is also well received; everything is not necessarily about *quebradita*¹⁵... that’s usually something very Mexican. Most of the Latin community that are not Mexican- they like rock- and that’s where Tony and I came into the equation.”
(Interview with author 3/13/2010).”

¹⁵ A *regional mexicano* dance style.

With this influx of new immigrants corresponding to a real estate and financial industry boom in the late 1990s, Charlotte was transformed in the eyes of many Latinos, from a sleepy town where you were excited to run into someone else who spoke Spanish to a budding metropolis with new challenges of ethnic and racial tensions and new economic opportunities. Latino immigrants who had arrived just a few years earlier found they could benefit from this influx, whether by opening restaurants and stores, running radio and newspapers, or leading community organizations- all catering to newly-arrived Latinos who had come to work in construction, and the service economy. In the music scene, Tony and Fred joined others in forming increasingly popular bands; some musicians branched out to become concert promoters, one even opened a recording studio. But, as Fred described, Charlotte began to have two (and eventually several) parallel but largely unconnected music districts, one centered on *regional mexicano* music, the other around *rock en español*. Differences in legal status, national origin, class identity and musical taste contributed to this split between more established and recently arrived Latino immigrants.

A seminal band in Charlotte's Latin rock scene was La Rúa. Formed in 2004 by Tony and three Ecuadorian musicians, La Rúa became the most famous of Charlotte's Latin groups, recording two albums and having their music video, "El Chanchito" (2005), shown on MTV Latino and Mun2. Concurrent with the group's founding was the start of the annual Carlotan Rock festival, a concert that featured local and regional *rock en español* groups. Many younger musicians recall being inspired to form bands and getting their first break playing at Carlotan Rock. This Latin rock community found reinforcement and approval in a series of concerts promoted by Tony, La Rúa drummer Juan Miguel Marín, and his brother Herman Marín. International acts, such as Los Enanitos Verdes, Los Amigos Invisibles, Hombre G, Molotov,

and Cafe Tacuba, played packed shows in Charlotte (often with local groups opening) in clubs that had never previously hosted a Latin rock group, and created a feeling that the city was a happening place for Latin music. Alas, this moment was soon over, with La Rúa disbanding in December 2006. Carlotan Rock and the big shows petered out, drawing to a standstill because of the economic recession and declining attendance in 2008-9. Talking with informants in 2009-2010, I got the sinking feeling that I had missed the “golden age” of Latin rock in Charlotte as several musicians told me they wished I had been there to document what was happening in 2005. One of the challenges of doing fieldwork was reconstructing this past from oral histories, newspaper articles, and reminiscences over bottles of scotch.

Meanwhile, Mexican music in Charlotte slowly came of age, as a smattering of groups formed in the mid-2000s. By 2007, local DJ and promoter Alex Ruiz had scored a minor hit with his song “La chica que conocí” (Ruiz 2007). Local *regional mexicano* groups found audiences at neighborhood dance clubs, on Spanish-language radio, and at annual festivals such as Ruiz’s Carnaval de las Carolinas, where they played alongside well-known Mexican bands touring through Charlotte. Other venues in Charlotte began to cater to audiences wanting to listen to *tropical* genres such as *bachata*, *merengue*, and *salsa*, drawing a diverse crowd of Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Colombians.

Genres

There are three main genre categories of music played by Latin groups in Charlotte- *regional mexicano*, *música tropical*, and Latin rock/*rock en español*- with several sub-genres and adjunct styles. These italicized names are broad categories that are often used by record companies, promoters, radio DJs and others in the music industry to describe the music; however, musicians

sometimes deploy other terms, usually referring to the sub-genre or style of music they play, and some invent new terms to describe their genre(s).

Table 2: Charlotte Bands

Bands	Instrumentation	Musical styles	Audience	Venues
Ultimanota	Guitar, Bass, Conga, Timbales, Saxophone, Vocals	“cheesy cocktail music,” Latin rock & pop, English-language pop	Restaurant customers, middle-class Latinos	A Piece of Havana, restaurants, private parties, Festivals
Dorian Gris	Guitar, Bass, Drum Set, Vocals	heavy metal, Latin rock, punk	working-class Mexican immigrants	Skandalos, the Dark Room
Los Mentirosos	Keyboard, Bass, Drums (bass and cymbal), Vocals	<i>regional mexicano</i> , R&B	working-class Mexican immigrants	Festivals, Eastside clubs
Banda TecnoCaliente	Keyboards (3-4), Vocals (3), Drums	<i>regional mexicano</i> , <i>bachata</i>	working-class Mexican immigrants	Festivals, Eastside clubs
Bakalao Stars	Guitars (3), Keyboard, Bass, Drum Set, Saxophone, Vocals	ska, reggae, Latin rock, <i>cumbia</i>	Middle-class, 1.5 generation, multicultural Latinos	Festivals, Evening Muse, Neighborhood Theatre, Visulite
Tropic Culture	Guitar (2), Bass, Conga, Drum Set, Violin, Trombone, Saxophone, Trumpet, Vocals	Latin pop, rock, funk, disco, world music	Middle-class, 1.5 generation, multicultural Latinos	Festivals, Neighborhood Theatre, Visulite, Pura Vida
Orquesta Mayor	Vocals (3), Timbales, Keyboard, Bass, Conga, Bongo, Clave, Cowbell, Trumpets (2), Trombone	<i>Salsa</i>	Puerto Ricans, Dominican and Cuban immigrants	Festivals, Cosmo’s Café
Bachata Flow	Guitar (2), Conga, Tambor, Guiro, Vocals (2)	<i>bachata</i> , <i>merengue</i>	Puerto Ricans, Dominican and Cuban immigrants	Festivals, Uptown clubs
Leydy Bonilla	Vocals (Bachata Flow is her backup band)	<i>bachata</i> , <i>merengue</i> , R&B, pop	Puerto Ricans, Dominican and Cuban immigrants	Festivals, Uptown clubs
DS Evolution	Vocals (2), DJ	<i>reggaetón</i> , <i>bachata</i> , <i>merengue</i> ,	Puerto Ricans and Dominican immigrants	Uptown clubs, TV Shows
SoulBrasil	Guitars (2), Bass, Drums, Saxophone, Vocal	<i>bossa nova</i> , <i>samba</i> , MBP	Brazilian immigrants and multicultural Latinos	Chima, Neighborhood Theatre, Festivals

Regional mexicano refers to a set of styles that originate in rural Mexico, mainly in Northern provinces and the US-Mexico border region, and have an affiliation with working-class, Mexican culture (Mendoza 1939, Simmons 1953, Simonett 2001, Peña 1985, Herrera-Sobek 1980, Ragland 2009). Regional Mexican music includes sub-genres such as *norteña*, *banda*, *ranchera*, *pasito duranguense*, and Mexican *cumbia* (also known as *onda grupera*). Although it has many stylistic similarities with *música tejana* or Tejano/Tex-Mex music, *regional mexicano* is primarily the music of Mexican immigrants to the United States and migrants to the border region, whereas Tejano is the music of Mexican-Americans who have long-resided in Texas and the US Southwest. The types of songs performed include both up-tempo dance numbers (where audience members dance *polca*, *quebradito*, or *pasito*) and ballads (including both romantic ballads and *corridos*).

Música Tropical refers to genres of popular music from the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and its associated cities of migration, namely Miami and New York, including *salsa*, *merengue*, *bachata*, and *reggaetón* (Flores 2000, Pacini Hernández 1995, Washburne 2008, Austerlitz 1997, Manuel et al. 2006). There are similarities and differences between these musical forms, but musicians in Charlotte rarely use the term *música tropical*, instead naming the specific style they play. These related musical genres are embedded in national and island identity, musically conveying Dominican-ness through *merengue* performance or equating loving *salsa* with being Puerto Rican. Yet, many acknowledge the common ties that link Dominican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Nuyorican, and other Spanish-speaking Caribbean styles (from Panama, Venezuela, Colombia, and Brazil).

The third genre category relevant to the Latin music scene in Charlotte is Latin rock. For this study, I prefer the term Latin rock over the more well-known phrase *rock en español* for several

reasons. First, the simple fact that the bands included in this category at times sing songs in English, Portuguese, and Spanglish, in addition to Spanish. Second, many musicians spoke of *rock en español* as a musical movement that emerged in the 1990s and reached its apex around a decade later only to be superseded by a fragmentation of the genre into subcategories that are sometimes referred to as “Latin Alternative” music. Third, several bands in Charlotte played a mix of rock and other genres- pop, electronica, ska, reggae, funk, heavy metal, blues, and punk. Of the three genre categories discussed here, these bands and their audience go the furthest in adopting notions of pan-Latino identity that bridge nationalistic notions of identity; Latin rock acknowledges both this positioning as “Latino” and the genres historical roots in rock music, from both the US and Latin America.

The Bands

Now that the reader has some sense of the history of Latin music in Charlotte and how Latin music fits in the context of the US South, the United States, and Latin America, I would like to introduce the protagonists of this story, the bands of the Latin music scene in Charlotte. The scope of my project is such: I observed numerous bands in Charlotte, selecting several groups that were representative of the diversity of Latin musical genres and styles. The total number of musicians playing Latin music in Charlotte numbers around 200 people. Of this group, I conducted in-depth interviews with 25 musicians, and had continuous social contact for a 13-month period with about 75 musicians by observing bands rehearse, attending performances, and having conversations with musicians. I also conversed with fans as I attended concerts as an audience member. While fan bases for musical groups vary, most bands counted on a musical community of approximately 100 people to regularly attend shows. I also interviewed and shadowed several important “cultural brokers” as they went about their jobs as

radio DJs, concert organizers and promoters, and club managers in the Latin music scene. These individuals were instrumental because they provided insiders' views of how Charlotte's music scene functions. The chart above is not a comprehensive list; many groups have been left out. Out of necessity, I included bands that were willing to grant me access to their lives and performances. However, I made every attempt to find musical representatives of every genre and nationality in order to showcase the diversity and vitality of the local music scene. What follows is a brief description of each band, with comments on the band members, their music, audience, and my association with them. In following chapters I will draw on each band for examples and evidence to support my analysis regarding Latin music in Charlotte.

Ultimanota

The first band, Ultimanota, is a group composed of a guitarist, bass player, percussionist, saxophonist, and vocalist playing what the leader of the group called "cheesy cocktail music" at local restaurants during Friday or Saturday dinner hour and at weddings, birthdays, and other private events. Their music includes covers of classic *boleros*, rock and pop standards from the US and Latin America, and a few *salsa* and *merengue* numbers. As a cover band, they walk a fine line between playing a tune in a recognizable fashion and trying to make the song their own. Ultimanota will rearrange a number- say Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean" (1982)- by adding Latin rhythms, namely congas, cowbell, and a different syncopation to the vocals. During their performances, songs sung in English and Spanish are interspersed, and during conversations with band members, I learned that they see no division between "American" and "Latin" music, these are their favorite songs, tunes they grew up listening to, from groups that they have seen in concert, and on constant rotation in their CD players at home and on their iPods.

Ultimanota is also notable for their diversity of nationality, age, familial and immigration status. Three of the musicians are from Venezuela, one from Mexico, another from El Salvador. Band members have mixed immigration statuses and two are naturalized US citizens. While the group represents a certain sensibility of an older generation of Latino immigrants, one of their members is barely out of his teenage years. While two of the band's members are married and have children, one member met and established a relationship with a woman during my stay in Charlotte. Another band member has a long-distance girlfriend in Venezuela.

Ultimanota stands out for another reason, namely they were the band that gave me almost total access into the functioning of the group, allowing me to tag along to performances at private parties, as well as observe rehearsals and the recording of a demo. During the course of my study, Tony, the leader of the band, became my chief interlocutor. I worked with Tony not just on his band, but also at a local non-profit, the Latin American Coalition (La Coalición), where he is the Events Manager in charge of planning and coordinating festivals and shows the Coalition puts on to raise money and promote Latino cultural pride in Charlotte. Moreover, Tony is the co-founder of a local concert promotion company, Carlotan Rock, which brings rock bands from Latin America to play in Charlotte and puts on an annual *rock en español* festival featuring local and regional bands. The wealth of information and back story Tony and his bandmates provided was invaluable, particularly since many of them had been in other bands previously and knew many prominent Latin musicians in town.

Dorian Gris

The second band, Dorian Gris, is a punk/heavy metal group made up of a guitarist, bassist, drummer, and lead singer. They play a mix of covers and original compositions, mainly in Spanish, but with an occasional rock song in English thrown in. Dorian Gris' audience

consists of mainly young working-class men and women from urban areas in Mexico who dress and act the part that differentiates them from their counterparts from rural and Northern Mexican provinces by wearing long hair, leather jackets, jeans and tennis shoes (as opposed to cowboy boots, Stetson hats, and embossed dress shirts) and engaging in a dance style of play violence and moshing during shows. The band's lead singer, Juan, caters to this audience, interacting with concertgoers by using callous and obscene language, walking out into the mosh-pit and jumping into the action, and allowing friends in the crowd to sing a verse during a song. The audience rewards him with jeers and commentary between songs and by bringing him cold beers from the bar. While seemingly chaotic, all of this interaction between performers and audience is choreographed and learned behavior- commonplace during performances by Mexican rock bands such as El Tri, Maldita Vecindad, and Café Tacuba- and Dorian Gris provides a localized and intimate version for a group of Mexican immigrants to Charlotte.

Ironically, three of Dorian Gris's members are not even from Mexico, instead hailing from Ecuador, and the band started out playing another type of music popular throughout Latin America, covers of English groups such as post-punk band The Cure, electronic group Depeche Mode, and new wave rock band The Police. However, after playing a few shows and having audience members suggest songs they should play and albums they should listen to, the band found themselves changing their style to accommodate an enthusiastic yet critical audience.

During the time of this study, Dorian Gris experienced a difficult and tumultuous period. Holbach, their bassist- facing economic distress because of diminished earnings from his job installing countertops, and encountering creative disagreements over the direction of the band's music- decided to take a sabbatical and was replaced with a bassist from another local rock band. The band had trouble drawing sizeable audiences to their shows; with the economic recession, it

seemed that people were not attending concerts in the numbers they had two to three years earlier. Finally, their guitarist and band leader, Carlos, decided to pack it in during the summer months. The band took a break and when they reconvened, their longtime drummer Alex did not return and was replaced by a young drummer from another heavy metal group. Through it all, Carlos stressed that the band was a “hobby,” that they played for fun and if it stopped being enjoyable then the band would lose its purpose and break up for good (Interview 2/19/2010, Interview 3/5/2010).

Banda TecnoCaliente & Los Mentirosos

The third and fourth bands considered in this study both play variations of *regional mexicano*, a genre that includes *banda*, *norteño*, *pasito*, and *polka*- styles of popular music from the rural states of northern Mexico and the southwestern United States.

Los Mentirosos is a band from Gastonia, a suburb of Charlotte, made up of a bass player, two drummers, a keyboard player, accordion player, and several vocalists. Most of the band members hail from the Mexican state of Querétaro, and they play regional Mexican genres mixed with R&B vocal stylings while wearing baggy jeans, matching silkscreen t-shirts, and hats inspired by urban fashions made popular by hip-hop and R&B artists.

Banda TecnoCaliente, another regional mexicano group, is made up of keyboardists, a drummer, and several vocalists. Their name, “tecno-caliente,” derives from the band’s particular style, which is a subset of *banda* called *tecnobanda* because of its heavy reliance on synthesized sounds produced through use of “teclados,” or keyboards. Banda TecnoCaliente relies on synthesized trumpet, accordion, and other instrumental sounds manufactured by keyboards on stage while the singers harmonize. The band dresses in the more common *banda* manner, with brightly-colored matching sport coat and bell bottom pants, with the band’s name embroidered

on the back of the jacket and side of the leggings, white dress shirt, and cowboy boots.

TecnoCaliente's music varies from romantic ballads, up-tempo dance numbers and even occasional collaborations with a local *merengue/bachata* singer, Leydy Bonilla.

Bands like Los Mentirosos and Banda TecnoCaliente play music that retains strong ties to rural agrarian traditions in Mexico, but at the same time evokes contemporary situations among urban-living migrants and relies on sophisticated technology and instrumentation. Band members are not alone in their cowboy get-ups; audience members often come dressed in snakeskin boots, *vaqueros* (jeans, but translating literally as “cowboys”), patterned shirts, and cowboy hats (often with the name of the Mexican state where they are from). While many bands use acoustic instruments amplified by microphone hook-up (trumpets, accordion, guitars and guitar-like string instruments), just as numerous are the bands that utilize keyboards to synthesize these familiar sounds during a performance. Groups constantly reference traditional popular musical forms from rural Mexico, singing a *corrido* telling a story of migration or drug trafficking or blasting out a *pasito duranguense* for everyone to dance to, but these groups sometimes throw in elements of electronic music, including techno and trance beats, or riffs from American R&B songs.

Bakalao Stars

The fifth band is Bakalao Stars, a ska/rock/reggae band that has three guitarists, a drummer, bassist, keyboard player, saxophone, and several vocalists. Started by two brothers from Colombia, the band sings in Spanish and has a dedicated fan base that attends all of their shows. Inspired by earlier Latin rock groups, particularly La Rúa, the group began opening shows for better-known bands and having “paid their dues,” now headlines shows and can lay claim to being the longest continuously running rock group in the Latin music scene. Bakalao

Stars often appears onstage in playful costumes, from Hawaiian shirts to afros and gorilla masks, and plays up tempo and driving rhythms with catchy lyrics that get the audience singing and dancing along. Many of the audience members are not just fans, but friends from school or work, and part of the same cohort of young, educated and middle-class children of immigrants or 1.5 generation immigrants who journeyed to the US as young children.

For all their (local) renown, Bakalao Stars also felt some of the same economic distress that affected other bands. After playing several concerts in the fall/winter of 2009, they took a long break, not playing a concert again until the late summer of 2010. During this break, however, they continued to rehearse and develop new material. Their weekly rehearsals embodied what band leader Christian called the true essence of the band, as a forum to jam and a respite from stressful jobs, where kin and fictive kin joined together to relax and have fun.

Tropic Culture

The sixth band, Tropic Culture, is a rock/funk/disco/world music group consisting of two guitarists, a bassist, two percussionists, a violin, and a horn section with trumpet, trombone and two saxophone players. The group was founded by a brother and sister and their cousin, all originally from Puerto Rico, and has grown and changed personnel over the years. Tropic Culture plays mostly their own compositions with a few covers thrown in, with songs sung in both Spanish and English. Tropic Culture has been described as a "festival band" or jam band, the type of group that is most in its element at fairs, festivals, and outdoor celebrations. This is an accurate description, if one takes this label to mean that the band is a "big tent" affair, where various styles and genres exist side by side, and are imperfectly and messily mixed together. At times, Tropic Culture brings the funk of Tower of Power, the throwback disco of Jamiroquai, or the breaks common in lite, smooth and acid jazz, all with a side of tropical rhythm. When

interviewed in July 2010, group members hinted that they were in the process of changing their sound, and by late 2010 they appeared to have made that change by featuring an enhanced horn section and more upbeat tunes in what they called a "Dance Revolution."

Tropic Culture's audience, similar to Bakalao Stars, mainly consists of young middle-class people- the primary difference being that they seem to attract more English-speaking and non-Latino listeners (perhaps because they sing more in English). The two bands sometimes even perform together; one of the lead singers of Tropic Culture, Alberto, has sung and recorded a song with Bakalao Stars, and at a concert in fall 2010, Tropic Culture invited several members of Bakalao Stars onstage to sing a cover of a Manu Chao song. Tropic Culture is also well integrated into the local coffee shop/art gallery crowd, playing acoustic sets at a Latina-owned coffee shop and performing at a spoken word poetry/art installation event. To put it more academically, they and their audience are prime examples of what Richard Florida (2003) dubs the "creative class," a group that works in high-tech sectors during the day and participates in a particular creative/artistic atmosphere at night.

Orquesta Mayor

The seventh band, Orquesta Mayor, is a salsa dance band that models itself after classic salsa combos like El Gran Combo de Puerto Rico and the Fania All-Stars. The group consists of a brass section of three or four horns (trumpets and trombones), a percussion section (with timbales, bongos, congas, and clave/cowbell), bass player and three or four vocalists. Their lineup depends on the song and its instrumentation. Although several of the musicians are Puerto Rican, the leader of the group (and trumpet player), Helder, is a Mexican immigrant trained in a conservatory in Mexico City. Orquesta Mayor plays festivals and concerts, but also at parties and at dance clubs. Their audience consists mainly of an older crowd of Puerto Rican and other

in-migrants originally from the Spanish Caribbean who grew up or spent some time living in the New York metropolitan area. The band also draws younger salsa dance enthusiasts, some of whom are non-Latino, looking to dance to live music.

Leydy Bonilla, Bachata Flow and DS The Evolution

The next three groups- Bachata Flow, Leydy Bonilla, and DS The Evolution- I consider jointly because they often collaborate on songs and share audiences. Of the three, Leydy Bonilla, a Dominican-born *merengue* singer, is perhaps the most well known, having toured throughout Europe and in New York, and in the Dominican Republic. Since moving to Charlotte from New York to be close to her family, she performs with Bachata Flow, a group of young musicians playing *bachata* and *merengue*, as her backup band. Leydy Bonilla sings mostly in Spanish, although she has experimented with songs in English. At times she incorporates popular American influences in her music, crooning R&B covers during a show.

Bachata Flow consists of six young Dominican transplants, mostly from New York, who moved to Charlotte separately and then formed a band. The group has two guitarists, a bass player, *congero*, *tambor* player, and two singers, one of whom plays *güiro*. Bachata Flow manages to reference the old school way of playing *bachata*, yet, as their promoter Gonzalo Pérez states, they bring an urban Latin sound to the music. By this, he means a certain sophistication and hipness, reflected not just in the music, but in the dress styles of the musicians and of their audience. This attitude is mirrored in the Dominican community in Charlotte where, again, the majority is transplants from New York who have found success as merchants and small business owners catering to the Latino community.

DS The Evolution consists of two artists, one Dominican, the other Puerto Rican, who sing and rap over DJ-produced beats. Although the group plays a *reggaetón* style, the group is

quick to distance themselves from what they see as negative associations *reggaetón* has with violence and drugs, framing their music in a more general “urban Latino” category that corresponds with their self-portrayal as two upstanding young men. Moreover, the duo does sing the occasional *bachata* cover and has collaborated with Leydy Bonilla at concerts. Of all the musical groups in Charlotte, DS The Evolution appeared to be the one most poised to “make it big” and become famous during my time there. They went from opening shows for local headliners to touring nationally and internationally with well-known *reggaetón* artists and appearing on Spanish-language television variety shows broadcast nationally.

SoulBrasil

The final band, SoulBrasil, plays Brazilian genres such as *bossa nova*, *samba*, and MBP at local clubs and festivals. The group consists of a guitarist/vocalist, bass player, and two percussionists; three of the members are from Brazil and the other member is a white man from the United States. As part of an ongoing debate within Latin American Studies and ethnomusicology, I decided to include Brazilian music, and particularly the music of this group, within the fold of the Latin music scene in Charlotte. There are several reasons for this. First, the musical similarities are unmistakable. Brazil shares many of the African influences that shape Spanish Caribbean genres like *salsa*, *merengue*, and *cumbia*. Brazilian music has long engaged in a dialogue with Latin American music, both firsthand through the regional popularity of individual artists, and secondhand through the amalgamation of Brazilian and Cuban influences in Latin Jazz. Musicians from other Charlotte bands, for example, Tony from Ultimanota, relayed the fact that they enjoyed listening to *bossa nova* and other Brazilian genres. Second, Brazilians and Latino immigrants, although speaking different languages, share a common history of tumultuous political and social upheaval in their home countries throughout

the last 50 years, with military coups, economic crises, and massive urbanization. Moreover, they share a common experience as immigrants to the US, living in the same neighborhoods, working in the service economy, and facing uncertainty about legal status and rights. Third, while I was in Charlotte, there were concerted efforts, by musicians and organizations, to include Brazilian culture as part of Latino-themed performances and concerts. Thus, Reinaldo, the vocalist/guitarist for SoulBrasil, was invited to perform with Ultimanota at several shows. SoulBrasil and a Brazilian dance troupe, Movimentos de Samba, were featured performers at a Latin festival and at a concert celebrating Brazilian Carnaval.

“Musical Brokers”

Finally, I would like to describe another set of participants in Charlotte’s Latin music scene in addition to the musicians and their audiences- radio DJs, band promoters, and club and restaurant owners. In the vein of Arlene Dávila’s analysis of “cultural brokers” (2001) who act as translators and go-betweens for Latino culture to the outside world, I would describe these individuals as “musical brokers” who interpret and package musical performance and groups for distinct audiences in their venues and on-air. These individuals are highly influential in terms of choosing bands to perform and deciding how the performance is presented through advertising, location, and stage production (sound system, lighting, set time). Their efforts shape the look and sound of concerts and festivals, with beneficial or damaging results. On several occasions, brokers confided that a poorly attended concert was the result of poor promotion or the wrong price point, while well attended shows often had ubiquitous advertising and a certain buzz created by good promotion and planning. However, I do not want to overstate their power as tastemakers and make their power sound deterministic; they work within the limitations of corporate media structuring (radio DJs), the financial constraints of owning a small business, and

the whims of an audience's leisure time. At times, audiences pushed back, whether by demanding encores or by showing their displeasure with unsatisfactory music and long delays in stage production.

So who makes up this group? Some are musicians, such as Tony, the guitarist from Ultimanota, who also runs a small concert promotion company that brings rock groups from Latin America to perform in Charlotte. Restaurant and bar owners often have little experience with music, but have come to realize that having live music in their establishment provides a draw that helps business. Music venue owners and radio DJs usually have more in-depth knowledge of music and familiarity with musicians, at least in the genre/category of music they specialize in. The specializations of these musical brokers usually fall upon geographic, national origin, and class lines. Venues cater to specific audiences, such as the working-class Mexican immigrant audience of Los Mentirosos or the middle-class, multicultural audience of Tropic Culture, and it is not often that these audiences mix. In many ways, this mirrors the social segregation present in both Latin American and US societies on a micro-level. However, these concerts provide the opportunity for community building between audience members and between audience and musicians, constructing social ties that I will show extend outside of the walls of the club or restaurant.

A Note about Names

Speakers of Spanish may have already noted that several of the bands mentioned above have interesting names. I would like to briefly translate and discuss some of these names and analyze why this naming is important in terms of music-making in Charlotte. First, there is a tendency among rock groups to use wordplay and a mixture of English and Spanish to name their groups. Dorian Gris is a reference to Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (2011) and is a

reflection of the private school, anglophile education of the band's members in Ecuador and their goth, punk, and heavy metal musical tastes. Bakalao Stars references *bacalao* (cod fish), a food commonly eaten, particularly among the working class, in Spain, Portugal, Brazil, the Spanish Caribbean, and coastal Colombia and Venezuela. The "Stars" portion of Bakalao Stars refers to their self-categorization as a jam band playing a mixture of styles, such as the reggae group Easy Dub All Stars, or the Afro-Cuban All Stars. Another group, Avión sans Pilot, weaves words from Spanish, French, and English into its name- "Plane without a Pilot" doesn't have the same feeling- to describe their runaway plane death-metal sound.

Second, among *regional mexicano* groups, there are multiple traditions that groups tap into in the naming process. The most famous *norteño* group extant, Los Tigres del Norte, epitomizes the classic naming equation- Animal/person + del (of) + place/landscape. A band from the Charlotte area that follows this pattern is Los Forasteros del Norte (the Outsiders of the North, highlighting their marginal immigrant identity). Another tradition involves naming the band using the formula- Banda (band) + name/descriptive term. Banda TecnoCaliente fits this mold. A third tradition involves a descriptive name using animals or adjectives as nouns. Los Mentirosos (the Liars) fits this formula.

Third, *música tropical* groups tend to have names that reflect their perspective of the band's musical direction. Thus, one finds names like Furia Tropical (Tropical Fury), a local band that plays *merengue*, *bachata*, and *salsa*. Bachata Flow's name reflects their affinity both for playing *bachata/merengue* and mixing in R&B and hip-hop elements to their music and dress styles. DS The Evolution is a name that reflects the changing viewpoint and presentation of this local band that now tours internationally. The duo started out as D.S. or Dominican Squad and rapped and sang *reggaetón*. In their new guise as DS The Evolution, they continue to play

reggaetón mixed with the occasional *bachata*, but have shed the “squad” part of the name, which lends association to African-American rap groups.

Finally, some bands also give nicknames to bandmembers as part of the process of making music. The core members of Bakalao Stars all have nicknames, such as *Reggaeman*, *Mr. Popo*, and *Gorilla*. These nicknames correspond to the sense of playfulness and acting that Bakalao Stars engages in when they take the stage. They often dress in creative costumes, including, for one show, gorilla masks. Leydy Bonilla (pronounced like lady), however, is not a stage name, but her birth name; in several Latin American countries like the Dominican Republic and Venezuela, this reflects a common creativity in naming children (Romero 2007). Throughout the following chapters I will attempt to highlight and translate names and show how the naming process links into aesthetic visions for the bands.

Chapter 3:

Bands Making Musical Communities

Musical Community

“Musical community” connotes a sense of belonging and shared affiliation around notions of class, ethnicity, language, style and taste expressed through music and other creative cultural expressions. Musical community exists at the intersection of local and mass consumption, often serving as a point of mediation between locally produced, “grassroots” expressions of music and nationally and globally popular mass expressions of music. Particular genres have settings that are more appropriate for its rules of interaction, both in terms of the music venues where performances happen and the neighborhoods of the city where audiences and musicians situate their music. Charlotte’s musicians and audience form community at the micro-level of the club and neighborhood, but also connect to global and transnational networks through touring and social ties to musical communities elsewhere.

This chapter documents how bands and their audience engage in a process of community formation around music. Working together to create music, they establish their political agency through negotiations of genre, style, outlook, and through performance of music. The Latin music scene in Charlotte consists of the Eastside, Intown, and Uptown districts, each loosely corresponding to a geographic area of the city. Within these districts, band-made communities highlight class divisions and tensions around race and ethnicity within the Latino community and between Latinos and non-Latinos.

My analysis of “community” acknowledges the limitations of the term as a commonsense yet rarely defined concept (Creed 2006), but focuses on the process of community formation through the popular practice of music-making. I find “community” a useful term for describing

and analyzing the small-scale gatherings of musicians and audience where performance of genre and common experience became the basis for a sense of solidarity. However, my view of “community” is critical and looks out for the temporal and imagined dimensions of community formation. While new forms of post-industrial and post-modern community are forming in “virtual” and transnational settings, the state continues to affect how and to what extent groups formulate a sense of community and shared understandings of the world. In Charlotte, for example, immigration enforcement through the 287(g) program has hampered community among Latinos because of family separation and fear stemming from state policy, but it has also created a rallying point for Latino immigrants and their allies to forge a political movement around immigration reform. The diversity of the Latino community, with immigrants from across Latin America and the Caribbean, also restricts a shared sense of belonging, as Latino immigrants remain divided by questions of class, legal status, ethnicity and racial identity, and cultural expressions. These divisions, the most significant being class, shape the musical communities I outline below.

Through interactions with their audiences, bands channel sentiment and provide structure to musical communities that, within the larger Latino population in Charlotte, were often dramatically divided along class lines. As such, bands “make” these communities by embodying the shared values and aesthetic of their fans and constituting a space of trust and mutual respect. This chapter examines how bands make community in the three districts of the city where Latin music is created and analyzes how band-audience interaction embodies class identity through music and performance. These three geographic districts, Eastside, Intown, and Uptown, are located in separate and largely segregated areas of Charlotte. The Eastside district consists of bands such as Banda TecnoCaliente and Los Mentirosos and their audiences, in other words,

mostly listeners of *regional mexicano* music. The Intown district includes bands such as Bakalao Stars and Tropic Culture and their fans. The Uptown district consists of bands such as Bachata Flow, DS Evolution, Leydy Bonilla, and SoulBrasil and fans of *música tropical* and Brazilian music.

A series of moments, described below and arising through live performance, highlight how bands and audience engage in a dialectical process of defining the boundaries and direction of their music. It is through this process that they create solidarity and a sense of community. This “musical community” is fleeting (sometimes only lasting the length of a concert) but some bands are adroit at building ties so that a sense of community extends beyond performances into informal social interactions and online social networking sites. These communities are part of larger social networks based in the workplace, church, neighborhood, or school where Latino immigrants remake home in the United States, retain linkages to their home countries, and form transnational bonds with fellow migrants. However, I argue that musical communities form a space apart where Latino immigrants draw on these social ties but also enter into performance that itself become the basis for communal bonds. Live performance, manifest in band-audience interaction, is an active process that includes three parts: 1) the moment- a live experience with liminal qualities; 2) a ritual- where performers invent tradition and push up against the boundaries of genre and musical taste; and 3) an artifact- to be recorded, interpreted, and remembered by community members and the anthropologist as representative of the culture(s) of Latino immigrants to Charlotte.

The “community” in this case is constituted on multiple levels. Who is in the audience? Who is not? First, there is a stark geographic segregation corresponding to the class and racial segregation of Charlotte, highlighted below, that ties musical communities to neighborhoods (the

three districts) where musicians find welcoming spaces for performance and audience members feel at home going to listen to music. Second, we must account for factors that limit who goes to see bands' live performances: age (if the concert is at a bar or nightclub), enjoyment of live music (often played at high volume and late at night), the charisma of the band members, cultural and linguistic knowledge, weather, and money. Finally, there is an open dialogue between musicians and audience that creates a fan base. Band members draw on other social networks by inviting friends to shows, but new ties are formed with prior strangers during performances when musician and listener interact. Some musical communities are more successful than others at cementing these ties and coalescing around a shared vision of what their community does.

Although the musical communities outlined below may appear drastically different and even oppositional in their outlooks and styles, I argue that there is one unifying facet that unites them: all play music that inspires (indeed, requires) dance and kinetic movement. If there is one thing that unifies Latin music and provides the basis for speaking of a Latin music scene in Charlotte, it is this practice. Latin popular music, despite its diversity of genres and varied geographic roots, when performed live is music for dancing. It is this aspect of active audience participation that, while not separating Latin music from other dance forms, does distance it from the relative passivity of audience participation in mainstream popular music (and classical and jazz forms) in the United States (see Adorno 1941).

Table 3: Charlotte’s Latino Musical Communities

Musical District	Bands	Musical Styles	Audience	Venues
Eastside	Dorian Gris, Los Mentirosos, Banda TecnoCaliente	<i>Regional mexicano: banda, cumbia, norteño, polka, pasito</i> Mexican Rock	working-class Mexican immigrants	Kalipso, Skandalos, the Dark Room, Palenque, Backstage, Fanta Festival
Intown	Tropic Culture, Bakalao Stars	Latin rock, ska, reggae, pop, funk, disco, world music, <i>cumbia</i>	Middle-class, 1.5 generation, multicultural Latinos	Evening Muse, Neighborhood Theatre, Visulite, Smokey Joe’s, Festival Latinoamericano
Uptown	Bachata Flow, Leydy Bonilla, DS Evolution, Orquesta Mayor, SoulBrasil	<i>bachata, merengue, salsa, reggaetón, bossa nova, samba, MBP</i>	Puerto Ricans, Dominican & Cuban immigrants; Brazilian immigrants, multicultural Latinos	Cosmo’s, LaTorre’s, Luna Lounge, Punta Cana, Chima, festivals

Dorian Gris

I sat by the entrance to Skandalos with Carlos and his wife Rebecca on a chilly night in February. As a steady stream of fans entered and paid the cover charge, Carlos, the guitarist for the featured band that night, Dorian Gris, greeted each person, often by name, and gave them a copy of the band’s latest EP, *Live at the Dark Room* (2009). The crowd, dressed in leather jackets and vests, jeans, studded belts, tennis shoes, and wearing long hair, mohawks, and the occasional mullet, mixed fashions from heavy metal and punk rock traditions. Soon, the show started, and Carlos joined his bandmates on stage in a t-shirt reading “No human being is illegal.” After a few covers, of the Doors, los Jaguares and Molotov, Dorian Gris launched into a set of their own songs. At first the audience stood around watching, catching up with old friends,

having a few beers from the bar; but soon a long dreadlocked figure burst into the center of the floor, headbanging enthusiastically to the opening chords of a song, and within seconds, five or six other guys joined him in a bout of energetic pushing and slamming against one another. The instigator, “Greñas,” (Mop-head) is a local promoter of heavy metal concerts (including this one) and musician; the other dancers his friends and fellow fans of Dorian Gris. At first glance, the dancing looks violent, but everyone has a smile on his face and no fights break out. There is a delicate ballet as boyfriends on the margins of the circle of dancers shield girlfriends from errant blows and guys nursing beers give wayward dancers a shove back into the center of the floor.

Juan, the lead singer of Dorian Gris, signals that he is thirsty, and somebody in the crowd goes and gets him a beer from the bar. Catcalls and whistles fill the air as Juan curses at the crowd in Mexican slang, smiling and looking sheepishly down at his feet before he signals the start of the next song. The band launches into a cover of Zurdok’s “El Gallito Inglés” (1997) Tired of pacing around on stage, Juan launches himself into the crowd, and a circle of fans quickly converge on him, flailing arms and hips in every direction. He sings into the mike:

“¿Quién es, quién es?” (Who is it, who is it?)

And passes the mike to a fan, who screams in a guttural timbre...

“Es el GALLITO INGLÉS!” (it’s the little English cock!)

Juan and his fans link together, arms around shoulders, and turn in a line, he drops to his knees to sing, then gives the mike over to another audience member to finish- “es el Gallito Inglés!”

The interaction between band and audience at Dorian Gris shows are telling in their ritualized yet chaotic nature. The band members, and particularly Juan, thrive on the interactions with their fans, and any pretense of separation between performer and listener is quickly broken down as the dancers draw Juan off stage and into the throng on the floor. This enhances the

physical bond between band and audience; a crowd of performers embodying the music in exaggerated movement as they hurl themselves at each other. Male dancers mix sweat as they shake and jump, occasionally putting arms around each other's shoulders. In this interaction, masculinity takes center stage and the feminine is pushed to the margins. Women participate, but only momentarily; few women choose to enter the fray in front of the stage.



Figure 4: Fans dancing at a Dorian Gris concert

But this is also a verbal interaction. The crowd hurls friendly insults at the band between songs, and they return the favor with scatological dialogue (see Dorian Gris' "Paranoia" (2009) or El Tri's "La Raza Más Chida" (2004)). Juan relishes the exchange, and smiles every time a particularly creative phrase or jarring expletive is hurled his way. He makes sure to pause just long enough to encourage this dialogue, but not long enough to let it take over the performance before launching into another song.

The balance of words is delicate; at another concert with the same fans, Dorian Gris opens for local rock singer Johnny Mortera. When Mortera asks the crowd, "¿Donde están las

MUJERES!?” (where are the women at?), he gets a tepid response. His songs don’t contain enough hard driving rhythm for the audience, and he’s singing out of tune. So the peanut gallery in the back starts shouting:

“CU-LE-RO! CULERO!” (Asshole! Asshole!)¹⁶

“Otra!...Otra!...otra Banda!” (Encore!...Another!...Another band!)”

“Toca uno del Tri, Toca uno de Dorian Gris!” (Play one from El Tri, Play one of Dorian Gris’ songs.)

The audience is giving their feedback, and whether positive or negative, there is the instant gratification in knowing what the audience thinks of the band’s performance.



Figure 5: A verbal exchange between Juan and fans

To say that a performance by Dorian Gris is representative of class identity would be misleading. The ideas and markers of class identity that band and audience display are not just facets they bring to the concert fully formed, rather this musical community, like others I found

¹⁶ *Culero* is a Mesoamerican Spanish colloquialism that has varied meanings. From the word *culo* (ass, butt) and *-ero* (personal suffix), the term can mean: asshole, a mean or bad person, or ass-fucker in reference to a person’s alleged homosexuality (the latter particularly used by Salvadorans and Hondurans). Usually the term is deployed as an insult, although in the case above and most musical settings it is used as friendly criticism to be yelled when a singer forgets lyrics or a DJ miscues a record. It has less gravitas than similar homosexual insinuations attached to the verb *chingar* (to fuck, penetrate) (Paz 1994, Byrd 2000).

in Charlotte, formulate their ideas around class belonging through performances. They bring facets of urban street culture from Mexico City and other urban centers in Mexico to a club in Charlotte that features rock, but also *regional mexicano* and *música tropical* (on different nights or in different rooms), in a neighborhood where they work as service industry laborers and that features a heavy police presence targeting undocumented immigrants. I found that the interactions between band and audience and the performances that both engaged in revealed more about class dynamics than any simplistic accounting of the socioeconomic status or class outlook of band members gathered through interviews (although these measures proved useful for other analysis). The give and take between band and audience is part of a dialectical process where musical communities form class identity by working through the contradictions of their role in US society and as migrants who maintain transnational links to Latin America. They use music to decipher their positionality, to arrive at an interpretation of their role as a young urban proletariat. Thus, while this account seeks to problematize class as not something that is not pre-determined, deterministic, or essentializing, it also will show that class identity has real contributing factors (in Charlotte's Latino community, geographic segregation, education, national origin, employment outcomes and legal status) and actual effects (namely, the formation of different ideas of politics, leisure time, and musical style).

As Bourdieu (1984) suggests, groups' choices, expressed through their musical taste, reflect levels of social capital, socialization in school and other settings where the senses are "trained" to appreciate certain ways of expressing sound, and ideologies of class. These choices serve to position communities as affiliated with certain styles and opposed to other styles and groups that express those distinct tastes. While I will go into further detail in Chapter 6, taste is

relevant to this discussion in the way that it helps create a sense of belonging and acceptance within a community, particularly through performance during music-making.

Dorian Gris' audience demonstrates this class engagement through their dancing and verbal exchanges. Both are "dirty"- whether it's the sweat, feigned violence, and physicality of their dance styles or their scatological conversation with Juan, the lead singer. This dirtiness corresponds to how they view and are perceived in their role as proletarian workers in restaurant kitchens, construction sites, landscaping, and custodial jobs. While association with this type of work could lead to negative stereotypes, many of the audience members I spoke with embraced the difficulty and dirtiness of their occupations. Some men viewed it as proof of their masculinity, while both men and women stressed the sacrifices they were willing to make on the job (dangerous conditions, long hours, payment scams) for their families both in the United States and abroad. While I have framed this correlation as part of the making of class identity, I must reiterate here that the audiences for all the bands featured in this chapter are mostly made up of young people, from teenagers to those in their thirties, so the ideas formulated are tied into views of youthfulness, coming of age, and hopes and dreams for the future.

*¡Que Naco!*¹⁷

It's Sunday evening in Charlotte, and aside from the stray tailgater making his way home after watching a football game, there's not much to do. At least, one might get that impression walking around uptown Charlotte (which is what natives call downtown). But if you make your way up North Tryon Street from center city, past the looming glass skyscrapers, past the homeless shelters and used car dealerships, behind a bowling alley, a nightclub called Kalipso is

¹⁷ "Naco" is a colloquial term that means base, lower class, or 'ghetto.' The term may originate from 'totonaco,' a group of indigenous people from the eastern coastal and mountain regions of Mexico, present day Veracruz, Puebla, and Hidalgo (see Cabrera 1974). However, Marco Polo Hernández-Cuevas asserts that the term originates from Chinaco, a term referring to African descendants in Mexico, and must be understood in the context of the *mestizaje* racial project that erased Afro-Mexicans from Mexican national identity (Hernández-Cuevas 2004; 2011).

just opening its doors. Every Sunday night Mexican immigrants, many celebrating the fact that Monday is their day off, gather to listen to music and to dance. Parking in a poorly-lit gravel lot, you enter and get frisked by surly off-duty cops, then step onto the dance floor. A DJ plays the latest *banda* and *pasito duranguense*, couples dance, men drink can after can of *Modelo Especial*. Then, a local band gets up on a tiny stage wedged into the corner of the dance floor with wooden railings and a small, steep staircase front and center. The group is energetic, their music driving, and the audience appreciates them, particularly if the lead singer calls out the province in Mexico from which they hail: “¡Viva Michoacán!” “¿Dónde está la gente de Nayarit?” Sometimes, the club has arranged for a more well-known, visiting artist to perform on their tour through the Southern United States, say Larry Hernández, Banda Recodo, or Los Tucanes de Tijuana, and the room buzzes with anticipation.¹⁸ The artist makes them wait; radio DJs hover outside in their mobile studio hyping the event over the airwaves to get more people coming in to pack the place, and the DJ keeps the audience in motion while the featured group makes their way from a nearby hotel. Finally, the music stops, a video is projected on wall screens with the band’s name, its promotional accolades, and its latest hit song. The group makes its way to the stage, through the crowd (there’s no backstage at Kalipso) where fans converge to try to get a handshake, a kiss, a picture with someone famous. The band starts playing, the crowd cheers, then returns to dancing, the dancers sweating in the airless room, skillfully turning partners without stepping on neighbors’ toes. Single men line the walls, searching for openings to ask women for a dance. After playing for several hours, the band begins to wind down. Last call means men double fistfing cans of beer, staff cleaning mountains of trash, and altercations quickly snuffed by security guards escorting young men out of the

¹⁸ Larry Hernández is a young Norteño singer of *narcocorridos* and love songs. Banda Recodo is the oldest continually performing *banda sinaloense* group. Los Tucanes de Tijuana are a Norteño group whose song “Mis Tres Animales” (1995) is arguably the most renowned *narcocorrido*.

building. Afterwards the band signs autographs, poses for pictures, and talks with radio DJs and local musicians, before venturing out on the road to the next town.

On any given Sunday night, clubs like Kalipso on Charlotte's Eastside cater to an audience of working-class Mexican immigrants. The musicians and audiences at these shows make up the first grouping of band-made musical communities in Charlotte's Latin music scene. Housed in old converted warehouses and retail stores, clubs like Kalipso, Midnight Rodeo, Skandalos, Palenque and Backstage provide opportunities for local bands to play live music for an audience made up of recent immigrants from across Mexico. When I spoke with audience members and musicians, they insisted that these types of clubs did more; they provided a space where audience members felt "comfortable." Numerous times the point was brought home to me that this crowd did not attend shows at uptown clubs or in gentrified neighborhoods like NoDa (North Davidson) or Plaza Midwood, even if many of them worked as waiters in restaurants, janitors in offices, or as maids or landscapers in these areas. This geographic segregation, confining the recreational activities of Mexican immigrants to several neighborhoods in East and South Charlotte, occurred despite the fact that clubs like Kalipso often had subpar sound systems and dilapidated facilities compared to other clubs. Many community members stressed their discomfort with traveling to Uptown clubs, where they felt out of place among middle-class and non-Mexican weekend partiers. This discomfort was re-enforced by fear of police checkpoints for DUI; under the 287(g) program in Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, police pulling someone over for a traffic violation could check immigration status and if undocumented, the driver could be detained and eventually deported. Even if you weren't "illegal," the sentiment in this community was that the

police singled out Mexican drivers for harassment and your chances of getting pulled over increased if you ventured outside of the neighborhood.¹⁹

This social segregation reveals one of the ironies of globalization. Latina/o immigrants, having traveled thousands of miles to arrive in Charlotte and maintaining transnational contacts through phone and internet connections, nevertheless fear traveling outside their neighborhoods during their leisure time. Their labor and physical bodies buttress the development of Charlotte into a globalizing city because many fill low wage service jobs that help support the “flexible” and “creative” work of the financial sector (Sassen 1988, Harvey 1989, Florida 2003). As part and parcel of Latina/o immigrants’ roles in the job market, they face policing of their bodies and impediments to their geographic mobility. As immigration scholars have long stated, the framing of immigrant labor as “illegal” and socially distinct from the mainstream enables the exploitation of immigrant workers and hinders their efforts to contest this exploitation (De Genova 2002, Griswold del Castillo & de Leon 1996, Montejano 1987). Moreover, local implementation of the 287(g) program can be seen as part of a larger process of implementing a regime of global apartheid (Harrison 2008, M. Davis 2006) that restricts movement of poor people from the global South through policing of bodies. Federal policies of border enforcement have curtailed the back and forth movement between countries that many immigrants, both documented and undocumented, used to engage in (Massey 2011). Individuals who had expired visas or had migrated without documentation often related their frustration with being stuck in one place. They knew it would be a big risk to return to visit family in Mexico and perhaps not be able to return to the United States. While Charlotte’s undocumented Latino residents might

¹⁹ According to a local Spanish-language newspaper, Latino drivers devised ingenious ways to warn other drivers about an impending police roadblock. Drivers passing a checkpoint in the opposite direction would flash headlights and use hand signals outside of rolled-down windows to warn oncoming drivers to turn around. José Cusicanqui, “‘*Los Puntos Malditos:*’ *Sin papeles se las ingenian para evitar los retenes policiales.*” *Que Pasa*, August 11, 2010, B1.

enjoy some of the cosmopolitan taste (Appadurai 1996) that is revealed when one leaves a parochial setting, they were denied the freedom of motion that other global travelers enjoy.

Further evidence of this geographic segregation appeared during a series of festivals held in summer 2010. Two festivals featuring *regional mexicano* music held in an Eastside park, the Fanta Festival and El Grito celebration, attracted tens of thousands of people. Two similar events, a soccer game featuring professional teams from Mexico and Honduras, and an indoor daylong concert with seven Mexican bands held at a community college near Uptown, attracted far less robust crowds. This despite the fact that all four events were heavily promoted on the radio and publicized in newspapers and all but the soccer game were held on Sunday afternoon.



Figure 6: Banda TecnoCaliente at the Fanta Festival on Charlotte’s Eastside

Yet there are exceptions to this link between nationality and participation in the music of one Charlotte district. Dorian Gris is a case in point. While the drummer is from Mexico, Carlos, the

guitarist, Juan, the lead singer, and Holbach, the bass player, are all from Ecuador. The band favors Mexican and American-origin rock songs and the vast majority of the audience is Mexican immigrants. The Ecuadorians have actively chosen to identify with the working-class Mexican audience that attends their shows, even though their personal histories might suggest another path. Growing up as schoolmates in Guayaquil, Carlos and Holbach were both from upper-class families with elite tastes: vacation homes on the beach, watching American football, expensive musical equipment and instruments. Holbach came to the United States to attend a high school military academy, and ended up moving to Charlotte and living a working class life as a cabinet and countertop installer in residential home construction. Carlos, after getting a degree and working in graphic design in Ecuador, came to the US in his mid-twenties to work for a newspaper. The newspaper owner, a fellow Ecuadoran, promised more than the long hours and minimal pay that Carlos got, and Carlos eventually quit and drifted from job to job. During the time I was in Charlotte, Carlos was an underemployed freelance designer and part-time US Census worker; he made ends meet by relying on his wife's full-time salary at a non-profit. Carlos and Holbach's identification with working-class Mexicans had much to do with their diminished class position in the US; they interacted with Mexican co-workers in their day jobs and enmeshed themselves within Mexican immigrant social networks, while maintaining separate Ecuadorian ties as well. For Carlos, choosing to have Dorian Gris play at Skandalos is a conscious decision that he contrasts with playing at other venues further in town, where the band has had unpleasant experiences. In an interview in English, Carlos recalls playing at an Intown club and the close relationship between his band and their fans.

Carlos: “Only one time, we went to play at one place downtown, but the guy who promotes shows, promotes more South American rock. You know, because we're Ecuadorians. The people who go expect to hear, like, Fito Paez, Charly Garcia, Soda Stereo...so we played our

own stuff, and our covers of El Tri, Molotov.²⁰ I always told the guys, we are what we are; we don't have to change just because we play another gig... so at that time people left."

SB: "People left?"

Carlos: "Yeah! Actually I really didn't care, because thirty guys from our usual crowd went to see us. And I was happy just to see them there. Like Greñas and his crew was there jumping..."

SB: "So when you are performing, do you look for particular people in the crowd? Do you say, 'Hey! There's so-and-so?'"

Carlos: "Yeah, yeah! Sure. Before I get into the stage, you can see familiar faces. They go all the time- not only to my show, but other shows. So I know some by name, others I just recognize faces. I always try to say hello, I always try to be very humble, to not try to think like 'I'm a rock star!' and even when Juan sings he goes down to the public and sings with the public. I mean, they're going to have fun. They are paying to see you; the only thing you can do is treat them with respect... There's a thing, like, I have to see people jumping from the stage. If I don't see jumping, then I feel like they're not having a good show. That's why I love so much playing to a Mexican crowd, more than my own South American crowd. South Americans are not very emotive, I mean, when they see a band they just *see* it. And I'm the same way."

SB: "They don't get into it."

Carlos: "When I see a band, I don't go jumping. But somehow people in Mexico, they really do, I mean even if you go to see like Los Enanitos Verdes, it's a very soft pop band, and they are jumping all the time, and slam-dancing and hitting everything."

SB: "Why do you think they do that?"

Carlos: "I don't know. I guess it has to be something cultural. I have no idea. Maybe they just want to liberate all these emotions, frustrations...but they tell me that's the way it is in Mexico, so maybe it's more like a Mexican thing. I don't know but to me it's more like they just want to- I mean, most of our crowd, I would say 90 percent are undocumented people, and they work these miserable jobs having like 8 dollars an hour and at least, you know, they can have fun, jump, and play..." (Interview with Author 3/5/2010)

²⁰ Fito Paez is an Argentine rock singer who since the 1980s has been known for his political lyrics. Charly Garcia is an Argentine singer and keyboardist who played in the bands Sui Generis and Serú Girán and wrote outspoken songs against the military dictatorship. Soda Stereo was an Argentine rock band who were the first to achieve success throughout Latin America. After suffering a stroke in May 2010, Soda Stereo's lead singer Gustavo Cerati remains in a coma. El Tri is Mexico's oldest and most famous rock band. Their lead singer, Alex Lora, is known for his piquant exchanges with audiences during performances and for writing songs about working-class Mexican life. Molotov is an alternative rock/rap band known for their vulgar and political lyrics.

Carlos' perceptions about his band's audience are telling. In Charlotte, there is a geographic and stylistic separation between Mexicans and South American musical communities that corresponds to social and cultural differences they have imported from their home countries and that have been shaped by unequal access to legal status and different socioeconomic trajectories between these two groups once in the United States. The separation led to Dorian Gris' sour reception by a downtown club's regular audience of South American immigrants, but a warm reception by their loyal fans. By embracing the musical tastes of their Mexican fans, Carlos and his bandmates represent a countertrend of South Americans breaching this separation of national origin. Having already developed a style in dialogue with their audience, Dorian Gris chose to stay true to their musical community rather than pander to a crowd that liked music they were familiar with, but that was not part of their band's repertoire.²¹ Dorian Gris embraces the public interaction between band and audience where both debate the quality of music.

Carlos comments on the crowd's practice of jumping. As described above, Dorian Gris' concerts give community members a chance to engage in these performative practices, just as they would do at a concert by El Tri or Molotov, but with more regular and close social ties to the musicians. The jumping is a choreographed yet erratic performance of head-banging, lifting both feet off the ground while bending the upper body at the waist and moving shoulder and arms in time to the rhythm of the song. It also entails leaping into and across the circle that has been created by the dancers and the bystanders; often people are pushed in a friendly and playful manner into the circle by friends, the person pushed then smiles and tries to get the instigator(s) to join in the dancing as well. At particularly exciting moments, audience members try to jump from the stage into the crowd or get the singer, Juan, to join them off stage. In this way the

²¹ Carlos, in fact, enjoys listening to Fito Paez and Charly Garcia, but doesn't consider this style of South American rock right for Dorian Gris.

dance breaks the artificial plane between stage and dance floor, audience and band. Sometimes Juan would run and slide across the dance floor on his knees while singing, like a rockabilly singer of old, and the crowd would thunderously voice its approval. Of course, the spilled beer and sweat on the floor greatly aided his slides. It was this kind of chaotic, frenetic, yet highly interactive physical performance that Dorian Gris aspired to as proof their music succeeded.

Soundcocho

In my blog on October 3, 2010 I wrote this about Charlotte group Tropic Culture:

“Let's take a further look at Tropic Culture. I've seen this Charlotte band play several times over the past year, and what I saw this past Friday at the Visulite was a step up from their previous concerts. They have augmented their horn section, adding an incredible saxophone player, Adrian, who in many ways stole the show.

He played an autotune machine during a couple of songs, seducing the women in the crowd with distorted growlings of the song's melody. He ventured out into the crowd during that time during the show when all but the most dedicated dancers grow weary, and engaged the audience directly, even climbing the stairs to the bar to get the barflies moving and grooving. Along with the rest of the horn section, he massacred²² a cover of Chick Corea's "Spain," so much so that a fellow saxophonist in the crowd was by the stage clapping and cheering. Tropic Culture is developing new songs, which are not perfected yet, but showcase some improved ideas for the band. Overall, I was intrigued and the concert had me anticipating what these guys might do next.

I've heard Tropic Culture described as a "festival band" or jam band, the type of group that is most in its element at fairs, festivals, and outdoor celebrations. I think this is an accurate description, if you take this label to mean that the band is a "big tent" affair, where various styles and genres exist side by side, and are imperfectly and messily mixed together. At times, Tropic Culture brings the funk of Tower of Power, the throwback disco of Jamiroquai, or the breaks common in lite, smooth and acid jazz, all with a side of tropical rhythm. When I interviewed the group this past July, they hinted that they were in the process of changing their sound, and they appear to have made that change. They call what they are doing a "Dance Revolution," again this is festival music, not "serious" rock you stand around contemplating (for better or worse).

Tropic Culture has always had a certain socio-political stance, in the feel-good, spread-the-love vein of listeners of Bob Marley who adhere to his pop songs and sidebar his Garveyite lyrics (War, Burnin' and Lootin'). In songs like "Eliminate the Hate" and "The Train," they advocate a pleasant social activism, never threatening or controversial. In this concert, they dedicated a song to the people of Ecuador, after a chaotic week when the


²² I meant this in a positive way, in other words, he killed it, knocked 'em dead.

Ecuadorian president was attacked by striking police. This song included the lyrics, "the revolution must begin." Without reading too much into it, we can at least say Tropic Culture wants us not to forget the troubles of the world, but at least be aware of them while we dance to their music."

From this blog entry, one can get a sense of what might be termed multicultural, Intown bands, such as Tropic Culture and Bakalao Stars that play at music venues in the NoDa, Plaza Midwood and Elizabeth neighborhoods in Charlotte. I use the term multicultural to mean not just literally a mix of cultures (rather ubiquitous in Latin America and now in the United States), or its original meaning as part of a political push for inclusion and racial diversity (Omi & Winant 1994), but rather the term's current popular usage. Since the 1990s in popular and academic circles, multicultural has taken on multiple and disparate meanings corresponding loosely to left and right-wing attempts to describe the post-Civil Rights era landscape in the United States. What began as a descriptive term to analyze the emerging diversity of schools and workplaces became codified in national policy (witness President Bill Clinton's National Conversation on Race), parallel with attacks on Affirmative Action, welfare reform, and the increasing imprisonment of poor black and Latino men (Doane & Bonilla-Silva 2003, Mullings 2005, Baker 2002, Morgen & Maskovsky 2003). The idea of multiculturalism was incorporated in the language of international NGOs and United Nations agencies, affecting policy decisions in countries with vastly different social dynamics and ethno-racial histories from the United States (Hale 2002). In this usage, multiculturalism takes on a bland, apolitical character that in its deployment in slogans, advertisements, and policy decisions has political repercussions, namely shifting discussions away from questions of lingering class and racial inequalities (Gates 1993, Frontline 1998), racially-targeted violence, and citizenship. This was perhaps most prominently displayed in the pitiful plea of Rodney King, "Can[']t we all just get along?" during the Los Angeles riots that followed the acquittal of the police officers who beat him.

For members of the bands in question, who came of age in the late 1990s and early 2000s as immigrant children in the Southern United States, the multicultural idea (and ideal) forms an essential part of their worldview. But this multicultural idea is of the “soft” variety that welcomes social inclusion and cultural mixing, but falls short of explicit political demands. They are the children of relatively successful immigrant parents who make up an emerging middle class in Charlotte. Mainly second generation or 1.5 generation young men, these musicians retain loose ties with their home countries and their cultures (through periodic visits), but mainly they have chosen to formulate an eclectic music that draws on Latin American, US, Afro-Caribbean, and world music traditions.

Bakalao Stars plays rhythms and melodies that draw on Jamaican reggae and Afro-Brit ska while singing in Spanish in the mode of groups from Colombia and Venezuela. Yet, they often mix in rock guitar riffs, while their lead singer jumps around and falls down on stage like a possessed punk rocker. The title of their 2010 album, *Soundcocho*, a play on the Spanish word for a hearty type of soup/stew- *sancocho*- reflects this stylistic mixture in their music.

Bakalao Stars and Tropic Culture have dedicated fans who attend their concerts regularly. Much of the audience consists of school classmates from high school or the local public university where a few of the musicians are enrolled or have graduated. Other fans are friends from work. The bands maintain an active presence on social networking websites like Facebook, sending out event notifications with colorful posters and e-mails detailing their next concert and encouraging everyone to attend. Bakalao Stars, in the midst of recording a new album in fall 2010, posted photos and video of their time in the studio. At concerts, the bands engage in a particular style of showmanship that marks this musical community apart from others. Bakalao Stars always brings a large handmade tri-color flag with BAKALAO  written on it, which

they hang somewhere in the club. The Afro-centric symbolism (the flag is red, yellow, and green; basically an inverted flag of Ghana) corresponds to the band's embrace of reggae and ska, as does their collaboration with local reggae singer Ras-Congo on their recent album and during performances.



Figure 7: Bakalao Stars promotional concert poster

Tropic Culture, befitting their label as a “festival band,” uses their musical choices as an inducement to get the crowd dancing. Unlike Dorian Gris concerts where the audience takes the lead and seemingly spontaneously launches into action, Tropic Culture’s audience rarely starts dancing until the lead singers pressure and cajole fans to start moving. The audience has to be reminded that they can participate, that they too have a part to play in making this concert a success beyond just showing up. These two bands flirt with the line that divides a classical music/European-derived, passive spectator audience from an active, participatory, dance

movement focused audience. As such, the audience rarely engages in what could be described as a particular genre of dancing, rather a mish-mash of styles exist side by side.

The class affiliation and outlook of the community made from these bands and their audiences is evident in the location and type of venues they choose to seek out for their performances. The majority of their concerts take place in several venues in NoDa, an in-town neighborhood near the center city. NoDa (short for North Davidson) is an old mill community that has been slowly remade as an in-town residential community with hip nightlife. Over the last two decades, the conversion of closed textile mills (Graves & Smith 2010) and working-class housing into luxury condominiums and highly sought-after historic homes signaled a process of gentrification that corresponded to the opening of coffee shops, trendy restaurants, and live music venues. Music halls such as the Evening Muse, Salvador's Deli, and the Neighborhood Theatre attract regional and national acts to play in Charlotte in intimate spaces for relatively low ticket prices. Another venue, the Visulite, in the nearby Elizabeth section, books similar acts. Following in the footsteps of bands like La Rúa and the organizers of Carlotan Rock, Tropic Culture and Bakalao Stars have decided that this type of venue provides the best space for their style of music. Echoing the opposite sentiment from Mexican bands playing on the Eastside, several informants told me that this community much prefers NoDa and will not travel to clubs like Skandalos to hear live music. Moreover, in their view, NoDa provides the best hope of fulfilling the ultimate goal of a band like Tropic Culture, namely to “cross over” and reach a larger, non-Latino audience of music fans that attends shows at these venues (whether they are likely to be successful at this is another question altogether, see Chapters 5 and 6).



Figure 8: Tropic Culture performing at the Visulite, Intown Charlotte

Caribbean Nights

Natives of Charlotte call the center of the city- the shiny skyscrapers which house bank headquarters, the rows of steakhouses, the museums concentrated into a “cultural campus,” and the hotels, bars, and nightclubs- Uptown. Uptown Charlotte is cut off from the rest of the city by a moat of highway- Interstate 277- that loops its way around the center city. It is fitting then that this figurative island in the middle of Charlotte would attract musicians and audiences who enjoy the music of the islands of the Spanish Caribbean and New York, genres such as *merengue*, *bachata*, *salsa*, and *reggaetón*. (While I generalize here to make a point about the geographic and social separation between band-made micro-communities, in later chapters I will delve more deeply into the significant differences between genres and musicians within this tropical grouping.) On Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights, uptown clubs host Latin nights, featuring DJs and occasionally live bands. Alongside and sometimes within the same club, other dance floors feature hip-hop, house and trance, and reggae music. Latinos from the Dominican

Republic, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and especially New York crowd onto the dance floor to show off their skills and enjoy a night out. Joining them are white and black *salseros*, often part of a local dance studio where they take salsa lessons and are ready to practice new spins and steps.

Of all the neighborhoods in Charlotte, Uptown alone has the density of buildings and proximity of businesses and nightlife to mimic the urban feel of a city like New York. Its *salsa* clubs loosely mimic the sense of “going out” and separation from ordinary life that New York’s *salsa* clubs provide (Washburne 2008). Uptown Charlotte’s affiliation with New York is no surprise given the number of transplants from New York working in banking and the close financial ties between the two cities. One difference is the critical importance of parking decks and garages to Uptown Charlotte’s popularity. Charlotte, like other Southern cities, is a car-dependent and car-happy place. This simulacrum of Manhattan attracts a community of Charlotte’s Latino residents, many of whom lived in New York for years and have obtained legal status in the United States, even if originally from Santo Domingo or Havana. The attraction of Charlotte parallels a move by many *caribeños* from New York/New Jersey/Connecticut to other Southern cities such as Atlanta, Orlando, and Miami. Moving for the lower real estate prices, better job opportunities, and warmer climate, these Latinos also cherish the expansion of direct Caribbean flights from airline hubs in the South (US Airways in Charlotte, Delta in Atlanta). In Charlotte, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans all have formed small but vibrant communities based in ethnic and national solidarity and familial ties.

Perhaps the best musical example of this trend is Leydy Bonilla and the band that often plays with her, Bachata Flow. Bonilla started out performing in Santo Domingo, and then moved to New York, as many Dominican performers before her have done. At a young age, she had a modest level of success, with singles on the radio and a tour of Spain and Europe. Yet she

decided to follow her parents when they moved to Charlotte rather than remain in New York alone. She continues to sing and record, but also works a day job at an insurance agency to help support her son. Bachata Flow’s musicians made a similar move; separately, each of the band’s members transplanted from New York to Charlotte. They had played as sidemen in different groups in New York; now in Charlotte they formed their own group and started playing in clubs.

Unlike both *regional mexicano* and Latin rock audiences, however, listeners to tropical genres like *salsa*, *merengue*, and *bachata* seem much more accustomed to dancing along with pre-recorded music played by DJs. Thus, bands find their job opportunities limited to clubs whose owners prefer to feature live music on nights when they think bands will draw the largest crowds. Much more than rock groups, who often limit themselves to playing fewer concerts with the excitement of making each gig an “event,” tropical bands rove from club to club and try to play as many places as possible. Bachata Flow is a case in point; on some summer weekends they played every night from Thursday to Saturday at different clubs. Although these bands have small fan bases that attend shows, it is just as likely that audience members are there to dance because they are regular attendees of the club or restaurant where the band is performing.



Figure 9: Bachata Flow performing

The audience reaction to the music of tropical bands is conversational, by which I mean there is a give and take of communication, both verbal and physical, that moves the performance along. For example, although Leydy Bonilla has a famous background and a striking stage presence, she always makes a point to casually ask the audience how they are enjoying the music and to thank audience members for coming out to the show. Simple gestures like these serve to lessen any (social) distance between her and the audience and involve the audience in the making of music, e.g., singing along to choruses. Beyond verbal cues between songs, the music itself provokes movement; *música tropical*, at least among Latinos, is rarely just listened to but rather is music to be danced to, usually with a partner. So the audience responds to the music by dancing, but with variations that become evident after much observation (and participation). Dancing to live music builds, that is, it often starts out with slower, more relaxed, or easier (to dance to) songs, and then intensifies with time. The band can break this intensity with a slow song or ballad, but often the point is to continue to push the dancers to maximum exertion and get as many bodies as possible out on the floor. Audience members dancing must navigate a minefield of potential pitfalls: gender imbalances leading to not enough partners, unskilled or inebriated dancers clogging up the floor, the fatigue of dancing in heels, sweat-soaked clothes, and ringing ears from bumping speakers. The band's job is to keep the music moving in such a way so that the audience forgets these worries, keeps dancing, and keeps buying drinks to convince the club owner that having a live band is worthwhile.

These bands and their audiences share a common past, of migration from the Caribbean to working-class neighborhoods in upper Manhattan and the Bronx, but in moving to Charlotte, they also share aspirations towards upward class mobility and greater assimilation with the mainstream. The bars and clubs catering to the Uptown Latin musical community reveal this

tendency through their décor, dress codes, and geographic location. However, this desire to distance themselves, both literally and figuratively, from the negative aspects of Northern inner city life is tempered by a strong commitment to preserving and fostering musical and other cultural expressions from the Caribbean. For example, Punta Cana, a Dominican restaurant on nearby South Boulevard, features a traditional *perico ripiao* group on Fridays and encourages diners to sing *merengue* and *bachata* karaoke on Saturday evenings. At summer's end, the *Club Dominicano de Charlotte* and the Puerto Rican Cultural Society of Charlotte each hold separate picnics with home-cooked food and live music at a Southside park. Both Punta Cana and Park Road Park, where the picnics are held, are located south of Uptown in solidly upper middle-class and mostly white neighborhoods, reinforcing community members' desires to insert themselves in the mainstream of Charlotte.

Soundscapes and community

Anthropologists and musicologists use the term “soundscape” to describe the “contextually specific local relationship of sound and place, which impacts the cultural perceptions, beliefs, and behavior of its publics (Schafer 1993).” While Steven Feld used the term to describe the relationship between bird and waterfall sounds and the musical aesthetics of the Kaluli people of Papua New Guinea (Feld 1990), in the urban setting such as Charlotte, soundscapes can be interpreted to reveal contestations as social groups create commonality and difference through sound and music. As neuroscientists have pointed out (Levitin 2006), not all sounds are music, and what humans perceive as musical has some basis in universal evolutionary structures in the brain and ear, but also is culturally constructed by what sounds and social and emotional cues children are given as their brains develop. Soundscapes are also shaped by social

and political pressures to define the history of musical practice in a particular place to fit a narrative, or what might be called the “invention of tradition” (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983).

In Charlotte, musical communities within the Latin music scene are geographically segregated and each community in effect has a different soundscape. The production of musical spaces coincides with local cleavages within the Latino community along lines of socioeconomic class and legal status. Yet each of these separate musical communities is highly connected to international networks of musicians and musical knowledge, keeping musicians and fans up to date with musical trends in Guadalajara, Bogota, and Santo Domingo. Thus, local Mexican musicians can open for Los Tucanes de Tijuana, but be afraid to venture downtown; while Latin rock fans dance along to an up-tempo ska number, but dismiss Mexican dance music as *naca*.

This geographic and social segregation creates comfortable and uncomfortable spaces for members of these communities. In later chapters, I will explore how musicians and audience react on occasions when this separation is breached or work to bridge the social gaps that exist between musical communities. The comfort level, or appropriateness of the space for the perceived needs of the audience, has a direct correlation to how band and audience judge the success of a performance. The behavior of musicians and audience- how they sing, dance, and interact- is learned. While some of this performance is portable- immigrants bring experience with music from their home countries, from New York, and from traveling and performing elsewhere- much of it is site and community specific. This locality extends to the gatekeepers in music venues- club owners, managers, and band promoters- who in subtle but important ways contribute to how performances run.

For example, late into a heavy metal concert that the promoter Greñas had organized, Dorian Gris took the stage at the Dark Room behind Skandalos. The date happened to be

Halloween, which was fitting for the concert theme, with a band named Nataz (Satan spelled backwards) opening up. But the night also marked Daylight Savings Time, which gave the club owner one extra hour to stay open and serve drinks. Dorian Gris played for an enthusiastic crowd decked out in gothic-themed black costumes and folks in regular casual concert attire. As the concert neared an end at 1am (which really was 2am), the crowd pleaded with the manager of the club for one more song. After hours of stopping fans from throwing beer bottles and keeping doorways clear for fire safety, he was ready to head home, but after a long pause, he finally raised his index finger up above his head to indicate the band could play one more. The crowd was ecstatic. This back and forth happened two more times as Dorian Gris ended up playing three encores. When the music stopped, audience and musicians hung out for another half hour, chatting and reveling in the exhaustion of a long concert. They were a community clearly at home and the club manager recognizes the role this musical space holds in joining them together.

For bands like Tropic Culture and Bakalao Stars, in-town neighborhoods like NoDa and the music venues there provide a comfortable space that mirrors their casual and eclectic styles. One popular venue, the Evening Muse, is a bar with a coffee shop feel, with chairs and couches, and a stage on the same level as the dance floor. Tropic Culture played an acoustic set on a Sunday afternoon at Pura Vida, a store that sells coffee, crafts and folk art from Latin America and has a small performance space in back. The Neighborhood Theatre, where Tropic Culture and Bakalao Stars have both opened up for visiting bands and performed as headliners, is a converted movie theater that now hosts concerts. Bakalao Stars has their practice space just down the street from the Neighborhood Theatre and Evening Muse, so on rehearsal nights, you might find band members picking up a sandwich from the local deli or grabbing a beer at a bar.

There is also a historical reason why this community chooses NoDa for concerts. Earlier Latin rock bands like La Rúa played some of their most memorable concerts in these venues from 2002 to around 2007, while promoters of *rock en español*, like Tony Arreaza, have cultivated long-standing relationships with club owners to bring touring international groups to perform in Charlotte, usually at the Neighborhood Theatre. Current performing groups patch onto that history; there is an excitement and honor that comes with opening for the Venezuelan group Los Amigos Invisibles, as Bakalao Stars did in November 2009, and then headlining a show at the same venue in December 2010. For audience members, it seems natural that their band should perform in the same neighborhood and clubs where they hang out on any given weekend. Although NoDa and other gentrifying Intown neighborhoods are essentially white public and private spaces (Hill 1999), this community of Latinos easily moves within these spaces because of their parallel backgrounds- they are mainly middle-class, educated, bilingual, and with legal status. At the same time, there is some separation; rarely will whites who are not tied into this community, i.e., as girlfriends or fellow musicians, attend these groups' concerts.

For groups playing *salsa*, *merengue*, and *bachata*, Uptown clubs match the aspirations of their audience and the leisure practices associated with tropical genres, namely dressing to the nines and engaging in social interactions through dance. Because this group of Latino immigrants either have US citizenship at birth (Puerto Ricans) or tend to have high rates of permanent residency or naturalized citizenship (Cubans and Dominicans) they are unafraid to venture into the center city at night and less fearful of the consequences of driving home after a night spent drinking. At the same time, this audience has less familiarity and desire to imbricate themselves in the bohemian and gentrified lifestyles of neighborhoods like NoDa or Plaza Midwood, where Latin rock audiences hang out. Uptown, with its shimmering office towers

where a few of these highly educated, middle-class group have found jobs, holds more appeal, as do clubs in several other areas of the city, such as along South Boulevard and Ballyntyne, that also represent upward mobility for these residents of Charlotte. The adjacent clubs, bars and nighttime entertainment in Uptown serve as a proxy for Manhattan, providing a comfortable setting to engage with music that also radiates from New York, allowing band and audience to manufacture an experience that feels metropolitan and cosmopolitan but in a lower rent, suburbanized, Southern setting.

Chapter 4: “Thursday is Bakalao’s Day!” Bands at work and play.

Music and work

“Artists, by an almost complete inversion of the ordinary world view, frequently consider money (often earned through activities external to their craft) as a means of buying time to work and lead the ‘artist’s life’ which is an integral part of their specific activity. Thus artists (and intellectuals) exchange money, which they could otherwise earn, for time, the time which has to be spent without counting to produce objects which often (in the short term) have no markets, and to ‘discover’ objects and places whose rarity and value they helped to produce...”
Pierre Bourdieu (1984: 295)

“Working musician” is an oxymoron. In US society, musicians occupy a special position; their work is highly identified with leisure and fun. As performers and entertainers, they interact with an audience during the audience’s leisure time. But unlike waiters, bartenders, cooks, cleaning staff, or security guards, musicians look like they are having fun when they work. How much of this outward appearance is musicians enjoying their music making and how much of it is performative affect, a mask that they wear to appeal to audiences? It is telling that the English language word for what musicians do is *play*, not work. Jazz musicians have invented a metaphoric idiom to bypass this perception- a saxophone is an *ax*; an intensive practice session is called *woodshedding* (going to the woodshed), a job is a gig- and equate their profession with blue collar occupations (Spellman 1965). Country music has also imbued its lyrics and process of music-making with the trappings of working class life (Fox 2004).

This association of music and fun is not universal. The Spanish verb- *tocar*- differentiates the action of strumming or striking an instrument from the other English meaning of *to play* tied to games and sports and expressed by the verb- *jugar*. In the Caribbean and Latin America, musicians have traditions of playing popular music in styles that require other emotional timbres,

for example, the Argentine *tango* stresses melancholy and longing, while participants in Mexican cantina music engage in melodramatic *gritos* that evoke despair and loss. Many *regional mexicano* songs, particularly *corridos* and *ranchera* song forms, continue to focus topically on experiences associated with work, with lyrics detailing crossing the border, migrating for jobs, obtaining a green card, or conflicts with bosses (Ragland 2009, Herrera-Sobek 1993). However, the Latin genres that I encountered in Charlotte most often reflected the association with fun, escape, and pleasure that have come to shape much contemporary popular music.

This chapter analyzes the ways that Latino musicians view their experience working and playing in Charlotte, building on other studies that examine the link between labor and music (Green 1972, Fox 2004, Washburne 2008, White 2008). I stress the diversity of musicians' experiences and viewpoints, while also collecting some common themes to formulate a vision of how we might think about the labor of immigrant musicians in a globalized urban workplace and better understand the connections between musicians and their fellow immigrant workers. Defining and analyzing the concept of "working musician," I position musicians' labor in the context of immigration and class-based views on training and professionalism. The vulnerability of musicians as immigrant laborers plays a vital part in how they approach music-making and relate to fellow musicians. I show how musicians deal with the norm of low-paying, contingent music jobs and strategize about how to best pursue lives as working musicians. I focus on three bands, Bakalao Stars, Banda TecnoCaliente, and Ultimanota, which represent the spectrum of musicians' different attitudes and conceptions about their labor. In addition, I focus on a trio of musicians who also have become concert promoters, in order to explore another side of the music business in Charlotte. The trajectory of bands, often reflected in their attitudes about the labor of performing and living the "artist's life," also helps us to understand different notions of family and community among Latino immigrants to the US South.

While being a musician, along with other creative pursuits like painting, acting, or writing fiction, is often held as the gold standard of the ideal job that allows an individual to “follow his dreams,” at the same time musicianship is denigrated as not a serious occupational pursuit. As Richard Florida argues in *The Rise of the Creative Class*, “following your dreams” for a new generation of recent college graduates has meant pursuing jobs in technology and finance sectors in workplaces that foster flexible hours, openness to alternative lifestyles, and novel work practices, while settling in cities where this “creative class” can embed themselves in the bohemian milieu of musicians and other artists (Florida 2003). While Florida argues that the symbiotic relationship between artists and an emerging “creative class” of technology workers fosters local economic growth and enhances a city’s luster, I counter that this view hides the daily struggles of musicians to make ends meet. Obscured in the haze of a desirable bohemian urban lifestyle is the longstanding and persistent devaluation of artistic work. While “creative” work in the finance sector, such as speculative trading and mortgage derivatives, leads to hefty year-end bonuses; artistic creativity rarely results in fame and fortune. Instead, musicians work long hours, for little pay, and mostly as freelancers- the epitome of flexible labor. In fact, several musicians expressed that their bands are treated as interchangeable pieces, competing for limited jobs and disposable if other cheaper bands are available to perform.

Charlotte’s Latino musicians play and work on this tightrope. For many, being a musician means doing something they love or following a dream, yet when asked, they are quick to point out the anemic pay and difficult working conditions. Hidden behind the glamour of a performance, musicians spend hundreds of hours rehearsing music, expend social capital to organize and promote a concert, and put in long hours the day of a performance traveling, preparing sound equipment and lights, and breaking down the stage after the show. All of this

work happens on top of musicians' day jobs, which they rely upon to pay the bills, those of their households and the band, as concerts can be a losing financial proposition. Conditions at clubs and restaurants, festivals and bars can be less than ideal: musicians dress in cramped dressing rooms or in the back seats of cars in the parking lot when dressing rooms are non-existent; they fight dehydration while dressed in heavy polyester suits in the midday summer sun during a festival; they pull muscles lifting heavy amplifiers out of car trunks; they play in restaurants where the diners want mood music, where the owner wants them to play an extra set for the same pay, and where they must jerry-rig their own sound system; and musicians navigate the challenges of working in places where alcohol and drugs are readily available and seen as part of the creative process of being a musician.

From these conditions, musicians conjure up the joy and excitement of a performance. While working, they play their instruments and engage in *play* through their interaction with each other and the audience. There is a connection between the physicality of musicians' labor- the sweat, aches, and exertion of a performance- and the expressions of pleasure that audiences exclaim during live shows. But the magical moments of performances, fraught with emotional (and sexual) tensions, and linking people in human chains through dance, singing, and music-making are constructed by the long hours that musicians put into rehearsing, perfecting their training, and organizing concerts.

This dialectic between work and play comes to define how many Charlotte musicians see their music. Some see their music as a hobby, to be pursued for leisure, while others treat music as a profession, stressing their specialized training and professionalism. Most musicians rely on their gigs to make ends meet, paying for gas with the take from a night's performance, while others have made a significant personal investment in their music in the hopes that monetary

success will follow the release of the next album or the next tour. Some musicians see rehearsing and performing as a way to stay connected to fellow musicians with whom they have played for years, while a newer generation sees playing as a way to gain acceptance and respect in the Latin music scene.

Bakalao's Day

On any given Thursday night in a small room crammed full of musical instruments and sweaty musicians, Bakalao Stars rehearse. The band gathers in the NoDa neighborhood in a nondescript building that has been subdivided into practice spaces for local bands. Their room is sparsely decorated, with a couple of old posters, a sagging couch, and a mini-refrigerator. One or two band members bring the cheapest beer they can find to stock up the fridge for the night. Every other conceivable space is soon occupied by musicians, as Bakalao Stars has up to eight or nine members, and their equipment. As the band rehearses, they drink and joke with each other, and occasionally get into debates about the proper tempo and rhythms of songs they are preparing for an upcoming performance. If a member of another band, say Carlos from Dorian Gris (who occupies a room down the hall), is practicing, he might stop in to say hello and inquire how the band is doing.

Sometimes the band practices on Tuesdays, but Thursday evening is when everyone in the band knows they are expected to show up to play together as a group. This Thursday gathering often turns into a jam session, but might include a “serious” rehearsal if the band has an upcoming gig. In an interview in English, band members Christian, Javier and Daniel discussed the importance of Thursday rehearsals to the band's cohesion:

Christian: “I think that's one of the things that makes a band stay alive, if you come to band practice and you're not having a good time you might as well not be here.”

Daniel: “Yeah.”

SB: “It’s not worth it?”

Christian: “If you come here and then you’re just sitting there thinking, ‘*oh god, I want to go and drink a beer*’, maybe this is not the thing for you... and the thing about it, is when it comes to that, we do this as a hobby, I think none of us want to go and see Bakalao be famous or anything, but it’s like a serious hobby. We do practice twice a week, it’s not like you, ‘*oh, we got a show, and then we practice,*’ you know.”

SB: “So you practice even when you don’t have a show?”

Christian: “Yeah!”

Javier: “Thursday, every Thursday no matter what.”

Daniel: “It feels weird when we don’t practice.”

Christian: “We’ve been practicing Thursdays for....”

SB: “Forever?”

Christian: “For eight years, we started doing Tuesday maybe two years ago, but Thursday’s to me that’s my day of music, whenever I’m not practicing or somebody cancels on Thursday, I’m pissed, because that’s my... I already know Thursday, I can have some beers.”

SB: “You have it in your head, you already know?”

Christian: “Whatever I go home Friday, cool it’s the weekend, like to me- Thursday it’s you know...”

Daniel: “Bakalao’s day!”

Christian: “YEAH!”

Javier: “It just that time to, if you play an instrument, you know that you come in and start to play and its just that connection between you and the instrument and you just completely forget about everything else and then there’s nothing else there’s no worries, there’s no bills, everything is about hit that note or hit that cymbal, or get the right riff, and you’re so concentrated you’re so in to it that time flies, then you hit it and you’re like ‘WOW!’”

Daniel: “When we’re playing shows it’s kind of like a gift to ourselves for all the hard work and we want to show off that hard work sometime, I mean not to show off, we want to share the enjoy[ment] that we have with people and we want them to have a good time. We might not be the best music players in town but I bet if you go to a Bakalao Stars show, you’re going to have a lot of fun.” (Author Interview with Bakalao Stars 7/20/2010)

The founding members (and brothers) of Bakalao Stars, Christian and Javier, stress how important these rehearsals are for the band. For them, practicing regularly doesn't just improve the technical aspects of their music, or inspire new songs; rather, dedicating Thursday night to the band means that the group becomes like a family. Just as families might gather for a meal, the proverbial Sunday dinner of lore, Bakalao Stars gathers weekly for a little music. Thursday nights become times when they can relax, crack jokes, and jam. However, Christian and Javier treat Thursday evening rehearsals with a level of seriousness that corresponds with their position as band leaders; they require attendance and get upset if someone doesn't show up to practice. Thursday rehearsals become ritualized as a time apart from "worries" where music becomes the central focus of their lives. Their music takes on a therapeutic and spiritual quality that corresponds to the band's identification with reggae, ska, and other Afro-Caribbean music styles.



Figure 10: Bakalao Stars performing at the Evening Muse

The manner in which Bakalao Stars view their music-making, as fun, conveys an attitude held by a number of Latino musicians in Charlotte. These musicians treat their music as a hobby, something to do in their spare time, not to be taken too seriously. This lends their rehearsals (and interviews) a certain enthusiasm that is infectious and certainly comes across in interactions with audiences at live shows. Yet they are serious musicians, and well organized as a band. By working hard with the attitude that this is not work, they imbibe the music with a looseness and approachability that is sometimes lost on other local bands that stress being as “professional” and polished as possible. There is a realization, from age and experience, that as a band they have little chance of “making it big” (although they would jump at the chance), so they do not kill themselves trying to become famous. While this strategy might not make for a great plotline, it helps explain the longevity of bands like Bakalao Stars, who have been playing together since 2002. Having little ambition leads to less conflict.

What do other musicians think of this type of music-making? In private conversations, several musicians expressed feelings of respect and amazement that bands like Bakalao Stars were able to keep playing music for so long and as such a tightly-knit group. However, fellow musicians sometimes expressed frustration at the slow evolution of these bands’ music and a perceived lack of ambition on the part of bands who did not seek more of the spotlight. From the bands’ perspective, these flaws are part of the communal process of making music together and performing when they want to and are ready to share new music. The attitude of Bakalao Stars means that its members must make a significant financial investment in the band, particularly since it is not a given that their shows will make money. At some shows, Bakalao Stars loses money because the door receipts do not cover paying the sound manager; then band members each contribute to covering costs. Its members understand that the purpose of the band is not to

make money and often work for free in order to reach a goal, such as saving money to record an upcoming album (as the band was doing in 2010 when concert profits went toward recording studio costs).

The band members explained how Bakalao Stars got started as a project showcasing local bands at a Latin rock festival:

Javier: “And actually it was funny, because that was supposed to be a project. Bakalao Stars was supposed to be like this, jamming band. That was going to be the idea. You know?”

Daniel: “Nothing serious.”

Javier: “We can have a lot of musicians coming and play, you know?”

Christian: “We were thinking...our idea was to create, like, a club. That’s our main idea...”

SB: “Where does the name ‘Bakalao Stars’ come from?”

Javier: “Bacalao is a fish that you find, you know?”

SB: “Codfish, right? My wife’s Dominican, so she eats bacalao.”

Javier: “You find it on the *peninsula ibérica*, mostly, and it’s really underground and it’s really high in protein and energy. So that’s why it was the Bakalao. We want to be underground, because that’s what we always wanted to be.... And we want to be high in energy when- live shows and stuff like that. And Stars was because we were supposed to be this jamming band where everybody...”

SB: “All Stars?”

Javier: “Where all the stars would come up, like...”

Christian: “Fania All Stars!”

Javier: “Yeah, like Fania All Stars, so that was the thing. That’s Bakalao.”
(Author Interview with Bakalao Stars 7/20/2010)

As Javier states, the band wants to be “underground” [sic] like the bacalao fish; they hold little ambition to be famous, popular, or mainstream. The food reference continues in this excerpt as Javier describes the band as having the qualities of the fish- high in energy during

their live performances. This was not the only time Bakalao Stars make reference to Caribbean and Iberian cuisine in their music. Both of their albums (2007; 2010) have drawings of fish on the album cover or CD. They perform and have recorded songs with food-related titles such as: “Mango,” Zañahoria Style (Carrot Style),” “Borrachera (Drinking Spree),” “Kokoa Brown (Chocolate Brown),” and “Ensalada (Salad).” And their second album, *Soundcocho*, is a play on the Spanish term for a Caribbean peasant soup that combines many ingredients, *sancocho*. But the second part of their name, Stars, is just as important to their outlook as a band. They define the band as a jamming band, where good vibes and a positive relationship with the music are highly valued. Like the Fania All-Stars, Bakalao Stars takes elements from different genres and musical traditions and mixes them together in their music.²³ Daniel stresses that the band was nothing serious, a project, yet the band has lasted over eight years. Somehow, the band leaders have been able to transition from the initial goal of the band, which was to showcase young local musicians at a rock festival, to the long term work of balancing their casual attitude toward music-making with the organization of concerts and recording sessions. They work at not working too hard and spoiling the point of being Bakalao Stars.

TecnoCaliente

On a humid day in May, Banda TecnoCaliente is suiting up for their slot at Charlotte’s annual Cinco de Mayo Fanta Festival. The sun glares off the windows of the parked cars in a grass field behind the stage; sweat glistens on the necks of the band members as they change from t-shirts to crisp white dress shirts and then don bright pink suit jackets with Banda TecnoCaliente embossed on the back. They take the stage, tune up their numerous keyboards,

²³ The Fania All Stars included singers and instrumentalists who performed on the Fania label, including Héctor Lavoe, Celia Cruz, Johnny Pacheco, Willie Colón, Rubén Blades, Ray Barretto, Cheo Feliciano, and other Latin stars of the 1960s-70s. Their recordings mixed *salsa* (which itself was a fusion of several dance styles) with other Caribbean and Latin American musical styles, as well as R&B, disco, rock, and funk.

and begin playing up-tempo *banda* music. After a 45 minute set, with an enthusiastic crowd dancing on a soccer field, the band exits the stage, dripping sweat, reaching for water and soda stocked on ice backstage.

TecnoCaliente is one of several bands represented by Gonzalo Pérez, a Dominican transplant from Santo Domingo via New York, who prides himself on the professionalism of the bands he promotes. He has worked as a stage hand and promoter for internationally-renowned *merengue*, *bachata* and *salsa* artists in New York, and he brings that experience to bear in his strategies promoting Charlotte bands. Gonzalo books the band's shows, makes sure they arrive on time, and intently involves himself in the sound check, stage plot, and set-up to make sure performances go off without a hitch. For TecnoCaliente, he has converted an old Greyhound bus into a tour bus with the band's name painted on the side so they can travel together to shows (and have a private place to change and relax). Gonzalo has hired a roadie to carry equipment and rapidly set up the band's many keyboards on stage. During concerts where his bands play, you can often find Gonzalo beside the stage, or in the crowd next to the sound tent, lobbying the stage manager and sound technicians for a bit more bass or less drums in the vocalist's monitor. Under Gonzalo's tutelage, TecnoCaliente has started touring, playing festivals and nightclubs around the Southern states, in addition to their frequent performances in Charlotte.

TecnoCaliente is a professional band, meaning they have dedicated themselves on a full-time, semi-permanent basis to being a band and are actively seeking larger exposure and fame within the *regional mexicano* music market. They rehearse and perform regularly and treat music-making as their career. By investing significant money in uniforms, promotion (hiring Gonzalo and a roadie), and transportation, TecnoCaliente must find regular work to stay solvent

as a band; the hope is that eventually a radio hit and exposure through touring and appearances on television shows will pay off.²⁴

As Gonzalo explains in an interview in Spanish about his role as TecnoCaliente's manager and the band's professionalism:

Gonzalo: “And the groups have given me the support (I need to be their manager). It's true, I'm thankful to the Mexican group (TecnoCaliente) more than others, and without offending anyone, because they have placed all of their confidence in me. They don't look... they never ask me, ‘how much are we going to make?’, only, ‘what time should we be there?’ They don't ask anything about pay, when I (pay them)...that's what's left (after expenses). That is the confidence they have in me...

They are people who don't drink alcohol; they don't go...how should I say it? It's very rare for them not to focus on music. Same as the others, they are professionals.”

SB: “Professionals.”

Gonzalo: “Yes, everybody, everybody is a professional.”

[Translation by author] (Author Interview with Gonzalo Pérez 9/20/2010)

And later in the same interview, Gonzalo explains how the hard work of being a musician pays off, particularly in view of the larger goal of making a hit record:

Gonzalo: “There are many hardships you have to face, leaving your family for all this, spending nights (on the road), and at times you say ‘It's not for nothing, to say, there is a goal.’ There is something for everyone, that makes it worthwhile and you look for it, for this the musician doesn't just seek money, the musician likes to feel good, find himself.”

SB: “So then, what is the goal, the larger (goal for the band)?”

Gonzalo: “Well, the trajectory is...that the whole world knows you, to arrive at a moment of explosion. Explosion is when you come across a (musical) theme. There are themes that change your life. For every group one... single (hit song) changes their lives. Why? Because the single is a hit and the people stay with it. It changes your life emotionally, economically, morally, in every aspect it changes. I have seen this transformation because I saw it with Kinito Mendez (a *merengue* singer whom Gonzalo toured with as a stage manager).”

[Translation by author] (Author Interview with Gonzalo Pérez 9/20/2010)

²⁴ Spanish-language television has a number of talk and variety shows that provide chances for lesser-known bands to promote their songs. TecnoCaliente has appeared on several shows produced in New York or Miami throughout the past few years, such as *Despierta América*. One locally produced show, *Mi Tierra TV*, is broadcast on satellite television and features local bands, interviews, and community news.

For Gonzalo and Banda TecnoCaliente, there is a professional work ethic and training that goes with being in a band and accompanies their vision of success. Professionalism means refraining from drinking alcohol or other distractions (drugs, amorous adventures) during performances and tours, but also trusting in the expertise of a band manager who is more experienced at putting on concerts and managing the band's expenses. Gonzalo is well aware that, while audiences might crave the magical experience of dancing and listening to music, club owners and festival organizers see *regional mexicano* groups (that are not famous) as somewhat interchangeable and thus relatively disposable as labor. In conversations, he stressed to me the importance of differentiating Banda TecnoCaliente by their actions: showing up on time, having a professional appearance and sound, eliminating the personal distractions that plague other bands. That Banda TecnoCaliente is made up of teetotalers while Bakalao Stars readily admit to heavy drinking as part of their rehearsals and performance points to class and identity differences between the two bands and their musical communities. When Gonzalo expresses the professionalism and sobriety of Banda TecnoCaliente, he is not just positioning them as musicians, but as Mexican musicians who must do battle against negative stereotypes of working-class, Mexican men that associate laziness, drunkenness, and unskilled labor training with members of their musical community. Bakalao Stars, as members of a musical community made up of more assimilated 1.5 generation young adults with higher average levels of education and greater economic mobility, have less cause to construct a professional persona. In fact, their audience relishes their wild and uncontained stage presence and conflation of music, drinking, and dance with "fun."

Gonzalo's professionalism is not just an internal strategy to organize a disciplined band; he actively markets his bands as professionals who put on a quality show. Gonzalo stresses that

TecnoCaliente measures up, not just to other local groups, but to more famous groups that tour through the US South. In one instance, TecnoCaliente outshone other, better-known groups at a festival so that they became in his words, “*el plato fuerte* (the main course)” for that day. In this way, they become memorable- to the audience and to the event organizers who may hire them again in the future. Gonzalo also promotes his bands together, so that a festival looking for bands can negotiate a better deal by choosing several bands from his stable of groups, say contracting Banda TecnoCaliente and Bachata Flow to play the same festival.

In the second interview excerpt, Gonzalo is quick to stress that musicians endure the hardships of the road not just for the fame, but also for self-fulfillment. Unlike Bakalao Stars, Banda TecnoCaliente has a larger objective of finding fame through a hit song. They work toward this goal with the knowledge that, if achieved, it will change their lives dramatically. Gonzalo describes this goal as a trajectory, a projection that ends in an explosion when a group makes it big. This teleology assumes that fame and success are inevitable, as long as the hard work and professionalism continue. An element of luck is involved as well, when one “comes across” a musical theme that enchants audiences. While the economic change that would accompany a hit single are straightforward, it is less certain what emotional and moral changes would follow from fame. Would the band face intensified challenges from life on the road as a famous band, in the form of substance abuse and temptations to marital infidelity? Would the band feel obligated to help other Charlotte Latin musicians in their careers? What is clear is that Gonzalo with his “professional” training is trying to prepare the band for this eventuality.

Ultimanota

It’s Saturday at a Cuban restaurant, A Piece of Havana, in a strip mall in the South Charlotte suburbs. The restaurant is empty, except for the wait staff and bartender, when several

members of Ultimanota arrive. The band members lug amplifiers, conga drums, speakers, and microphones in from the parking lot and begin to set up in a tight corner right in front of the bar. As the band starts to tune up, families come in, offering greetings to waitresses and band members, and grab tables facing the band. By the time the always late saxophone player arrives, Ultimanota is ready to start performing.

Ultimanota plays at A Piece of Havana on a regular basis, usually once or twice a month, during most of the year. In addition, they sometimes find jobs playing in other restaurants, at weddings and birthday parties, and at festivals. But playing at the Cuban restaurant represents their most reliable source of work as musicians. For a night's work spanning from around 6:00pm to 10:00pm, each band member receives 75 dollars. In addition, the restaurant's owner, Belkys, often provides the musicians with one free drink and some food. The musicians pocket the money, but to calculate the real amount of money they make, we must account for several costs. First, we must subtract gas money (the restaurant is 10-15 miles away from some of their homes) and any additional food and drink musicians consume on their breaks between sets. Second, we must account for the fixed investment they have made in musical equipment, such as the cost of maintaining musical instruments (e.g. fixing broken guitar strings) and replacing aging parts (e.g. amplifier fuses and cords). Tallying these costs, the band members come away with little left over for a night's work.

What then do Ultimanota's musicians gain from playing on Saturday nights? Several members of the band are older musicians in their 30s, who, a decade earlier, were part of rock bands playing Intown clubs. The teleology of eventual fame, which Gonzalo adheres to, reached one band member only in momentary form. Tony, Ultimanota's band leader, was once part of Latin rock group La Rúa, which managed to get a music video played on MTVLatino. For Tony

and other band members of his generation, Ultimanota serves as a way to keep playing music while family life and its daily obligations have limited their capacity to dedicate themselves full-time to band membership. On Saturday night, they get to escape the kids at home and have a drink with friends while playing music. For a younger musician such as bass player Isaac, playing with Ultimanota gives him experience playing for live crowds and links him to the more extensive social networks of older musicians. When I inquired what Ultimanota members do with their pay from the band, I got similar responses. Tony uses the money to help pay bills. Fred usually goes after the show to fill up the gas tank of his SUV. Oscar combines his money from Ultimanota with money earned from playing with several other local bands to supplement his income, the main source of which is working at a retail store that sells soccer gear. No band member relies solely on music making for income; each of them works other “day” jobs.



Figure 11: Ultimanota playing at A Piece of Havana

Ultimanota plays at A Piece of Havana at the discretion of the owner, Belkys, who often calls up the band’s leader, Tony, a week or so before to request that the band play on a Saturday night (sometimes it was Friday). However, when business is slow, particularly in winter and early spring, the band gets called upon less frequently. Part of Tony’s job as band leader is to

convince Belkys that continuing to hire Ultimanota will bring more paying customers in the door of the restaurant, thus justifying their continuing employment. This includes promoting the band's gigs through Facebook and texting friends to convince them to stop by. Another tactic is to get hired by another (Intown) restaurant, Dressler's, for a series of nights, which demonstrated that the group is in demand. Tony started to establish a relationship of greater mutual obligation to solidify the band's role at the restaurant. Through his day job as an events manager at the Latin American Coalition, a local non-profit, he helped Belkys promote her business by having her sell food at cultural festivals, including allowing her to be the sole Cuban restaurant selling at *Azucar! A Caribbean Celebration*, an event celebrating Spanish Caribbean culture organized by Tony and the Latin American Coalition.

Between sets at A Piece of Havana, Ultimanota's members saddle up to the bar. They order drinks and if someone is hungry, he asks the bartender for something that can be made quickly, so he can finish it before the next set starts. They say hello to friends and regular customers who have come out to see the band. They acknowledging the other members of this musical community and thank them for their support. Of course, they will take requests. And if diners have birthdays or weddings coming up, Tony might give them his card and ask what kind of music they enjoy. But most of all, the band takes this down time as a moment to bond, cracking jokes, clinking glasses in a toast, or discussing the latest sports. Joswar inevitably takes a photo with his phone to send to his long-distance girlfriend in Venezuela, and the band needles him for his romantic proclivities. The band members enlist my anthropological expertise- "How did that song sound?" "What other bands are you studying?" "Did you see that hot girl who was sitting at the table in back?"-and I try to respond as best I can. It is at this bar that I learn about band members' love lives, about a band member's treacherous journey to the United States

smuggled in the luggage compartment of a bus, about preferred brands of whiskey, and about how much Venezuelans love baseball.

Over several months of observation from the restaurant's bar, I also begin to take on the role of Ultimanota's mascot and stage hand. Not only do the band's musicians let me into their lives, they come to expect my attendance at performances and wonder what has happened if I fail to show. I help unload equipment from cars and give advice on the positioning of speakers to get the best sound. I relay drink orders from the band to bartenders while they are performing. I snack on comped food between sets. When Ultimanota plays private events, I get to hang out because I'm "with the band." Through this intimate rapport with the band, I gained a sense of the motives and outlook this group of musicians brings to their labor. Like Bakalao Stars, Ultimanota was organized into a band as a temporary project, in this case to play a few gigs as a cover band, which over time became semi-permanent. However, Ultimanota views their performances and rehearsals differently from Bakalao Stars. Whereas Bakalao Stars stresses the creativity that comes out of rehearsals and jamming, Ultimanota rehearses much less often, mainly because band members cannot find the time every week with families and jobs. Instead, Ultimanota performs more often and their concerts become like rehearsals in that they are a fun exercise where the band experiments with playing a new song, letting Joswar, the conga player, sing a number, or taking extended solos. While Ultimanota presents a very professional image on its website and in Tony's relationship with restaurant owners and other clients who hire the band for private events, this professionalism is not the same touring ethic that guides Banda TecnoCaliente. Instead of rooting the band in the nightclub community, whether of Eastside Mexican clubs (TechnoCaliente) or Intown venues, Ultimanota's performances root them in the community in a different way. Their visibility at restaurants, paired with Tony's extensive social

network, gives them entrée into a different venue, namely private parties- weddings, birthdays, and other family celebrations. The band played a Bolivian woman's 50th birthday celebration at an Eastside club that had been rented out for the occasion, a wedding in a Charlotte suburb, and the birthday party for a Colombian woman in the backyard of her family's Intown home.

Why do people hire Ultimanota to play private events? Beyond the initial social connection, I argue that the age of the band members, as part of the first generation of Latino immigrants who have established families and roots in Charlotte, and the corresponding "cheesy cocktail music" that appeals to listeners from this same generation, play major roles in this decision. While they are not new or hip, neither is the band a fly by night operation looking to scam party organizers out of their money. Band members have deep roots in the city. Like Bakalao Stars, Ultimanota's members view the band members as family; they have taken the band's youngest member, Isaac, under their wing, providing him personal guidance and musical training. Band members often hang out at each other's houses, play softball together, catch rides with each other to play a gig, and attend services at the same local church.

In fact, the local church and the role that several Ultimanota musicians play in it, provides an interesting point of comparison to their work with the band. *Camino del Rey* is an evangelical Christian church in suburban Charlotte that has a majority Latino immigrant congregation, but is led by a white American pastor who has learned Spanish and led missions to Latin America. Tony, Joswar, and Isaac, along with several other musicians, play in the church band on Sunday evenings. While their participation in Ultimanota is about making money, maintaining a presence in the music scene, and diversion, playing for a church audience is about showing faith and dedication to God and being part of a religious community. Their churchgoing also positions them as respectable in their larger neighborhood community. The

music played in church consists of religious hymns and popular Christian rock songs, covered by the church band during interludes between the pastor's sermon and leading of prayers. Rather than see these two worlds as completely separate, the band's membership in the church community shapes how they act and interact as members of Ultimanota- the sense of familial obligation, as well as what constitutes proper moral and ethical behavior all stem from their relationship with this religious community.

Carlotan Rock

An important element of the working musician is the time put into promoting shows. The monetary investment and social capital necessary for a successful show can be considerable. While I spent time following several bands around as they promoted shows by appearing on radio shows, handing out flyers, and posting updates on Facebook, I turn to a historical example to present the vagaries of promoting shows in Latino Charlotte. Carlotan Rock is a promotion company started by three local musicians, Tony Arreaza, Herman Marín, and Juan Miguel Marín. These musicians, realizing that the skills they utilized to promote their own shows could be put to work promoting other artists and bringing in internationally known acts, began the company in 2004. At first, the trio promoted local bands, in particular through a festival also entitled Carlotan Rock, and concerts by groups such as La Rúa, of which Tony and Juan were members. But soon, they began to bring in artists from Mexico and South America, including: Los Amigos Invisibles, Molotov, Los Pericos, Hombres G, Kinky, Café Tacuba, and Los Enanitos Verdes. These bands were groups that the promoters had grown up listening to in Latin America, or had gone to see in concert in nearby Southern cities, such as Atlanta. Thus, they saw it as quite a coup to get these bands to play in Charlotte, a place most bands' previous tours through the United States had skipped in favor of more established centers of Latino immigration

and musical production, such as Miami, Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago. Many of their shows were very successful, netting profits and large crowds, and the Carlotan Rock festival became an annual event that helped promote local and regional Latin rock bands.

Yet by 2009, the trajectory of Carlotan Rock had reached its nadir. Juan Miguel and Herman had both moved to other cities to pursue non-musical careers. In 2009, the Carlotan Rock festival was canceled because the economic downturn meant fewer fans were going to see shows. And while Tony attempted to put on a major show, bringing back Los Amigos Invisibles in November 2009, the concert was a financial bust- not enough people bought tickets and Carlotan Rock lost money.

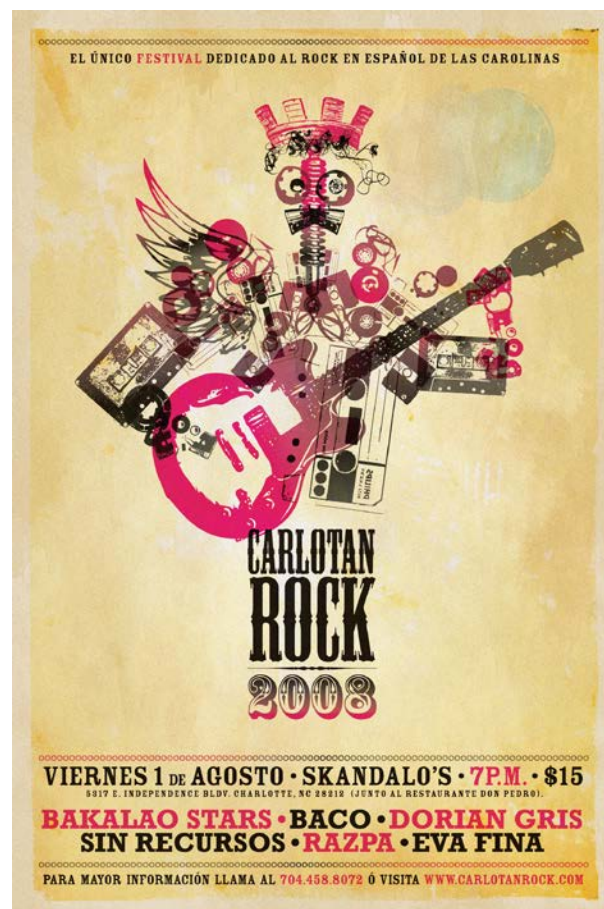


Figure 12: Poster for the 2008 Carlotan Rock Festival
(Courtesy of Carlotan Rock Productions)

So how did these three Latino immigrants become, at least for a few years, major players in the Latin music scene in Charlotte and conduits for international acts to enter Charlotte's Latin scene? First, I point to the relative neglect and lack of consolidation that major labels and ticket/concert companies had in relation to *rock en español* at the time. While now major artists such as Spanish rock singer Enrique Bunbury²⁵ have exclusive contracts to only play shows in clubs owned or affiliated with national ticket/concert companies like Ticketmaster, and so play at Charlotte's Fillmore Theater (affiliated with Ticketmaster), in the early 2000s, Latin American rock groups playing the United States relied on local entrepreneurs like Carlotan Rock to promote their shows for local audiences. Visiting musicians rely on local promoters to connect them to an audience, particularly if it is a place where they have never previously performed. Concert promoters attempt to tie into the local musical community, which they may be a part of, by asking a local group to perform as opening act, passing out flyers for upcoming shows at clubs and bars, and using social media, such as Facebook, to publicize a show. A successful show requires preparation as promoters must lay the groundwork for a visiting band to be well received. A musical community's taste also plays a major role in concert organization. Local bands are constantly engaging in a process of manufacturing and negotiating with their audiences a set of styles and songs, some of which come from local networks and others that arrive from abroad through radio, television, travel, and the internet. Concert promoters, especially if they are fellow musicians tied into this community, are well aware of these trends and look for acts that fulfill perceived desires among the musical community.

Second, I stress the important skills that each of Carlotan Rock's members brought to the table. Juan Miguel, trained as a graphic designer, came up with a series of visually striking

²⁵ Former singer with *rock en español* band Héroes del Silencio.

posters and flyers to promote each concert.²⁶ Tony's organizational skills and social capital in the local music scene, particularly his rapport with the manager of the Intown Neighborhood Theatre, provided available spaces for shows. Of course, some of these skills were learned on the job; their quality and professionalism improved as Carlotan Rock gained experience. Third, Carlotan Rock had a bit of luck. Tony placed cold calls to artists' managers to see if they were considering touring soon in the United States, and, if so, could Carlotan Rock piggy-back on dates already scheduled in Atlanta, Miami, or Washington DC, cities within driving distance on the East Coast. Contact with one band sometimes lead to inroads with another group, and a successful concert encouraged bands to want to return for a repeat performance a year later.

The business of promoting concerts presented significant risk but also some rewards for the partners of Carlotan Rock. Each of them put in one-third of the total investment for a show. For an internationally known act, this might total as much as \$20,000 and include a guaranteed sum paid to the band, insurance for the venue, promotional materials, sound costs (renting equipment and labor for the night of the show), and security guards. After the show, the take at the door would be used to pay expenses and then any profits would go into a company bank account and be split three ways between them. Some of each partner's profit would of course go towards the guarantee for the next upcoming concert. If the partners did not have enough money on reserve for a concert, then they would use a company credit card to finance a show, trusting that the revenue coming in would cover the debt accrued in promoting and organizing the show. For several years, Carlotan Rock was moderately profitable and the partners benefited from its success. For example, Tony saved his money from Carlotan Rock and his work with La Rúa in a bank account reserved just for paying for his wedding, which he held in Venezuela with family. However, the concerts were negatively affected by immigration policing, especially

²⁶ <http://www.carlotanrock.com/portafolioshows.php>

when they changed the venue of the Carlotan Rock festival from Skandalos to outside the Neighborhood Theatre in 2006 and fewer people attended because of rumors of immigration raids. In 2007, they changed the festival venue back to Skandalos, but a series of less than profitable concerts meant that by 2010 the company credit card had several thousand dollars of debt the group was struggling to pay off.

Carlotan Rock provides an interesting point of comparison with the finances of several local bands. Whereas Carlotan Rock was profitable, at least at its apex, the profitability of many local bands is minimal when one examines all the costs associated with running a group of musicians throughout the year(s) and the financial structure of playing in local music venues. For example, La Rúa, arguably the most well-known and successful of Charlotte's Latin groups, played clubs where the manager would not usually pay them a guaranteed amount for their appearance, instead giving the band a percentage of the door cover charge. During festivals, it is customary for local bands not to be paid anything, or to receive a low fee of several hundred dollars, while national and international acts receive much more. Promoters justify this treatment by arguing that local groups are less famous and that festivals are opportunities for local acts to perform for larger audiences than at nightclubs. When bands do receive pay for a gig, they often must negotiate for minimal pay in a climate where their labor is contingent and tenuous. For example, Ultimanota found it difficult to ask for more pay for their restaurant shows because of the apparent struggles of the restaurant industry during the economic recession; restaurant owners would say they were barely making ends meet and could not afford to pay the bands more money. Often, restaurant owners, like Belkys of A Piece of Havana, were unsure whether they could employ the band past next week and rarely booked Ultimanota more than a few weeks in advance. On another occasion, when Ultimanota played at a suburban

Mexican restaurant, the restaurant manager arbitrarily added an extra set to their show without raising their pay. Not only did they work longer that night, but by the time they finished playing the kitchen was closed and the band did not get the free meal that was promised with their pay.

Band members often use the money they do earn, after paying household bills, to improve the quality of their music. Thus, La Rúa members invested an estimated \$25,000 in band equipment- amplifiers, effects, microphones, lighting- during the five-year life of the band. They also paid \$250 per month for a practice space. Carlos, leader of Dorian Gris, spends significant sums on a collection of wah-wah pedals for his guitars. The elaborate suits of Banda TecnoCaliente lend their group a professional appearance, but also must be hand-tailored at significant cost. All of these investments point to the fact that, regardless of the outlook of the band- professional, hobby, side-gig- most Charlotte Latino musicians see their music as a labor of love. In addition to the social capital that is developed and employed during concerts, such as Dorian Gris' relationship with their fans or Tony's mutually beneficial relationship with restaurant owners where Ultimanota gigs can turn into catering jobs at festivals, money capital moves through circuits between nightclub, musician, audience members, and local businesses. Bands work as freelancers, playing at venues when there is a free night available or a band leader or promoter can gather significant enthusiasm to make a concert potentially successful. Success breeds success; a point that was brought home to me as several bands went through funks when they did not have regular concerts for several months at a time during the recession of 2009-2010. But the resilience of many groups during this difficult time highlighted how they see music as something vital to their lives. It remains to be seen if a future economic uptick will correspond to renewed audience enthusiasm for Latin music in Charlotte. However, developments in late 2011 boded well, as several rock groups, including Mexican alternative

rock band Zöe, Mexican rock/rap group Molotov, Spanish singer Manu Chao, and Colombian duo Aterciopelados, all played to large, enthusiastic audiences at venues in Charlotte.

Conclusion

The experience of Latino musicians working and playing in Charlotte highlights the difficulty, but also the importance, of understanding musicians' labor. The ethos of certain bands, like Bakalao Stars, and their onstage personae can make it appear as if they treat music-making as "fun." However, the easygoing nature of public performance is built upon a process of community-making that starts with intensive and regular rehearsals and years performing together. Other bands, such as Banda TecnoCaliente, stress the "professional" and money-making purpose of their music by tying their labor practices with a desire to have a hit record. I think the term "working musician" encapsulates the diversity of musicians' experiences and viewpoints, stressing their labor power over common divisions like amateur/professional or full-time/part-time musician. In the three examples I have provided, what stands out is the need for musicians to assert their agency by defining the terms through which they make music. When Banda TecnoCaliente stresses their professionalism, they are defying common stereotypes of both Mexican immigrants and musicians. Bakalao Stars and Ultimanota both see their music-making as a time apart-from family obligations and from the stress of day jobs- and a space where a sense of community can be created with fellow musicians and audience members. Carlotan Rock was a way for *rock en español* enthusiasts to encourage local bands to develop their artistry and to bring in international groups who had previously bypassed Charlotte. The promoters rode the ups and down of successful and less than successful concerts, making a little money, but also forging a local Latino rock community that has had a lasting effect, even if the Carlotan Rock festival is defunct. Musicians pursue this process of community formation in the context of immigration policing that constantly threatens social ties and through a medium that

is rarely financially rewarding. Yet, they succeed, at least momentarily during performances, in sparking audiences to feel a sense of belonging and solidarity. With each other, musicians form life-long bonds of friendship, camaraderie, and a sense of “family” that ties them to a common cause.

Chapter 5: “*El Sueño Gris*”: Politics & Music in Charlotte

“*Gracias...a nuestras familias y amigos por apoyarnos en este sueño gris. Y un agradecimiento hiper-especial a la raza que va a todos nuestros shows, sin ustedes Los Dorians no existen.*”
Liner Notes, Dorian Gris, “Live at the Dark Room.” (2009)²⁷

“Is your music political?” I often asked musicians about the politics in their music- “Do your songs make a political statement?” And the answers to these direct questions would invariably be “No.” In the context of ongoing marches and protests over immigration reform and laws that target undocumented immigrants, these answers were puzzling. Over time I realized that when pressed, most musicians thought “politics” to refer to the overtly political world of elections and political parties- something they considered controversial, uncouth, or improper to include in a song’s lyrics or performance. In part, this may be because the Spanish term- *la política*- imperfectly translates into the English concept of politics and in Latin America has taken on negative connotations corresponding to national histories of one-party rule, corruption, political violence, and co-opted civic institutions.

While musicians rushed to appear apolitical when on record during an interview or formal conversation about their music, during other instances, both in their music and daily lives, they displayed strong political opinions and positioned themselves in everyday conversation along axes of class, ethnic, and national identity. Moreover, bands’ song lyrics, album liner notes, and statements during performances revealed commentaries on social issues through which musicians knowingly and unknowingly positioned themselves politically. Thus, it would be inaccurate to describe their stances as one of anti-politics (Ferguson 1994); instead musicians

²⁷ Translation: [“Thanks...to our families and friends for supporting us in this gray dream. And a hyper-special gratitude to *la raza* that comes to all our shows, without you the Los Dorians wouldn’t exist.”] *La Raza* (literally- the race) refers to people from Mexico of mestizo and/or indigenous descent.

have distinct notions of what constitutes formal and informal forays into the political world. To compare and contrast to the corpus of well-known *regional mexicano* band, Los Tigres del Norte, Charlotte musicians often chronicle elements of the immigrant experience- the hardships of migration, language barriers, yearning for the homeland, generational splits between parents and children- yet they stop short of making the strong political and social commentary that distinguishes Los Tigres' oeuvre (Ragland 2007, Wald 2001).

This chapter looks at how music-making, the act of musicians working with audience members to make music, is political in itself. Similar to other studies of community formation through local artistry (Crehan 2012, Finnegan 2007), I found that the collaborative process of writing, rehearsing, performing and reworking music gave musicians and audience members a sense of agency. This mutual musical decision-making, whether pursued through direct feedback at a concert (shouted comments of admiration, song requests) or revealed through online posts attached to a Youtube video on a social networking site, shows the closely knit bonds linking musicians and fans. They live in common circumstances and engage in a daily labor of defining their musical scene, a dialectical process that often involves synthesizing disparate elements- nationalities, class backgrounds, ages, and migration experiences- into creative expression. My research demonstrates that Latinos are creating, in the face of oppressive anti-immigrant policies, group solidarity and agency. They are recognizing themselves as having a common experience- as immigrants, as musically-inclined people, as speakers of a shared idiom- and forming a group "in itself" (Thompson 1963), a community.

Moreover, on a smaller scale, some musicians and several non-musicians involved in the music scene pursue the intellectual work of developing folk theories concerning the meaning of their music and performances with their audiences. Through analysis of the nuts and bolts of

music-making and reflection of the significance of performances, they take on a role of grassroots intellectuals, outlining theories that explain the values and group identities of communities in each of Charlotte's three Latino music districts. These musicians, while not attached to the politics of social movement organizing, are theorizing the political significance of their music in the context of immigration, the globalizing city, and anti-immigrant politics.

This chapter examines the different meanings of "politics" in and around Latin music in Charlotte, engaging with several central questions: 1) What is the relationship between party politics and formal political stances (what might be called Politics with a capital P) and the political opinions and positions of Charlotte's musicians (politics with a lowercase p)?; 2) How does everyday music-making help constitute a sense of agency and shape the informal political stances that Latina/o musicians take?; 3) In what ways are music and music-making a revealing medium for understanding what counts as "politics?"; 4) How does the process of thinking about music-musicians engaging in a meta-discourse on music- relate to the development of a musical vision of "politics?"

Love Songs and the Immigrant Experience

Most songs performed by Latino musicians in Charlotte are love songs, or what might be more accurately described as "relationship songs"- whose lyrics tell a story about love, sex and the foibles of human interaction. Bracketing for a moment the very interesting gender politics of this type of song, most relationship songs provide little fodder for a discussion of politics or many of the social issues faced by Latino immigrants. This is because "relationship songs" present a relatively self-contained world that focuses on love and the performance of prescribed gender roles, couched in metaphoric language. Which is not to say that relationship songs cannot be catchy or intriguing; they often represent the archetype of popular genres, the standard

by which other songs are judged.²⁸ A good example is the Bakalao Stars song, “Bom-Bom” (2010) which involves a call and response chorus sung to a ska beat:

<i>Bom-bom</i>	Bom-bom ²⁹
<i>Tú eres mi bom-bom</i>	you are my bom-bom
<i>Bom-bom</i>	bom-bom
<i>Que me das satisfacción</i>	you give me satisfaction
<i>Bom-bom</i>	bom-bom
<i>Si bailes guaguancó</i>	if you dance <i>guaguancó</i> ³⁰
<i>Bom-bom</i>	bom-bom
<i>Me pones en calor</i>	you make me hot

The chorus is followed by lyrical commentary:

<i>Ay, tus papas no me quieren</i>	Oh, your parents don't like me
<i>porque me escucho reggae</i>	because I listen to reggae
<i>Porque tengo trencitas,</i>	because I have dreads
<i>Tomo cañas también</i>	and because I drink
<i>Soy desorden voy contra el orden</i>	I'm disorder going against order
<i>Pero quiero que tus padres me oigan</i>	But I want your parents to hear me
<i>No me importan lo que digan los demás</i>	I don't care what the others say
<i>Sello a mi nada me dan</i>	They'll never give me a record deal
<i>Que mi estilo es diferente y mi forma de pensar</i>	My style and way of thinking are different
<i>Pero mi forma de amar es igual</i>	But my way of loving is up to par
<i>Tengo cariño, tengo dulzura</i>	I have affection, I have sweetness
<i>Yo soy caribe que</i>	I am a Caribbean who
<i>Baile con tetura</i>	dances with [?]
<i>Tengo cariño para brindar</i>	I have love to offer
<i>Tengo dulzura para imprecicar</i>	I have sweetness to curse you with

“Bom-Bom” provides an example of the rhythmic essence of ska- up-tempo syncopated beats with a call and response chorus to the rapid fire lyrics- while outlining the ethos of Bakalao Stars’ musical community through its lyrics. They differentiate themselves from their parents’ generation and social mores through their musical taste, appearance and behavior; at the same

²⁸ To give an example, The Temptations’ “My Girl” (2008) for Motown Records. Even a genre that shuns the sappy and romantic, such as the *narcocorrido*, marks its beginnings with a song about love and betrayal, Los Tigres del Norte’s “Contrabando y Traición” (1988). The most notable exception may be rap music.

²⁹ Bom-bom has several possible references in Spanish: Bombón- a piece of chocolate, i.e. a chocolate bon-bon; Bombó- a type of box drum; or Bombón- a peach, i.e., an attractive woman.

³⁰ A style of Afro-Cuban music and dance, one of the precursors to modern *salsa*.

time they align themselves with elements of Afro-Caribbean culture. Christian, the band's drummer, sings the first verse as a personal statement. He has blond dreadlocks and is known to take a drink or two, so the lyrics are not far from the truth. Lead singer Daniel sings the second verse, which becomes both a personal statement and a statement about the band's independent streak- not having a record deal, thinking and having a distinct style. But both verses bring the focus back to statements about love. "Bom-bom" provides an example of a relationship song that comments on the cultural upheaval between generations of Latino immigrants- first generation parents and 1.5 and second generation young adults. Bakalao Stars have built an audience by expressing who they and their audience of young, Latino immigrants are. However, this move is not a total break with the past or with home- much of their identity is tied up in ideas of being "Caribbean" and in expressing the parallels between their interpretations of English-speaking Caribbean music (reggae, ska) and other Afro-Caribbean traditions from the Spanish-speaking Caribbean (*guaguancó*, and in other songs, *rumba*). Moreover, despite the commentary in their lyrics about parental dislike, Christian and Javier's father can almost always be found in the back rows of their shows, videotaping the performance and cheering his sons on as they play music onstage.

In the Intown musical community that Bakalao Stars are a part of, live music includes the performance of rebelliousness, even as their lyrics and personal outlook favor a multicultural position that aligns with assimilative, liberal politics. Bakalao Stars will dress in striking costumes to begin performances (gorilla masks or Hawaiian shirts and grass skirts), jump and thrash around the stage, drink copiously, and invite women on stage to dance. The audience joins in this performance by dancing (marching, skipping, and jumping, depending on the tempo), drinking, and singing along to songs they know well from having participated in

multiple concerts. In an interview, when asked about whether their songs had political meaning, members of the band stressed the “positive message” they wanted their lyrics to portray, accompanied by music that the audience could listen to and have fun. While Christian states that he is “*desorden voy contra el orden* (disorder going against order),” under closer scrutiny it becomes clear that he doesn’t want to destroy the authority of his beloved’s parents’ generation, rather he wants them to recognize the legitimacy of his musical community and its lifestyle and ideas. Bakalao Stars constantly stresses that their music is a continuation of Afro-Caribbean and other Latin American musical traditions, which they have updated with the inclusion of reggae and ska, Latin rock, and personal touches.³¹



Figure 13: Bakalao Stars performing in Hawaiian shirts and skirts

³¹ It should also be noted that several prominent Latin American bands, such as Los Pericos, Los Fabulosos Cadillacs, and Pacha Massive, feature reggae/ska in their repertoire. Reggae has been popular in Colombia (where Christian and Javier are from) since at least the 1980s.

Other relationship songs provide social commentary on the financial burdens of international migration. In particular, former members of La Rúa pointed to one song they wrote that held political meaning, “El Chanchito (the Piggybank)” (2005):

*Recorriendo las veredas esperando encontrar,
Solamente una moneda que me falta pa' llenar
Mi chanchito de la suerte,
mi cochino para ahorrar
Ya le quedan pocos dias yo lo voy a reventar...*

Walking the sidewalks waiting to find
only a little change I need to fill
my lucky piggybank
my pig to save with,
only a few days left until I break it open...

[Coro]

*Le compraré una carretera
Pa' que llegue hasta aquí
Bajo un cielo con estrellas
Y una luna
Voy a pagar en la frontera
Pa' que cruce hasta aquí
Bajo un cielo con estrellas
Y una luna*

[Chorus]

I would buy you a road
so you could get here
under a sky with stars
and a moon
I'm going to pay at the border
so you can cross over here
under a sky with stars
and a moon

*Tiene cuatro patas amarillas como el sol,
Se que es de porcelana y que no siente dolor
Mi promesa es recordarlo,
y rezarle
Por la niña de mis sueños
yo lo voy a reventar...*

It has four yellow feet like the sun
I know it is porcelain and doesn't feel pain
I promise to remember it
and pray for it
for the girl of my dreams
I'm going to break it open

[Hablado]

*Esta es la historia de un pana,
que recoge moneda por las veredas.
Para traerse a la pelada
Del otro lado de la frontera*

[Spoken]

This is the story of a friend
who picks up change from sidewalks
going broke to bring her
from the other side of the border

In “El Chanchito,” an immigrant man in Charlotte saves up, in his piggybank, for enough money to bring his beloved to the United States. The song’s music video was one of the first shot by a Latin rock band in Charlotte and featured scenes from around the city dramatizing the story of separated lovers who are reunited.³² The video closes with a scene of the band performing the song outside surrounded by family and friends, an inclusion of their musical

³² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FkH1wrLvgHk>

community in the portrayal of the immigrant story. The spoken section of the song also speaks to the band members' connections to the immigrant community; they are telling the (true) story of a friend and addressing a common problem of family separation that Latino immigrants face in Charlotte and elsewhere. In an interview in English, Juan Miguel, the drummer for La Rúa, had this to say about the band's political outlook and "El Chanchito":

SB: "How do you see your music in terms of speaking about politics or social issues?"

Juan Miguel: "Back in Ecuador it was just music for fun because I loved it. I think we, with La Rúa, first we wanted to make music. I felt the songs I wrote at that time were all kind of like love stories or relationship type of stories. And in Charlotte with what we were experiencing, in terms of 'okay there are a lot of people that moved, like immigrants that came to Charlotte,' and it's the South, and the whole bridging the Hispanic and Anglo community, the history of music as a universal language, with all those thoughts in mind, I feel like *the* one song that touches the whole immigration issue on a very light way, but when you think about it it's really true, is 'el Chanchito,' which is, it is a love story, it's this guy working many jobs, what happens in reality, to save money to bring the girlfriend across the border."

"But aside from that, I think our main thing was to play music, and just show that yes we are from a different country but we could entertain you, we could...it's music and you shouldn't worry about the language or maybe if we look a little different to not come to the shows, we'll always dare people or encourage people to- 'you should come check it out, it's rock in Spanish, it's music in Spanish, you'll like it' - and that's how a lot of people decided to try it and a lot of people came back."

"So, it was very important to represent our culture, our country, or where we came from the best way possible. I've always been a believer of coexistence- there shouldn't be too many walls between people. I love many people from all cultures and every country so I sort of like tried to communicate that with what we were doing with La Rúa, so... that was the thing, but we really didn't get too heavy into politics..."

SB: "Or making political statements?"

JMM: "No, not necessarily, no, I think again it was more about integrating people, no matter where were you from, so...of course we were coming from: 'we're Latinos,' but not heavy politics." (Author Interview with Juan Miguel Marin, 7/18/2011)

Juan Miguel's comments point to the historicity of the moment of La Rúa's formation in 2003, a time when increased Latino immigration to Charlotte was making Latino culture more visible. After performing for several months covering popular Latin rock songs, "El Chanchito"

was one of La Rúa's first original songs. The band saw the song not just as a commentary on the plight of a hard working immigrant and his girlfriend, but as a way to advocate for fellow Latinos and educate both Latinos and non-Latinos about the immigrant experience. The band sought to bridge the cultural divide between Latino and Anglo, between rock in English and *rock en español*, by acting as ambassadors to the English-language rock scene in Charlotte and among Latinos from different countries in Latin America. By many accounts, La Rúa was successful at this endeavor; they attracted a diverse audience of Latinos and a small but enthusiastic following of non-Spanish speaking fans. While there are many factors that led to this success- musical style, timing, unrelenting promotion, charisma- the underlying subtext of Juan Miguel's statement is that a more overt foray into "heavy" politics would have undermined the popularity of the band. He sees "heavy" politics as positions or statements that are divisive, an outlook that would counteract his desire to coexist and bridge cultural divides. In its own way, Juan Miguel's vision of "coexistence" becomes political in a city where residential segregation limits the social interactions of Latino immigrants and white and black residents of the city. "El Chanchito" fulfills his vision nicely by stressing shared Latino and American mainstream cultural values- industriousness and family- while downplaying the structural forces that lead to labor migration and family separation.

Another song by Bakalao Stars, "Pa'l Norte," (2010) presents a complementary vision to "El Chanchito" by explaining the reasons for immigration and the hardships faced by migrants both in their home countries and in the United States. Bakalao Stars considers "Pa'l Norte" one of their more political songs because it includes commentary on a pressing social issue- the plight of migrants. The lyrics tell of an immigrant trying to get ahead:

*Estoy cansado por las calles de esa inmensa ciudad
La pena, la tristeza de la gente se ve*

No hay empleo, no hay estudio, ni como progresar

Las penas ya me agobian el futuro se va

*Le pregunto a Papá Dios cuando se va acabar
Que mi tierra tan querida me voy a desterrar*

Pa' progresar

Al Norte yo me voy, yo me voy a trabajar

Porque en esta tierra no puedo progresar

Al Norte yo me voy, yo me voy a ganar

*Ganar billete verde, de pobreza echar
Y yo me voy pa'l Norte, me iré, me iré*

*Son las cinco en la mañana me acabo a levantar
Motivado como un diablo
Buscando trabajo pero no me da*

*Porque no tengo papeles
Le pregunta a la gente cómo llegar
Pero no me entienden
Inglés sin barreras me voy a comprar*

a (con)versa esta gente

*No dejes colonia,
te consumo ni atrás
Si vienes pa'l Norte
Haz como el elefante
Nunca para atrás,
siempre para adelante
Con carro o con joyas
Todo te asombran pero de la felicidad*

*Nadie la compra
Amor con amor solo se demuestra
Eso es lo que quiero pa' todo de mi tierra*

I'm tired of the streets of this big city
I see the shame and sadness of the
people

There are no jobs, no schools,
no way to get ahead

Troubles overwhelm me, the future
is gone

I asked God when this would be over
I'm going to leave my beloved home

To make progress

Up North I'm going,
I'm going to work

Because in this place I can't get
ahead

Up North I'm going, I'm going to
earn

Earn green bills, to throw off poverty
I'm going up North, I'll be going, I'll
be going

It's five in the morning, I just got up
motivated like the devil

Looking for work but nobody hires
me

Because I don't have papers
I ask people how to go places

But they don't understand me
I'm going to buy *Inglés sin*

*Barreras*³³

to talk with those people

Don't abandon your town
over there it consumes you

If you go up North

make like an elephant

Always going forward,

never backwards

With a car or with jewelry

Everything amazes you,

but happiness

No one can buy it

Love with love only proves it

This is what I want for all my people

³³ A popular English-language learning program.

“Pa’l Norte” begins by describing the problems impoverished people living in Latin America face- unemployment, lack of schooling, and blocked access to capital or land-factors that limit their ability- *pa’ progresar*- to get ahead. Migration northward to the United States is seen as the most feasible solution, and life in the US is idealized, as a place where one can make good money and throw off the chains of poverty. However, once arrived, the migrant encounters hardship and problems in the United States, unable to find work because of lack of papers, unable to communicate because of language, that temper initial enthusiasm. Bakalao Stars use the song’s last verse to warn that although migration may provide economic benefits (a car, jewelry), happiness and love cannot be bought. Similar to “Jaula de Oro” (Golden Cage (1988)) by Los Tigres del Norte, “Pa’l Norte” warns of the irreversible effects and unintended consequences of immigration while portraying the driving structural forces and emotional desires that continue to make migration viable despite the well-known risks.

The issue of family separation has always been pressing, especially among immigrants from Mexico and Central America who have longstanding traditions of gendered migration in which young men leave their homes to journey to *El Norte* for work. Often men would work for several years or make annual migrations northward while mothers and wives would stay at home. However, beginning in the 1980s and increasing in the past two decades, a series of factors complicated this migration pattern (Hirsch 2003, Smith 2005, Massey 2007). First, women began to migrate for work and family reunification in the United States in greater numbers. As women in Mexico and Central America became more educated and less tied to agriculture, they migrated, often first to work in *maquiladoras* on the US-Mexico border or larger cities within these countries, and then to the United States. Second, migrant labor to the United States became more permanent, particularly in the face of militarized border enforcement

and harsher immigration laws, such as the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA). Migrants who previously had pursued circular routes through the United States and returned during slow seasons to Mexico now found it harder to return each year. Many decided to stay in the US, even if they lacked proper documentation, rather than risk a perilous border crossing through the desert. Third, life-cycle developments pressured many immigrants to remain in the United States; as young migrants who were part of a wave of immigration in the 1990s began to have children, many of whom were US citizens having been born in the US, they put down roots in US communities. Currently, the economic crisis has slowed immigration from Mexico to a standstill and many migrants who lost jobs in the United States have returned to their country of origin (Papademetriou, et al. 2011; Passel & Cohn 2011).

In Charlotte, I saw evidence of all of these trends, but also of new challenges to family unification facing Latino immigrants. One challenge is when family members are dispersed across wide geographical distance, from the home country to the United States and other immigrant destinations. At the fiftieth birthday party for a Bolivian woman, Ultimanota was hired to play popular songs for the celebration held in a private room at an Eastside restaurant. After their second set, the lights were dimmed and the woman's son started to set up a video projector. He pushed play and a video montage began. First, grandchildren and relatives from her hometown in Bolivia gave their blessings. Then a son in Los Angeles made an appearance and wished her happy birthday. Finally, another son in Madrid told her how much he missed her and wished that he could be there to celebrate the occasion. The lights went up, and the son in Charlotte picked up a guitar and, joining the band, began to sing her favorite song. Then, the whole room joined in singing her happy birthday in Spanish and she was presented with a cake and candles.

This video, homemade but well put-together, attests to the international scope of migration from Latin America in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, but also the way technology has lessened the communication gaps and social absences at important life events for dispersed families. As the Bolivian immigrant reached a milestone, it was unclear whether she would ever return permanently to her “home” in Bolivia, or would remain in Charlotte where she has forged important familial links. She now has a transnational family, linked by technology, and not tied to one geographic place.

The policing of Latino communities

However, another trend in Charlotte pointed to the importance of geography in families’ lives. The 1996 Immigration act contained a provision, section 287(g), that gave local law enforcement agencies authority to enforce immigration law. This part of the legislation was not implemented for several years as the federal government focused on a build up of border security and deportations of immigrants with prior criminal convictions. However, by the early 2000s, several local county and municipal governments began to clamor for the federal government to allow them to participate in immigration enforcement. The 287(g) program, as it became known, gave local law enforcement a period of training (usually a week or so) in immigration law and then gave them authority to carry out stops where a person without proper documentation could be turned over to federal immigration authorities. The former sheriff of Mecklenburg County (where Charlotte is located), Jim Pendergraph, was one of the most vocal advocates of the program and succeeded in signing the first agreement between the local government and the federal government to implement the 287(g) program in Mecklenburg County in February 2006. As of February 2012, the 287(g) program in Charlotte had resulted in the deportation of 11,480 undocumented immigrants, with the vast majority being Mexicans (7,238) and Central

Americans (3,573) (Prieto 2012).³⁴ In Charlotte and other places in North Carolina, 287(g) was presented as a strategy to fight crime; authorities stressed that only certain individuals would be targeted- violent criminals, gang members, and drunk drivers- while hard working, law-abiding immigrants would have nothing to fear (Nguyen & Gill 2010). The implementation of 287(g) was paired with state legislation that cracked down on “illegal” immigration by restricting services, such as the ability to get a driver’s license, for undocumented residents. Checkpoints were set up, in theory at random, by police at major intersections where drivers had to present identification. Police pulled drivers over for minor traffic violations, such as illegal turns or expired tags, and if they did not have a license, then they could be arrested and, if determined to be undocumented immigrants, eventually deported. In practice, many people who were detained and eventually deported were non-violent offenders or had no criminal record whatsoever.³⁵ The language of fighting crime bled into the idea that all undocumented immigrants were “illegal” and thus criminal.

During 2009-2010, the Spanish-language newspapers were filled with reports of families separated by enforcement of the 287(g) program. Many immigrant families in Charlotte have members with varying legal status. The father may be undocumented, the mother a legal resident, and the children US citizens. News stories reported wives and partners who did not hear from their husbands for several days, only to find out that they had been detained and deported. In one case, a Charlotte resident, Roberto Medina Martínez, was arrested under the 287(g) program for driving without a license (Pauly 2009). After being transferred to Stewart

³⁴ By spring 2012, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) decided to reduce funds for Charlotte’s 287(g) program, for which the agreement was set to expire in October. DHS now favors the Secure Communities program as a tool for local enforcement of immigration law. (Rafael Prieto. *El 287g dejaría de funcionar en octubre*. QuéPasa/Mi Gente. (online) accessed March 2, 2012.)

³⁵ The counterproductive results for law enforcement, such as underreporting of crimes and fear of police in immigrant communities, are just beginning to be analyzed for the 287(g) program (see Vidales et al. 2009; Nguyen & Gill 2010, Capps et al. 2011). De Genova (2002) has written about the broader negative social implications for this association of “illegality” with immigrant communities.

Detention Center, an immigration detention facility in Georgia run by Corrections Corporation of America, he fell ill, was denied medical care, and died. Medina left behind a family with young children, and his death sparked protests by immigration reform activists. Many community members I spoke with worried about driving on major thoroughfares or about family members and friends who drove without valid licenses. Among Latinos in Charlotte, it was a widely accepted fact that police mainly set up checkpoints in Latino and black, working-class neighborhoods and neglected wealthier and whiter areas such as the South Park area.

This mistrust of the police was exacerbated by a series of incidents that came to light in spring 2010. An African-American officer of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Police was arrested after several Latino immigrant women complained that he had sexually harassed and assaulted them during traffic stops.³⁶ According to the women, the officer threatened to take them into custody or turn them over to immigration if they did not consent to his advances to have sex with them (La Noticia 2010). The women were undocumented and feared that their accusations could lead to deportation. The local Spanish-language radio station and several prominent attorneys were instrumental in ensuring their safety during the investigation.

In the weeks after the arrest of the police officer, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department hosted a series of town hall meetings in immigrant neighborhoods around the city.³⁷ These meetings were an attempt to assure community members that steps were being taken to ensure that police misconduct would not be tolerated and to improve relations between immigrant communities and the police department. Attending an evening meeting at a church on Central Avenue, I sat in an audience of Latino and Asian immigrants as the police commissioner

³⁶ “*Policía acusado de asaltar sexualmente a Latina.*” La Noticia, January 6, 2010, p. 5.

Cheris Hodges, “Community Violations: Crimes drive a wedge between CMPD and Hispanics.” Creative Loafing Charlotte, February 10, 2010, p. 9.

³⁷ Rosario Machicao, “*Policía pide confianza a inmigrantes.*” La Noticia, March 24, 2010, pp.10-11.

addressed the room. He introduced himself and then a row of about 20 officers standing behind him introduced themselves. Then, the audience was split into two groups- English- and Spanish-speaking residents. I joined the Spanish-speaking group where several bilingual officers were taking questions. No one brought up the accused officer, but several people asked about the 287(g) program. A few community members were concerned that the police department engaged in racial profiling of Latino residents, pulling neighbors and friends over and arresting them for drunk driving or having an expired license. While adamant that no racial profiling occurred, one officer flippantly responded that Latinos made profiling more likely by modifying their trucks with airbrushed Mexican flags and the names of their home provinces in Mexico. A Latina journalist whom I ran into at the event remarked that the meeting reflected an ongoing public relations strategy that the department had engaged in for years and that nothing had really changed in terms of the antagonistic relationship between the Latino community and police.

In a related newspaper article, several community members were asked what could be done to improve the relationship between Latinos and the police.³⁸ A few people stressed the need for Latinos to learn English to communicate better with police officers, but also for police to respect community residents' human rights. One person, Sonia Escobar, told of her experience with the police:

“They deported my husband because they took him to jail after an auto accident, where both drivers, my husband and the other person (American) were at fault. My husband was detained and later deported, and nothing happened to the American. The police should not conduct their work on the basis of race, because we all came here to work, except for a few who are delinquents. I don't believe that the police should collaborate with ICE (Immigration Customs & Enforcement) to pick up innocent people in their homes and deport them. They should search for criminals and not for the fathers and mothers of working families.”³⁹

³⁸ Rosario Machicao, “¿Como mejorar la relación entre la policía y los latinos?” La Noticia, June 14, 2010, p. 8.

³⁹ Ibid. (Translation mine).

Although Charlotte's Latino population has an antagonistic relationship with local police, highlighted by high-profile incidents such as those above, many musicians stressed the relative tranquility of Charlotte. In their experience, fewer examples of racism and discriminatory behavior towards Latinos occurred in Charlotte than in other places, particularly rural areas in nearby states. Some of this perceived lack of racism could be attributed to personal factors that differentiate musicians from the general Latino community- higher rates of legal status, bilingualism, access (to clubs, backstage areas), higher income levels, and increased visibility- leading to fewer individual experiences of racist behavior. Also, musicians may tend to downplay portrayals of local racism because they want to put a positive spin on their involvement in the music scene in Charlotte. The grass is sometimes greener at home; everyday forms of racism may not be as recognizable or mentionable as more blatant examples of overt racist behavior that some musicians reported having experienced elsewhere. This perception of Charlotte as a relative haven from racism and discrimination aimed at Latinos contributes to a sense of civic pride and belonging that some musicians express for the city and for Latino community institutions like the Latin American Coalition. For example, during an interview conducted in Spanish, local music promoter Gonzalo launched into an intriguing monologue when asked about his experience with racism in the US South:

SB: "How do you feel about living in the South, which has a history of racism?"

Gonzalo: "Yes, yes, yes, in that regard we have suffered a lot, it's true. Above all playing with a Mexican band, not just here in Charlotte, well, here a little in Charlotte, there really isn't that much racism, the Americans have mixed enough with...there are one, two or three (cases of racism) but look, places like, we have gone to Virginia, Ohio, it's true, wow, I could tell you some stories that!..."

SB: "Go ahead!"

Gonzalo: "Yes, I'm going to tell you one experience, my own experience, we went to Tennessee, came to a McDonald's, and I stepped off, well, I have black features- and

when the guys got off the bus, the people who were there started mocking us and in the McDonald's, the area where we sat emptied out, everybody changed their seat, that was, we didn't eat, we left and got out of there, and five minutes later the police stopped us, [asking,] 'What, what were you doing in that McDonald's, where did you come from, and where are you going.' And they searched the bus inside and out, they searched everything top to bottom, that was an act of racism."

"Yes, I eventually told the police officer let us go because I began to have strong words with him, I said that, 'I'm going to make a claim of racial discrimination, because you are doing something unjust, this is a motorhome, we have a motorhome to take us around to cities.' And that was the only reason he let us go. And we are trying to perform as a group, and that was one of the things we suffered most from in those cities, it's true that's how it is in Ohio which is full of racism...strong, it's strong... but whatever, we continue living and selling our music the same, it won't stop us...we have returned like ten times to places, and the people, okay, come to listen, they are not going to kick us out by doing that, this is not going to stop us."

(Interview with Author 9/20/2010)

Gonzalo, who is a dark-skinned Dominican immigrant, recounts the experiences he has had traveling with Banda TecnoCaliente, a group made up of Mexican immigrants, around the US South and Midwest. Significantly, he contrasts Charlotte, where he can recall having experienced only one or two incidents of racism, with trips to Virginia or Ohio, where he perceives racist behavior to be much more prevalent. When the band stopped at a McDonald's in Tennessee, the behavior of white restaurant patrons- changing seats- forewarned the group's racial profiling by the police. For Gonzalo, there is a place-based specificity to racism; the restaurant patrons made the band feel uncomfortable and the police targeted the bus because they stopped there; both contributed to an atmosphere of intolerance and acts of discrimination. There is also an air of personal bravado in Gonzalo's account; as someone who speaks passable English, is secure in his legal status, and is in charge of the band, he confronted the police officer and threatened to make a complaint. He becomes an advocate for the Mexican band members, drawing on a body of experience traveling with previous bands to resolve the situation and get the band on the road again.

This leads to his next statement- a justification for why the band continues to travel repeatedly to places where they know they will encounter racism. The band travels because they are trying to make a living and because their audience continues to come out to shows to hear them. This justification parallels an explanation I heard from many Latino immigrants about why they journeyed to the United States and remained here despite perilous border crossings, fear of deportation, discrimination, and separated family members- the higher wages and stability made the suffering endurable. Gonzalo and Banda TecnoCaliente understood the experience of mobile and migratory immigrant laborers who made up their audiences because they, too, faced the hardships of the road, even if from the relative comfort of their second-hand motor home.

Continuing with his monologue, Gonzalo goes into greater detail about how he envisions Latino immigrants as belonging to the city of Charlotte:

“But here, here at least in Charlotte I tell you that really (racism) has mostly stopped, in Charlotte, which is why it’s peaceful, the American that can give you a hand gives you one, like the Mexicans say, the ‘gabacho’ gets along well with us, yes in Charlotte I can tell you, but what you have in South Carolina, there is a lot of racism coming out, a lot (of racism) still exists in South Carolina, I say you have to be very careful walking around, it’s a rare day that you leave there without the police stopping you... I can’t wait for a day when that calms down.”

“We are all children of God, we are all humans, all made by the same creator, no matter the color of your skin or your race, because here no one should harm anyone else, I’m one of those who advises the Mexicans to work for (the benefit) of the state, ‘don’t send all your money to Mexico, it’s a mistake, keep some of it here, Mexicans.’”

“Mexicans earn one-hundred dollars, and send ninety to Mexico, ‘invest in your city, (a city) that gives you schools, gives you help that you need, your children have good hospitals, they have everything, so invest here.’ And I really don’t applaud the Mexican in that respect, the Mexican who earns one-hundred and sends eighty or ninety, don’t send it over there, but spend it here, they want to live doing that...but not everybody, Mexicans are really good (people), good workers, and good laborers and all, but it’s because of the same immigration problem that they think that...if one invests here and if they invest here, they (the city) will give them more support, the institutions are going to back them with more force, and say, ‘look, she is illegal, but she bought a house, he is paying taxes to the government, he is illegal but his children are professionals, he has a car and pays taxes,’ Understand? If we did all that, if we didn’t blow it in wanting to only take from the city, and not invest, the city would go to pieces.”

“We have to take money and reinvest it in the city, I, the Dominican that I am, sold all my properties in my country and I am concentrating here. I take here and I spend here. I’m not able to just take and not spend, ‘what would be left of the city?’ It’s like if you work and work and only work and they don’t pay you (laughs), you will die. This happens with a city, the city has to be cared for, you have to fight for this city because the people owe it. It’s not as if everybody is not giving, here there are many who help, here people, the Mexican knows that if your child is born here, you have help with your (WIC) coupons, your Medicaid, the house like this house here where we are at (Latin American Coalition) helps people a lot, with (learning) English, if one needs a lawyer they will look for one for you, because they invest in you here, we are going to work for (the benefit of) the city. That’s the only thing that I don’t approve of in our community, and not only, I say, it’s more Mexicans than others. They are the majority (of Latinos) here...”
(Interview with Author 9/20/2010)

Gonzalo compares Charlotte to nearby South Carolina, a place he stresses is replete with racist behavior. He couches the unity of all humans, regardless of skin color or race, in religious language. Gonzalo’s religious beliefs are connected with his strong attachment to place and his views on individual moral behavior (“here no one should harm anyone else”). What becomes clearer as the monologue proceeds is that Gonzalo also holds strong opinions about the relationship between the Latino immigrant community and the nation-state. First, Gonzalo positions himself as somewhat separate from what he is talking about by speaking of “Mexicans,” in a somewhat stereotypical and chauvinistic manner, as the group that, because of numbers and cultural strength, represents the Latino community as a whole. This move gives him distance and allows him to take on an advisor role toward the behavior he advocates. He advises Mexicans to invest in “your city” rather than send the majority of their money as remittances to Mexico. By buying houses, spending money locally, paying taxes, or donating to community organizations, Mexicans can repay the city and community for the support they have given immigrants in the form of public schools, Medicaid and WIC benefits, English classes, and legal aid. Gonzalo sees this as a political strategy; if “illegal” immigrants stake a claim to belonging in the city and invest as community members in its well-being (financially and

socially) through legitimate, above-board activities like paying taxes, owning property, and having children who are “professionals” (i.e., well-educated, English-speaking, with middle-class jobs in the formal economy), then the institutions of the state will be more likely to acknowledge that immigrants have a stake and say in the city’s future. Gonzalo contrasts his personal actions with that of Mexicans, stating that he has pulled up stakes in the Dominican Republic and settled fully in Charlotte. This leads to his assessment of what happens in the city that lacks reinvestment: it falls apart. Gonzalo’s vision is of civic pride entailing real financial and social commitment to a community and city by its residents. He links the Latin American Coalition with city government because they both provide social services and help construct a social safety net for the Latino immigrant community.⁴⁰

What is intriguing about Gonzalo’s argument is the way it positions Mexicans and the Latino immigrant community as political actors who have important decisions to make that will determine their future. Opposing both advocates of harsher immigration laws and immigrants who themselves desire a transnational existence, Gonzalo advances a *realpolitik* of acknowledging what is already fact- that most Latino immigrants to Charlotte are unlikely to return to their native countries and have strong ties to community in the city.⁴¹ Despite recent legislation targeting undocumented immigrants, mass deportations are improbable for economic and political reasons. Although immigration has slowed and some migrants have returned to their sending countries during the recent economic recession (Papademetriou, et al. 2011; Passel & Cohn 2011), most immigrants already in the United States have decided to stay, for steadier work, because they have children who are American citizens, or because the border crossing is

⁴⁰ In fact, city officials from the Health and Human Services Department hold office hours weekly at the Latin American Coalition, where they help families fill out paperwork for Medicaid and other public benefits. Some of the LAC’s funding comes from grants from city agencies and from prominent state-wide foundations.

⁴¹ See Massey, NY Times Editorial 8/4/2011, for an explanation of the decreased mobility and limited economic prospects of Mexican and Central American migrants to the United States.

too perilous and expensive. These trends have contributed to place-based community formation, even among immigrants who were formerly very mobile, such as migrant workers who decide to move to cities such as Charlotte for more regular work.

The state as it exists along multiple scales (city, county, state, federal) plays a major part in this politics around immigration. Although much of the publicity focuses on state actions that are anti-immigrant, such as recent legislation passed in Arizona, Utah, and Georgia that targets undocumented immigration, in reality, the state should be seen as encompassing multiple interests that at times pursue both complementary and contradictory paths. Much of the vitriol and anti-immigrant legislative efforts have centered on the rights of immigrants to participate in government-funded, regulated, or mandated activities that signal participation in society, such as driver's licenses, public education, benefits to the poor, and above-board employment. Yet while police and regulatory agencies may curb undocumented immigrants' rights to these activities, other government agencies, such as health, human services, or education may include undocumented immigrants in activities, either through the participation of family members who are legal residents or US citizens (particularly, US-born children) or directly despite their undocumented status because of federal anti-discrimination mandates (such as for public primary education). The work of the state to include undocumented immigrants acknowledges their *de facto* membership in the community, city, and state, even if legally their role is circumscribed.

In another light, Gonzalo's argument provides a critique of neoliberalism and its negative effects on cities, while using some of the logic of neoliberalism to back his position. This corresponds to the pervasiveness of market ideology in current political thinking, and the ways people fashion political speech on the local scale (see Holland et al. 2007.) The disinvestment in urban infrastructure and social services that first came to a head in the 1970s in New York City's

fiscal crisis (O'Connor 1973, Harvey 1973, Harvey 1989, Gordon 1978, Susser 1982) is described succinctly, "what would be left of the city?," in relation to what could happen in Charlotte. However, rather than see this collapse as a result of governmental austerity and structural adjustment, Gonzalo sees it as a consequence of individuals shirking their civic duty to reinvest in their local government (through paying taxes), neighborhoods and civic institutions. Immigrants are responsible for their own well-being and that of the city. Interestingly, recent studies of several US cities lend support for the idea that immigration (spurring ethnic entrepreneurship and immigrant consumption) and concurrent population growth has been one, if not *the* only source of economic growth, particularly in places with declining or aging native-born populations (Fayde 2007, Michigan Future 2003, Fiscal Policy Institute 2009). However, as Gonzalo's argument develops, he turns to a decidedly anti-neoliberal stance on the role of the state- government agencies have provided social benefits to the immigrant community, therefore immigrants should pay taxes and fight for a government that erects more of a social safety net and expands rights and access for all.

Politics with a Capital P

On a chilly November evening in Charlotte, I ride with Jess George, the executive director of the Latin American Coalition, to an African-American church in an Intown neighborhood just off of Central Avenue. We park in the crowded gravel lot and go inside a packed chapel of St. Paul's Church. At the entrance, young Latino volunteers pressed stickers reading "Reform Immigration for America" on the sleeves of our jackets. Inside, the pews are full of Latino immigrants- families with young children, teenagers and groups of twenty-something men- and a sprinkling of black and white concerned community members. People keep walking in and as the aisles fill up, the organizers announce that because of the turnout, we

will be moving to the larger church auditorium next door. Everyone filters over to the more spacious building and settles in their seats as the evening's presentation begins.

Reform Immigration for America is a national campaign for comprehensive immigration reform that is represented locally through the Latin American Coalition. Tonight's meeting has been organized by Rubén, a staff member at the LAC who organizes local campaigns for immigration reform and coordinating local efforts with state and national efforts, such as marches in Washington DC and lobbying in Raleigh, the state capital. This meeting is the kick-off of an effort to recruit people for an immigration reform rally in March 2010.⁴²

The first speakers of the night are several college students, who in English and Spanish, tell their stories of facing limited access to college because of state laws prohibiting undocumented students from attending community college. The church's pastor leads a prayer, and then Leydy Bonilla sings the US national anthem. Randy, a white preacher at an evangelical church with a mostly Latino congregation, steps to the pulpit to tell a story about having witnessed racial profiling by police at checkpoints. Driving with his young son one night, he had to explain why the Latino driver in front of him was being pulled to the side and police were searching his car, while they were allowed to pass through without trouble. Several women, speaking in Spanish, testified about husbands and other loved ones who had been deported under the 287(g) program after being stopped by police. St. Paul's pastor, Mark Reynolds, stands up next and gives an animated sermon to his "Latino brothers" expressing the common problems facing the black and Latino communities and the solidarity he feels with the struggles of Latinos for expanded civil rights. Jess George introduces herself (this is one of the first big events since

⁴² Rosario Machicao, "Masivo pedido de reforma migratoria en Charlotte." La Noticia, January 13, 2010, p. 1. Ileana Pauly, "Miles gritaron reforma: tres mil personas en Carolina de Norte prenden la campaña." Que Pasa, January 20, 2010, B1. "Charlotte se moviliza por la reforma migratoria." El Progreso Hispano, January 14, 2010, p. 1.

she has taken over as director) and speaks about the need to provide undocumented immigrants a path to legalization and citizenship and the important contribution of immigrants to the US economy. Maudia Meléndez, a prominent community organizer and pastor, rose to speak in Spanish, telling the crowd not to despair of the seeming impossibility of their task of pushing through immigration reform; she invokes Old Testament imagery by telling the story of Moses having faith in God and trusting that he would part the Red Sea as the Jews were escaping from Egypt. After this rousing mini-sermon, Rubén closes out the meeting by giving the audience instructions on how to fill out a postcard that is being passed around- by signing up with a mobile phone number, one can receive text messages with updates on how the campaign is going and when the next protest or meeting is happening.

After the meeting, I meet up at a pizza parlor with a few friends who had also attended. We are excited about the enthusiasm of the crowd and number of people who attended the meeting. Based on the size of the auditorium, which was almost filled to capacity, we estimate that around 2,000 people showed up. However, we wonder what will come out of it; the meeting took the form of a motivational meeting or a pep rally but didn't discuss what the next steps would be. The speeches were stirring, the stories heart-wrenching, but besides signing up for text messages what did the audience bring away from it? An op-ed column a few weeks afterwards by community activist Maudia Meléndez assuaged some of the concerns we had raised over dinner. In a column entitled "Where are the leaders?"- Maudia featured the stories of several young Latinos who, having been inspired by the meeting, were organizing groups to join the march on Washington.⁴³

The next few months were marked by small protests- in front of the county jail, at city parks, at city council meetings- where Latino community members gathered in public. People

⁴³ Maudia Meléndez, "¿Donde están los líderes?" La Noticia, February 24, 2010, p. 17.

held up placards expressing their disapproval of the 287(g) program and waved American flags to express their desire for political inclusion in the nation.⁴⁴ Organizers worked furiously to coordinate both these smaller protests and a scheduled march in Washington DC. In the Latin American Coalition offices, a conference room became a space where Rubén, Maudia, and other prominent Latino community leaders pulled together a campaign in the weeks leading up to the march. They dialed into conference calls with other state and national organizers to hash out logistics. A map of North Carolina taped on the wall was marked with the towns and cities that were sending busloads of participants to DC. They crafted press releases for the Spanish and English-language press and held radio interviews. Volunteers called participants who had signed up at community meetings, protests, or online and reminded them when and where the buses were leaving and how much the trip cost.

On a warm evening in March, I walked to the parking lot of the Eastland Mall where a long line of charter buses waited to be loaded with people. Groups of high school students gathered, saying goodbye to parents who could not make the trip, excited to be going to their first march. Women from a church group circled around to chant a prayer. Rubén and a group of student activists stood to one side giving a press conference under the bright lights of a TV camera set. A local Spanish-language newspaper had the most buses; they had promoted the march in their paper and given t-shirts to the participants who rode their buses. Finally, I found the bus of marchers organized by the Latin American Coalition and grabbed a seat. After a delay to make sure everyone who had signed up had arrived and was on a bus, the caravan started its overnight journey to Washington, DC. On the bus, I chatted with several people I recognized

⁴⁴ Organizers would often stress during planning meetings and during phone calls to recruit protesters that participants should bring only the US flag and not the flag(s) of their home countries so that the protesters' loyalty to the United States could not be questioned. This became an issue after the 2006 immigrant-rights marches when some marchers carried flags from other countries. Organizers also encouraged participants to dress in neutral colors, usually a white t-shirt, so that the group would appear uniform and easily recognizable.

from the Coalition- clients, friends, and family members- and introduced myself to several new faces. On the trip there, we slept very little; there were ongoing conversations about what to expect and a hint of anticipation in the air.



Figure 14: Charlotte representatives at the March 2010 immigration reform rally, Washington DC

During the march, I wandered around the National Mall- from group to group and side to side- but the crush of thousands of people often restricted what I could see and hear. Although the purpose of attending the march was to reach a better understanding of the immigrants’ rights movement and show solidarity with Latino community members from Charlotte; it so happened that music permeated the event and formed a large part of what I took away from attending. The opening convocation featured a choir singing “the Star-Spangled Banner” and several hymns in English. As groups from different states entered the National Mall, they often chanted slogans or marched in formation with small drums, while carrying banners with their organization or state. One party even had a rag-tag marching band that accompanied them down the Mall. As speaker after speaker took the stage, they often engaged the crowd with chants- “*¡Si se puede!* (Yes we can)” being the most common. As the heat in the crowd grew stifling, I slipped behind the stage where a group of Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans from California were gathered

around a group of *mariachis* and folkloric dancers dressed in full regalia. The band lit into a rendition of “La Negra,” a traditional song from central Mexico, and I could barely hear the vocalists over the chorus of marchers who joined in singing every word. I then made my way over to another bunch of people: Dominican immigrants who huddled around a group of percussionists playing a *tambor*, a *güiro* and *claves* and improvising lyrics about the march. Rejoining the crowd, I listened to a series of speakers, each more prominent than the last- TV personality Geraldo Rivera, officials from the NAACP and National Council of La Raza, Representative Luis Gutierrez, Senator Bob Menendez- until on a giant TV screen a prerecorded message from President Barack Obama pledged support for immigration reform. Soon after, the gathering dispersed, and groups of participants marched back to their buses through the streets of Washington DC. I found people from North Carolina and walked with them. A guy walking with a guitar strapped around his shoulders launched into José Alfredo Jiménez’s “El Rey” (1987) and everyone around me joined in singing:

<i>Con dinero y sin dinero</i>	With money and without money
<i>Hago siempre lo que quiero</i>	I always do what I want
<i>Y mi palabra es la ley.</i>	And my word is law.
<i>No tengo trono ni reina</i>	I don’t have a throne nor a queen
<i>Ni nadie que me comprenda</i>	Nor anyone who understands me
<i>Pero sigo siendo el rey.</i>	But I continue being king.

And the irony of Jiménez’s song seemed more poignant than ever; the marchers were supplicants to a government preoccupied with passing health care legislation that excluded undocumented immigrants from coverage. Yet the marchers retained their optimism and pride even as the tide that rose with the 2006 protests that many of them participated in appeared to turn against them in anti-immigrant laws and popular opinion. One marcher embodied this more than most; as we walked past the Capitol building, a young Latino man with long hair stood up

on a bench and repeatedly shouted “*Si se puede*” to an enthusiastic audience and raised his arms and pointed at the sky as if at a rock concert listening to his favorite band. It was a moment of assertion and defiance to a Congress that had seemingly turned its back on immigration reform.

On the bus ride home, the excitement waned as tired marchers drifted asleep, but some expressed hope that their efforts were worthwhile. The next day’s Spanish-language newspapers were flush with full page photo montages of the march and extensive coverage of what was said and who participated.⁴⁵ The front page of a local Spanish-language newspaper, *Que Pasa*, featured a photograph of the marchers looking at the giant video screen with President Obama speaking and asked: “*¿Nos Vas a Cumplir?: Miles le pidieron a Obama que cumpla con su promesa de campaña.*” (Are you going to keep your promise to us?: Thousands ask Obama to keep his campaign promise.)⁴⁶ In the months after the march, small protests continued around Charlotte. I observed one gathering that took the form of performance art and public theater as a form of protest of the recently-passed Arizona law SB 1070.⁴⁷ Activists dressed up as the Bill of Rights were arrested by police and put in handcuffs only to be rescued by Lady Liberty dressed in green robes and holding a torch. This performance was given on the sidewalk in NoDa on a Friday evening in English and Spanish, and people going to concerts, bars and restaurants stopped to watch and were given flyers about immigration reform.

In December, activists had a hopeful moment when Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid attempted to attach the provisions of the DREAM Act, giving undocumented college students a path to legalization, to a military spending bill. On a Friday night, I sat with several activists

⁴⁵ “*Multitudinaria Marcha Nacional se Unió a una Voz: ¡Reforma!*” *Mi Gente*, March 23, 2010, p.1. “*Inmigrantes demostraron su poder.*” *El Progreso Hispano*, March 25, 2010, p.1. Rosario Machicao, “*Miles marcharon por una reforma migratoria.*” *La Noticia*, March 24, 2010, p. 1.

⁴⁶ *Que Pasa*. March 24, 2010, A1.

⁴⁷ Ileana Pauly, “*Rechazo a la injusticia: Grupo de teatro callejero presenta obra contra la ley Arizona.*” *Que Pasa*, July 21, 2010, B1.

watching Senate proceedings, but the amendment eventually failed. This is how 2010 ended- an eventful but fruitless year of politicking for immigration reform in Charlotte and nationwide.

Although the main goals of the 2010 march were not realized, we should not discount the other effects of Charlotte's Latino community's participation in the march. For many of the students and young people involved, it was their first experience organizing and participating in a mass political event and visiting Washington DC. For them, the march may act as a rite of passage that leads to an adulthood of political participation.⁴⁸ In fact, young people appear to be taking a more prominent role in the immigration reform movement. In the past few years, student activists in several states have taken the risky move of proclaiming their undocumented status voluntarily in public during protests, bringing attention to their personal cases (many were brought to the US as babies by their parents, some are ranked at the head of their class) and the barriers facing undocumented students (limited access to college education and no federal loans).⁴⁹ In Charlotte, student activists involved in the Latin American Coalition's United 4 the Dream campaign have begun to encourage undocumented immigrants to "come out" by publicly proclaiming their status.⁵⁰ Other students have had their status revealed after brushes with law enforcement. One prominent case involved a student at Kennesaw State University in Georgia, Jessica Colotl, who after being pulled over for a traffic violation, was arrested for driving without a license. University officials, civil rights groups, and Latino organizations argued for her release and she was given a one-year reprieve to finish her degree before facing trial. In 2011, she was again granted a one-year reprieve through 2012.⁵¹ In the weeks leading up to the

⁴⁸ Alberto Benítez, "*Nueva Generación: son jóvenes y comprometidos con vivir con las mismas oportunidades.*" Que Pasa, February 24, 2010, B1.

⁴⁹ Lee Shearer, "Voices raised against regents' policy on undocumented students." Online Athens/ Athens Banner-Herald, August 24, 2011. Jose Antonio Vargas, "My Life as an Undocumented Immigrant." New York Times, June 22, 2011, p. MM22.

⁵⁰ Rhiannon Fionn, "Undocumented Latinos 'Come out.'" Creative Loafing Charlotte, September 6, 2011.

⁵¹ Laura Diamond. "Colotl allowed to remain in US for another year." Atlanta Journal-Constitution, May 3, 2011.

2010 march, a group of student activists from Florida walked from their university through the US South to arrive in DC. At each stop along the way they gave press conferences and stressed their views on why immigration reform was necessary. During 2010, the Latin American Coalition hired a community organizer to help recruit students from local high schools to participate in the march. By May 2011, they had a cadre of young activists who descended on the Cinco de Mayo Fanta Festival and gathered thousands of signatures for their “Drop the I Word” campaign.⁵² These students represent a younger generation that is coming of age in a climate where they, their parents, and friends face the constant threat of deportation and targeting by police and government authorities. As students, they have been portrayed as a demographic “problem” that requires more resources (for ESL classes, translators, etc.) and faced resistance to being admitted to higher education (Wainer 2006). Having grown up in the United States, they argue that because of their already strong ties of community and belonging to country and region, they have a legitimate claim to immigration reform and a path to citizenship as *de facto* members of the nation.

However, musicians, like many in the immigration reform movement’s constituency, do not participate fully in this type of overt political organizing. While some musicians conveyed their distaste of or hesitancy to get involved in protests, others are just too busy, especially as they work two or three jobs, to get involved in time-consuming campaigns. When musicians do link up with immigration reform activists, it is most often as performers- singing the national anthem at a rally or allowing an organizer to announce an upcoming event between songs at a concert. While few musicians make forays into overt politics, Charlotte’s political activists appear not to fully enlist musical communities as part of their campaigns, instead relying on

⁵²“Drop the I Word” is a campaign to pressure media to stop using the word “illegal” to describe undocumented immigrants in news stories.

organizing networks of the church, radio listeners and newspaper readers, and non-profit organizations.



Figure 15: Activists addressing the crowd, 2010 Fanta Festival

The Politics of Musical Life

It is in the context of political organizing and protest that we must consider the relative lack of overt political music among Latinos in Charlotte. Where are the protest songs?⁵³ Where is the *corrido* chronicling the plight of undocumented students or torn-apart families? These don't exist, despite the connections between Latin music genres in Charlotte and the political commentary of Latin American rock (Pacini Hernandez et al. 2004, Zolov 1999) or *regional mexicano* music (Ragland 2007). Instead, musicians from across genres stressed to me during interviews that they seek to avoid political issues in their music. Many musicians remarked that

⁵³ Billy Bragg. "Why Music Needs to Get Political Again." *The New Significance*. August 25, 2011.

they attempt to relay a positive message in songs, or that they provide music so that people can have fun. During a conversation, Tony Arreaza commented that he does not like to mix politics and music because he does not see music as a political arena. He recalled one incident when La Rúa was hired to play a fundraiser for a local politician and the band did not like how it felt to be so closely linked to party politics. Despite this political avoidance, several groups have songs with lyrics that provide political commentary, as we have seen. Other bands, in particular Dorian Gris and Tropic Culture, are fond of interspersing their songs with conversations with their audiences during live performances (see Chapter 3). For example, during one concert in October 2010, Tropic Culture expressed their concern over an attempted coup d'état that had occurred in Ecuador.⁵⁴ After declaring the need for democracy, the band dedicated a song sung in English to the people of Ecuador entitled, "Freedom Fighters:"

"Let's start a revolution, ya'll (Spoken)"

You may ask what it's all about
What goes around you comes around
Why all the thoughts you understand
Why are we here, do we have a plan?

Yes! To wake up everyday and see
How the world can be scattered with ease...

It's a rare occasion when one can see
We need education and we think it's free
Where to stand against these odds
It's heroic enough for us
For all the freedoms that we share
The revolution must be there
For all the freedoms that we share
The revolution must begin.
(Tropic Culture, Dance Revolution, 2010)

⁵⁴ On September 30, 2010, Ecuador's National Police went on strike. In a confrontation with President Rafael Correa, the police attacked him and took him hostage. After being held inside a hospital, Correa was rescued by an elite army unit and restored to full power. The Tropic Culture concert took place on October 1, 2010.

This song was part of their new album, “Dance Revolution,” which represented a change of styles and instrumentation for Tropic Culture. The band’s opening line, “Let’s start a revolution, ya’ll,” is both a statement of their new creative direction of bringing in disco and funk rhythms and attempting to make their songs more danceable, and an exhortation to their audience to effect change- with a Southern twang. The song’s lyrics attempt to answer questions about the purpose of the band and their musical community, while leaving vague what a “revolution” to protect “the freedoms that we share” signifies. With songs such as “Eliminate the Hate” and live performances of Bob Marley and Manu Chao covers, Tropic Culture has often positioned itself as part of a progressive, left-leaning community, although they hesitate to venture beyond the “positive message” politics of multiculturalism or the loosely choreographed style of jam band music. In “Freedom Fighters” it appears they still struggle with these limitations, both political and creative, to define what revolutionary change means.

A song by Bakalao Stars presents another facet of Latino social commentary in Charlotte, the link between immigrants and the environment. “Verde” (2010) is a paean to the Earth and a plea to protect the environment. For the song, Bakalao Stars enlisted the help of Itagui, lead singer of Miami-based band Locos Por Juana, who sings and raps as a guest vocalist on the track. “Verde” paints a bleak picture of environmental destruction to a reggae beat:

*Por esta aquí, tienes que pensar
Que esta tierra pronto basta ya
Si no actuamos*

You have to think about this here
That this Earth will be gone soon
If we don’t act

[Call and response]

*Verde
Que es el color de la tierra
Verde
El árbol lleno de ramos
Verde
El aire que respiramos
Verde*

Green
Which is the color of the earth
Green
The tree full of branches
Green
The air we breathe
Green

Pa' el futuro de los chamos

For the future of the youth

*No se que hacer, es muy tarde ya
Voy este mundo llega a su final
La vida vale no más que tres pesos
Solo la angustia, horror, y mil lamentos
Se acabó el gas y esto va explotarse
Si no actuamos nos jodemos ya
Ya esta guerra se salió de nuestras manos
Por dinero y por la envidia
Nuestra guerra atrapamos
Global Warming acaba el mundo ya
Nuestros hijos quisiéremos salvar
Tardamos, matamos,
también contaminamos
Cuidamos nuestro mundo
decirlo ya mis hermanos*

I don't know what to do, it's already too late
This world is going to end
Life is not worth three pesos
Only anxiety, horror, and a thousand cries of pain
There's no more gas and that is going to explode
If we don't act then we will be screwed
this war is out of our hands
through money and envy
our war has trapped us
Global Warming is about to end the world
We want to save our children
We're too late, we're killing it
Also contaminating it
Take care of this world
say it now my brothers

*Se acaba si no actuamos
Y si contaminamos
Se acaba si no actuamos
Si no hay reacción*

If we don't act it will be over
and if we contaminate it
If we don't act it will be over
If there is no change.

With “Verde,” Bakalao Stars position themselves as advocates of change that they see as necessary to prevent the destruction of the Earth through Global Warming. In the vein of classic politically-infused reggae, they portray this struggle as a war between forces of good and evil in which conscious individuals must become fully involved. The band's use of language warrants several notes. Saving the Earth for “*el futuro de los chamos*” employs a decidedly Colombian colloquialism, “chamo” for a universal class of people, the youth of the world. Global Warming is inserted as an English term in a song otherwise sung entirely in Spanish, pointing to its international acceptance as a signifier for manmade climate change and the dominance of English-language media in the environmental movement. Bakalao Stars commentary links Global Warming with capitalism, singing of the commoditization of labor and human bodies (“*la vida no vale más que tres pesos*”) and rising consumption patterns in the Global South (“*Por dinero y por la envidia nuestra guerra atrapamos*”). Like Tropic Culture in “Freedom Fighters,”

“Verde” presents a call for action with generalized recommendations of how to act- “take care of this world,” do not “contaminate it.” The song presents a call to action, an awareness-raising campaign, without condemning guilty behavior or laying specific recommendations on how to curtail Global Warming or undermine the capitalist, consumerist nexus causing the problem.⁵⁵

Despite their limitations, songs such as “Verde” and “Freedom Fighters” are evidence of an arena where Charlotte’s Latino musicians constantly and very actively engage with their audiences. Through e-mail messages, Facebook status updates, and informal conversations at shows, musicians seek and readily receive feedback from fans and other musicians in their community. Musicians chart an informal politics through these interactions, where they construct meaning through everyday practices and performance, often around notions of community and belonging. Performance at a concert becomes just the formal and outward manifestation of a long process of intertwined debate and discussion. Much as Aaron Fox describes for country music among working-class whites in rural Texas (Fox 2004), music becomes inseparable from identity and descriptions of social experience- a “fusion of aesthetic and social significance.”⁵⁶ The voice of musicians, both while onstage and in their role in the community, serves as a linkage in this fusion; through idiom, style, comportment, and portrayal, the voice embodies the material that is provided by the musician-audience interaction of class, racial/ethnic, speech, and generational identity. While few musicians work on the front lines of political activism in the immigration reform movement, they do act as creative leaders by distilling the speech patterns, attitudes, and perspectives of their musical community into a

⁵⁵ For a counterexample of a political, environmentally-concerned song that does offer specific condemnations and recommendations, see Atlanta rap group Goodie Mob’s “public service announcement” at the end of their song “Beautiful Skin.” (1998).

⁵⁶ Fox, *Real Country*, p.29.

performance and recorded body of work (written songs, CDs and mp3s, online videos, etc.) that can be referenced and renegotiated over time.

Musicians as “Grassroots Intellectuals”

In his “Prison Notebooks,” Antonio Gramsci defined intellectuals as people who give a fundamental social group “homogeneity and awareness of its own function.”⁵⁷ Intellectuals emerge from the social group to help define its direction and vision. Gramsci’s conception of intellectuals and their work cannot be separated from his views on class and class formation that focus not just on structural determinants of a group’s position in society, but also the internalization of class identity in ways of thinking and acting. Certain musicians and other participants (especially journalists) in Charlotte’s Latino music scene took on the role of grassroots intellectual by theorizing about the greater meaning of the music and discussing how music-making leads to a sense of solidarity and shared values- a musical community. A series of moments occurred when music lovers entered into heated debate over favorite songs, the relative success of current and past performances, and the current level of excitement surrounding bands. These moments would happen at rehearsals, before and after concerts, at the bar or outside grabbing a cigarette, and on social networking websites like Facebook. In effect, these were arenas where people created a meta-discourse about music and voice.

Often these discussions attempted to position the music at hand in context, relating a band’s songs to their major influences or comparing their style to other local bands. This intellectual step arose from a need to position the music in context and define its directionality. The music being created in Charlotte by Latino musicians comes from their knowledge of Latin music history; in addition, bands often spoke of moving their music “in a new direction,” or said that they were “trying out some new songs.” For example, in late autumn 2009, I sat in as

⁵⁷ Antonio Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, 2000, p. 425

Dorian Gris rehearsed in their practice space. They were practicing covers of songs by popular Mexican band Caifanes/Jaguares for a tribute show in early January. Between songs, band members discussed which songs they liked best, which ones they should let the other bands participating in the tribute concert cover, and what was the best way to cover the song without playing and singing an exact replica of the original. Over the course of the evening it became clear how important Caifanes, and the band that was formed by several former Caifanes members, Los Jaguares, were in the musical development of Dorian Gris. Because Caifanes was from Mexico City and was one of the seminal bands in the development of *rock en español* in the late 1980s and early 1990s, they had a major influence on Carlos, Juan, and other band members who had grown up listening to their songs. By interpreting their songs, the tribute concert became sort of an intergenerational forum as Dorian Gris' members (who vary in age but are younger than Caifanes, but older than many local fans) passed on their versions of foundational *rock en español* songs. But the tribute concert was also an opportunity for Dorian Gris to reiterate to fans, most of whom are young, working-class Mexican immigrants, the band members' ethnic and class solidarity that they (again being from middle-class Ecuadorian backgrounds) express while on stage. A few of these songs had already become standards that the band played at every show; new covers and reworked interpretations were a way to show the development of the band and renew the enthusiasm that fans felt for their performance style.



Figure 16: Flyer for 2009 Caifanes/Jaguares Tribute concert (courtesy of Carlotan Rock)

In an interview in English with *salsa* percussionist and singer, Sedy Méndez, who is a former member of Orquesta Mayor, we discussed the intellectual work that goes into being a musician and member of a musical community:

SB: “Let me ask you another question about being a musician; how does it affect personal relationships?”

Sedy Mendez: “You know, being a musician and having a social life is really, is difficult, because musicians are a special breed of folks. Everybody that plays an instrument, they love the arts of it, you know, when they get in a room of people that are musicians, their conversation is just all around playing music and, ‘have you heard the latest beat?’ or ‘what do you think about this, this kind of rhythm?’ especially around percussionists, because a lot of the percussion that I’ve learned is just from watching others, you know?”

SB: “Just mimicking them?”

SM: “Just trying... I come up to them, ‘how do you *do* that riff?’ and then, as I develop slowly, understanding the patterns of how to play it with my hands, and how it works on a music sheet, and how the different beats and the relation of the music, so, you know, I just walk up to the guy, if it’s something that really interests me, or sometimes I just pull out my phone and **record** that, then I go back...”

SB: “And try to figure it out!”

SM: “**Slow** it down, and then practice it slowly and then try to incorporate it into my hits, so...but that topic is very exclusive. So you bring...into that relationship someone who is not very musically inclined, they’ll get bored. And I’m a dancer too, I love to...before I was doing music, I was dancing. I’ve been in dance groups and stuff, but I love to do the *salsa*, *merengue* stuff, that was my very first love. You know? I love singing, but dancing was my thing. Just- I would walk *miles* and *miles* back home just to go dancing for a couple of hours and then have to walk *all* the way back.”

SB: “In Puerto Rico?”

SM: “In Puerto Rico, yep. Yep- in the middle of the night, band had just finished around two or three o’clock.”

SB: “Walking back in the dark...”

SM: “And now I’ve got to walk back, that’s right because most, main cities have lights but once you go...the main cities, the main roads, but getting from point A to point B is scary, but I wanted to dance so-- unless it’s somebody that is in tune with that, it can be, reaching can be difficult, now if that person is open, and likes the arts, then it makes it a little easier.”

“I used to have a friend, that... his ex-wife would tell him, ‘All you do is spend time with musicians?’ and he said, ‘well, what’s wrong with THAT!’ [We laugh] He didn’t have a problem with it. He was like a fish in water.”

SB: So, ‘Okay?’

SM: So, ‘What’s your point?’
(Interview with Author 5/7/2010)

The conversation with Sendy starts off with a general question that often during other interviews elicited a stock answer, usually about how supportive a musician’s wife or girlfriend is of his music-making. However, Sendy chose to use the question to express his view on musicians as a “special breed of folks” who spend much of their free time discussing music. He stresses the importance of metadiscourse on music for forging social relationships among musicians; percussionists listen to the latest beat, ask each other technical questions, and deconstruct an intriguing rhythm. Sendy’s personal quotation, “How do you *do* that riff?” highlights this process. Learning a new riff is not always simple, it is not (as I mention) just mimicking a person’s actions. Sendy corrects my simplistic question by detailing the process he

undertakes: recording a riff, slowing it down and listening to its component parts, practicing it slowly and then speeding it up to get it to the right tempo. Particularly for *salsa*, which often relies on African-derived polyrhythms with patterns that can shift during a song, learning percussion parts can be challenging. Because it is a dance music played before an audience that relies on steady tempo and recognizable beats to measure turns and step patterns, the percussionists play vital roles in the *orquesta*.

Sendy also relates his experience as a teenager in Puerto Rico when he pursued his love of dancing by traveling long distances on foot at night to listen to live music. The account, seemingly out of Mintz's *Worker in the Cane* (1974), adds to Sendy's vision of what constitutes a musical community. Dancers are included in the same realm as musicians as a "special breed," which makes sense when one considers the intense connections between *salsa* band and dancers during a live concert. Earlier in the interview, Sendy had recalled his earliest musical influences, which included a group of older men in his town who would regularly perform in jam sessions on weekends and at other times sat around listening to records. As Sendy hung out with this older generation or went to dance to contemporary groups performing nearby, he was receiving his musical education in both old and new styles of Caribbean music. He states that he got the "best of both worlds" during his early musical training.

While Sendy stresses the difficulty of participating in a musical community- it requires someone who understands the technical language of musicians, who is musically inclined- at the close of his response he does leave the door open for someone who is "open" and "likes the arts" to become attuned to musical life. In interviews and conversations, many musicians stressed the hardship of living as a musician and the intense technical training that brought them to the point of being a "professional" musician. This experience of "paying your dues," as blues musicians

frame it, is an important entry point for membership in a musical community; musicians who have demonstrated their technical expertise and longevity are highly regarded and more readily accepted into bands (Washburne 2008). But for Charlotte's more-established musicians, it is also exciting to see younger musicians just entering the community or to talk shop with musically-inclined community members who want to join the conversation after a show.

Women in Charlotte's Latino musical communities often play marginal roles. Most of the musicians are male, and besides the occasional female musician, wives, partners, and girlfriends are often accepted into the inner circle of bands and participate in discussions about music. Striking up conversations with these women backstage or in the audience, they would offer compliments and critiques of the band and their partners' performances, "I love how he interprets this song" or "Last week, he played a better solo." But in the male-dominated space of band life, women sometimes do not feel comfortable, or contest the time and money that band life drains from a household. Sendy's joke about his friend's ex-wife brings this point home. For Sendy, it is obvious why a musician would want to spend all his time with other musicians. The questioning statement from the "nagging" wife becomes an opportunity for the husband to stress his identity as a musician first and foremost, "what's wrong with THAT!" For Sendy, the musical life is something that is inescapable and hard to walk away from, even though he had recently stepped down from his percussionist duties with Orquesta Mayor. Even though he had left the band, he still acts as an emcee at cultural events organized by the Latin American Coalition and sits in with local salsa bands, continuing to participate in his musical community.

Interestingly, as musicians became familiar with my research project in Charlotte, my role as an "expert" studying Latin music and culture began to color conversations I had at concerts, rehearsals, and social gatherings. Interlocutors would call me "*Maestro Sam*" or

professor, sometimes jokingly, sometimes as a sign of respect. Often, they would ask my opinion of a performance. If a band was trying out a new song, for example, afterwards as I helped them break down equipment, they might ask me how it sounded. With audience members, I would often discuss how this performance compared to the band's last show or how the group's sound was changing. Because I attended numerous shows, I became a feedback loop, reporting back to musicians who could not make a weeknight show because of family or work obligations: they would ask me, "How was the crowd?" "Did lots of people show up?" "Did they play any new songs?" Inevitably, conversations would turn to music and we would compare notes on bands we liked and disliked. My "expert" status was constantly being tested; cueing a song on the stereo, someone would ask, "Do you know this song?" and search my face for recognition. Sometimes I failed (South American rock from the 1980s) and sometimes I succeeded (*salsa* and *merengue* classics). But these tests were conversation starters that often led to more involved debates about the intricacies of Latin music. Through these conversations, I was often struck by the intellectual depth of musicians' opinions. Whether it was *salsa*, rock, or *regional mexicano*, they stressed the heavy-lifting needed to formulate a great song and wonderful performance. The key elements included lots of rehearsing, good relationships among band members, and effective presentation, but most importantly musicians theorized about understanding and empathizing with the audience. Many stressed the process of cultivating an audience by staying true to their identity, evolving with them as they changed, but also including them in the process of personal development that the band members go through. In this role, I was pushed to expand my knowledge and understanding of what being a musician entails.

Another forum for intellectual debate about music and music-making are the Spanish-language newspapers in Charlotte. A small but dedicated group of journalists follow the Latin

music scene. They write articles in the papers' cultural sections previewing an upcoming concert or reviewing a new album release, for both local and international acts. This was in contrast to English-language newspapers, which rarely covered the Latin scene in Charlotte or performances by visiting Latin American artists. One Spanish-language reporter, Jacobo Strimling, a Jewish Mexican immigrant, warrants special mention. Following the music scene closely, Jacobo writes reviews for *Mi Gente* that challenge readers to think critically about the music's politics and cultural meaning for immigrants living in the US South. At times he will outline the genealogy of a musician's work, tracing musical influences and pop culture references that shape their work. For example, in an article previewing the Tribute to Caifanes/Jaguares (see above), Jacobo profiled local musician Johnny Mortera, who with Dorian Gris and Baco, was to perform at the tribute concert. Using quotes from his interview with Mortera, he presented a short history of Caifanes and their influence on Mexican rock music, stressing the songwriting skills of lead signer Saul Hernández:

“Today one cannot speak of *rock en español* without mentioning Caifanes. Montera [sic] thinks their music is simple, without too many notes but accepts that the songs ‘have a muse.’ ‘Saul is a tremendous writer, together with Cerati and Beto Cuevas,⁵⁸ I consider him one of the best songwriters,’ commented the musician from Veracruz. ‘With the metaphors he uses, you miss things if you only listen to the songs one or two times.’”⁵⁹

Using Mortera's words, Jacobo frames a discussion of the historical significance of Caifanes/Jaguares on Mexican society and Latin rock. The link between Mortera, a songwriter in his own right, and Saul Hernández are evident; Mortera offers his expertise by ranking the songs of Caifanes in the pantheon of Latin rock, alongside songwriters from Soda Estereo and La Ley, two other prominent bands from Latin America who made their mark in the 1980s when

⁵⁸ Gustavo Cerati, lead singer of Argentine rock band Soda Esterero and Beto Cuevas, lead singer of Chilean rock band La Ley.

⁵⁹ Ricardo de los Cobos, “*Honor a los grandes.*” *Mi Gente*, November 24, 2009, p. 31. [Translation mine].

Mortera was a child growing up in Veracruz, Mexico listening to rock music on the radio.

Mortera acknowledges a common critique of Caifanes' music, that their songs are simplistic and unadorned, but also focuses his analysis on the richness of the metaphoric language in Caifanes' songs, lyrics that warrant more than one or two listens to fully grasp. Accompanying the article are two photographs, one an early press shot of Caifanes with "un look ochentero muy a The Cure [a very The Cure eighties look]" as Jacobo terms it, the other a current photo of Mortera with spiked, long hair that references his rock idols as he looks thoughtfully into the camera lens.

In a review of an album, "*Circular Colectivo*" by Mexican ska/rock band Maldita Vecindad (Strimling 2010), Jacobo stressed the political significance of the band's songs and their ongoing dialogue with audiences about social issues:

"The band that has been known since its formation in 1985 for telling "*la neta*" [the simple truth], in their sixth studio album disk continues their social narrative. The public waited for lyrics that question society and critique our idiosyncrasies and it happened..." [Jacobo describes the lyrics and sound of each song]

"25 years have passed since these Mexican rockers appeared openly as '*pachuchotes*' [ultimate pachuco].⁶⁰ Their rebellious blood has not tired and the songs retain the same energy. '*Circular Colectivo*' fulfills a life cycle. It provokes dances of peace, those that from the outside look like jumping and shoving. Circular like a symbol of unity, collective like the music that belongs to all and is for all. La Maldita Vecindad y los Hijos del Quinto Patio [band's full name] continue telling and '*ska-neando*'⁶¹ the history of the Latin American people."

Jacobo's review of Maldita Vecindad's album provides several layers of analysis. On the surface, it is a review of a new album that describes the songs included and what the listener can expect to receive with purchase. But Jacobo also uses the review to present several points about the band and their political significance. The band is known for and, as he stresses, continues to tell the "simple truth," writing lyrics that critique the idiosyncrasies of Mexican culture and

⁶⁰ A *pachuco* is a term that describes Mexican-American/Chicano working-class youth from the 1930s-1950s who wore zoot-suits and engaged in a sub-culture that mixed Mexican and American, working class style, language, and attitudes. Maldita Vecindad often dresses in zoot-suits when they perform and have a song entitled, "Pachuco."

⁶¹ "*Ska-neando*" is a play on words combining ska, with *sonando* (sounding) and perhaps *sondeando* (sounding out) to describe Maldita Vecindad's relationship with their audience.

question social mores. A new album release is not just an occasion to enjoy new music, but also to take out the band's previous albums and reflect on how the "social narrative" has progressed. As Jacobo outlines in his overview of the album's songs, Maldita Vecindad continues to utilize working-class language and practices, such as the language of *corridos* ("Corrido de Digna Ochoa") or street soccer ("Fut Callejero"), to evaluate the exigencies of contemporary life in Latin America in the throes of widespread corruption, neoliberal capitalism, and transnational migration. Moreover, Jacobo begins to deconstruct the album's title by analyzing the meaning of the phrase "*Circular Colectivo*." For him, the title first refers to the band, who, after 25 years together, have completed a life cycle by releasing a long-awaited album as aging musicians. Second, "*Circular Colectivo*" presents a double move: Jacobo describes the circle of dancers that often form at Maldita Vecindad concerts (and at Eastside rock concerts in Charlotte) where dancers slam into each other while jumping and pushing each other in seemingly erratic and violent motions.⁶² To an outsider, these motions could be disconcerting, but as Jacobo explains, they are an expression of unity for those working-class *rockeros* who move within the circle. The active performance of "jumping and shoving" links audience members to the band and each other as they sweat, head-bang, rise and fall with the music. But the title also refers to the collective circulation of ideas through music; something that Jacobo believes should be for all and by all, a way to engage everyone in debates about the social and political.

⁶² When I attended a Maldita Vecindad concert in New York in July 2010 at Central Park Summerstage, this exact dance formation occurred as soon as the band started playing and went on for the entire performance, despite the wishes of the security personnel, who had to try to prevent crowd surfers from jumping onstage.



Figure 17: Dorian Gris' lead singer, Juan, joins the “*circular colectivo*”

These articles by Jacobo and other journalists who profile musicians in Charlotte provide a body of writing about music that embeds politics in discussions of music-making. Through their metadiscourse on the Latin music scene, music journalists act as grassroots intellectuals who guide and critique the music within a constant feedback loop among musically-astute Latino immigrants in the city. The articles and reviews on the Latin music scene are printed on the same pages that hold articles about deportations, police profiling, and immigration marches, and editorials that argue for immigration reform, more political involvement, and economic justice for stolen wages; yet they approach these political questions from a different angle that for many, at least in the musical communities I observed, holds more weight than regular news articles. In tandem with the everyday conversations that happen at rehearsals, concerts, and bars, these articles provide a forum where debates can range from commentary on style to critiques of structural inequality.

Music-related discussions with Jacobo led him to suggest that Tony Arreaza and I co-write a review of a tribute album to Argentine band Los Fabulosos Cadillacs that was released in spring 2010.⁶³ This exercise became a way for Tony and I to debate music and politics. As we spent several days listening again and again to prominent Latin American rock bands' interpretations of Los Fabulosos Cadillacs' songs, Tony and I argued over the strengths and weaknesses of each song: some covers were too close to the originals, others took songs in new directions with instrumentation and singing styles. What did it mean for a group whose songs are known for their political commentary and mix of genres to be recognized with a tribute album? Who was the intended audience for this album? Following the general format of a review (outlining the songs and artists, highlighting the strengths), we wrote a review that stressed the importance of Los Fabulosos Cadillacs in the development of rock in Latin America, their political importance as part of an outspoken opposition to military regimes, and their influence on the diverse (both geographically and genre-wise) group of bands covering their songbook. But as a father of a recently born son, Tony chose what he felt to be the most poignant song on the album, "Vos Sabés," covered by Argentine reggae group Los Cafres, as the keystone of the album. The record producers must have felt the same way because "Vos Sabés... como te esperaba, un tributo a los Fabulosos Cadillacs" is the title of the album. The song, about a father's love for his newborn son, could also be interpreted in this case to refer to all the bands "fathered" by the groundbreaking work of Los Fabulosos Cadillacs and other early *rock en español* groups.

Intellectual work, following Gramsci's conception of intellectuals, should involve more and more people in an ever-widening circle of democratization that includes working class people in the mental work of politics. In Charlotte, Latino musicians occupy a unique role in the

⁶³Sam Byrd & Tony Arreaza. "Vos Sabés..." *Mi Gente*, March 2, 2010, p. 32.

musical community of encouraging community members to think about the music that they make together. As creative leaders who have sprung out of immigrant and largely working-class neighborhoods, who often work day jobs alongside their fans, they engage in a process of rumination concerning the fate of Latin music. Whether it is the participation of community members- no matter if they lack “musical training”- or my “expert” opinion, musicians constantly seek to include a wide circle of people in their intellectual work. Musicians are quick to acknowledge the essential role of audience members in the development of their creativity; they do not just rely on fans to show up, rather, participation in the process of music-making is vital. As Dorian Gris explains: without the support of “*la raza*,” the Dorians would not exist. Musicians and other intellectuals in the Latin music scene speak for and with the collective circle of fans when they write songs, publish newspaper articles, or organize shows.

Chapter 6: Shifting Urban Genres

“The construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of cultural sets also involve the construction and destruction of ideologies.” **Eric Wolf** (1984)

Introduction

This chapter examines the political history of Latin genre categories, showing how genre emerges out of the contested spaces of nationalism and ethnic identity formation in Latin American and the United States. Genre categories mark musical expressions and provide distinction between social groups. By providing a set of rules and common assumptions, genre boundaries help foster musical community through a sense of belonging, but also exclude others through difference. A major part of the agency of Latino musicians and their audience is how they negotiate genre boundaries together in a dialectical process, often through direct feedback during performances but also through informal conversations and online social networking sites. This process creates grassroots intellectuals who act as leaders guiding new musical developments. Deploying and, at times, bending genre rules is how musicians enact and embody the common circumstances they share with their audience; they claim ownership over a method of making music. Drawing on numerous instances when distinct genre performances butted against one another, this chapter analyzes how musicians justified these boundaries as necessary for distinguishing between diverse strains of *latinidad*, but also a trend toward musicians collaborating across genre in an attempt to construct a pan-Latino vision of belonging to the city.

Questioning Genre

I'm backstage at the Hardee's Latin Fest, a music festival in Virginia Beach, VA in June 2010 as Leydy Bonilla prepares to go onstage and perform with Bachata Flow. I've traveled to Virginia Beach with members of several bands from Charlotte- Leydy Bonilla and Bachata Flow,

Banda TechnoCaliente, SoulBrasil, and Ultimanota- who have already performed this weekend. Leydy's young son wanders around backstage, while her father and manager, Carlos, watches over the band as they set up. A large and enthusiastic crowd has gathered on the grass in front of the bandstand with views of the ocean and boardwalk. I stand with members of Ultimanota off to one side where we can see the band and the front rows of the audience. The festival's organizer and local radio DJ announce Leydy and the band readies their instruments. Leydy is nowhere to be seen, but soon we hear the opening notes of Lady Gaga's "Bad Romance" (2009), a guttural, monosyllabic procession of notes sung a capella. Leydy emerges from the dressing room with a wireless mike, sings the chorus of the song, and enters stage right as the band breaks into a *merengue* version of the hit song. The crowd cheers and starts dancing.

What does it mean to turn a pop song sung in English into a *merengue* for an audience of fans of "Latin" music? All of the bands that journeyed to the festival in Virginia Beach that weekend have a striking ability to perform songs that embody the genre associated with their band, but they also regularly push boundaries to come up with intriguing genre explorations like Leydy Bonilla's "Bad Romance."⁶⁴ In this chapter, I analyze the meaning of genre- as a set of rules and identifiable traits and as an expression of a community of taste (Bourdieu 1984, White 2008)- in popular musical forms among Latino musicians. Genre, as performed by musicians and audience, is often attached to nationality, class, language, and ethnicity in ways that foster belonging and feelings of community. For example, *regional mexicano* music exudes Mexican national and provincial identity, including the high-pitched nasal tone of singers, instrumentation, danceable rhythm, and frequent *gritos* (shouts) and role-calling of Mexican provinces. The genre's name itself references its rural, working-class, and *Mexican* particularity.

⁶⁴ The fact that Leydy is a Hispanicization of 'lady' is also part of this affiliation. Unlike Lady Gaga, Leydy Bonilla is not a stage name.

Genres have rules and boundaries that are set down by practice, by training, and by the rhythmic constraints of the dance styles associated with a genre. Often these rules and boundaries are elided as depending on “tradition,” but it is important to remember that tradition is manufactured through social interaction, invented as a way to draw lines of distinction between genres, and morphs over time and space. These rules provide a framework within which musicians can compose and perform their music, giving direction and shape to ideas. But there is an additional element of genre, an indescribable, undefined element of musicality that several musicians labeled *feeling*, using the English word (even in Spanish conversation) to attempt to outline the touch or manner a skillful musician might use to imbue his/her music with an essence of a particular genre. *Feeling* corresponds loosely to what others have labeled “soul” or “groove” in various African-derived forms of US popular music (Keil 1996, Charters 2009, Spellman 1966). Chris Washburne also describes a Hispanicization of the term among *salsa* musicians in New York who use the term “*filin*” to distinguish old-school *salsa dura* from the commercialized and saccharine *salsa romántica* of the 1990s (Washburne 2008: 2). The element of *feeling* connects with discussions of authenticity and what makes a song or performance adhere to genre categories, or occasionally, create new spaces for exploration of what genre means. Finally, despite what the dislocation a new landscape of listening that relies on electronically-downloaded music might suggest, genres grow out of a sense of place, and are often remade when transferred and translated to new locales.

This critical view of genre raises several questions which will be explored in this chapter. First, does the proposed attachment of genre to nationality, class, and ethnicity correspond to the actual makeup of musical communities in Charlotte? Second, do the rules of genre foster or restrict creativity among Charlotte’s Latino musicians? How closely are they following the rules

and to what end? Third, how significant are *feeling* and related notions of the authentic way to perform genre to how musicians and audience members conceive of their music? Finally, what does it mean to have Latin music genres performed in Charlotte, where none originated? This chapter positions genre as a socially constructed “cultural set” that, as Eric Wolf stated, must be understood in relation to ideology. For this analysis, I draw on Bourdieu’s theorization of taste and distinction to help explain how Charlotte musicians distinguish genres and their associated class and national affiliations.

Genre Categories

a) *Regional Mexicano*

As outlined earlier in my discussion of bands, there are three main genre categories of music played by Latin groups in Charlotte- *regional mexicano*, *música tropical*, and Latin rock/*rock en español*- with several sub-genres and adjunct styles. These categories are often used by record companies, promoters, radio DJs and others in the music industry to describe the music; however, musicians sometimes deploy other terms, usually referring to the sub-genre or style of music they play, and some invent new terms to describe their genre(s). In the following paragraphs, I outline each genre category and briefly go into the debates among musicians and scholars about these categories.

Regional mexicano refers to a set of styles that originate in rural Mexico, mainly in northern provinces and the US-Mexico border region, and have an affiliation with working-class, Mexican culture (Mendoza 1939, Simmons 1953, Simonett 2001, Peña 1985, Herrera-Sobek 1980, Ragland 2009). Regional Mexican music includes sub-genres such as *norteña*, *banda*, *ranchera*, *pasito duranguense*, and Mexican *cumbia* (also known as *onda grupera*). Although it has many stylistic similarities with *música tejana* or Tejano/Tex-Mex music, *regional mexicano* is

primarily the music of Mexican immigrants to the United States and migrants to the border region, whereas Tejano is the music of Mexican-Americans who have long-resided in Texas and the US Southwest. The types of songs performed include both up-tempo dance numbers (where audience members dance *polca*, *quebradito*, or *pasito*) and ballads (including both romantic ballads and *corridos*).

Regional mexicano music, with roots in earlier popular forms from Mexico, marks its beginnings in the 1960s and 1970s, when several of the more influential artists in the genre began their careers (such as Los Tigres del Norte and Ramón Ayala). During this period, performers mostly relied on updated interpretations of the *corrido*, a Mexican ballad form, to sing about themes relevant for a new generation of migrants to the United States- border crossing, difficult working conditions, undocumented immigrants' encounters with immigration authorities, and the illegal narcotics trade. By the 1970s and 1980s, a younger generation of urban migrants settling in border cities popularized a new iteration of *regional mexicano* that drew upon Colombian *cumbia* (Ragland 2009) and other pan-Caribbean styles. Often played by *sonideros* (DJs), *cumbia norteña* or *onda grupera* departed from the *corrido* form, instead relying on love songs and pan-Latino musical themes to appeal to an audience versed in multiple musical styles. In the 1990s another iteration of *regional mexicano*, *banda* and *tecnobanda*, rose to popularity among migrants to Southern California from Northern Mexico (Simonett 2001). *Banda* originated in the Northern Mexican provinces of Sinaloa and Durango in military-style brass bands; *tecnobanda* replaces many of the brass instruments with synthesized keyboard notes. Corresponding to the rise of *banda* was a resurgence of *corridos*, particularly those dealing with the lives of undocumented immigrants and the exploits of *narcotraficantes*.

Regional mexicano encompasses a wide variety of musical styles, yet is readily identifiable by its constant invocation of rural, working-class, and Mexican cultural references. The music can range from sappy *bolero* covers to ribald dance songs where women from the audience are invited on stage to dance in a sexually suggestive manner; from numbers that involve the audience shouting when their native province in Mexico is called out, to *narcocorridos*- stories about drug trafficking that offer criticism of government corruption and describe in grisly detail and sometimes celebrate the violence of the drug trade. Bands utilize many instruments, from the more traditional tuba, acoustic harp and *bajo sexto* to fully synthesized instrumentation manufactured by a set of keyboards. Musicians often dress in uniform style, which usually means cowboy boots, flared pants, matching jackets, and a cowboy hat in a style that references *ranchera* and *mariachi* traditions, but can mean baggy jeans and loose t-shirts in reference to hip-hop styles. It is this variety that allows bands to specialize in music from a particular region, say, *Tierra Caliente*, or to position themselves with a unique performance style. Both of the *regional mexicano* groups I focused on for this study did the latter: Banda TecnoCaliente features keyboards and a *technobanda* electronic sound; Los Mentirosos dress in baggy clothes and present an “urban” hip-hop style of *regional mexicano*. Although tremendous variety exists, as we shall see later, *regional mexicano* is replete with references to working-class Mexican culture, in particular through a high nasal toned style of singing (which links back to traditional styles of rural Mexican music), but also style of dress, celebration of symbols of working class identity- Mexican soccer teams, alcohol toasts, the *vaquero* (cowboy), trucks, the Virgin Mary and other religious icons- and themes in song lyrics that reference Mexican working-class and immigrant life: “*trabajando duro*” (working hard), family separation, “*la lucha de la vida*” (the struggle of everyday life), and ties to an agricultural way of life.

Musicians in Charlotte had several ongoing debates concerning *regional mexicano* music. The first concerned their treatment by radio stations and prominent concert promoters in the city. Many musicians felt that the local Spanish-language radio stations offered little airplay to local artists and failed to promote their performances, even when they were booked to play at radio-produced festivals like “*El Grito*” -the Mexican Independence Day celebration. Instead, the radio tended to favor well-known artists from Mexico and the US Southwest, neglecting to give local artists “*un chance*.” The second issue involves the limited geographic mobility of audience members under surveillance from the 287(g) program that meant that musicians had to be careful about where they booked a gig, both to ensure the success of their performance and out of concern that fans might be stopped by police roadblocks. At times, however, this meant that musicians had to contend with subpar performance spaces and sound systems at Eastside clubs or poorly organized festivals.⁶⁵ The third debate centered on the future of Mexican music in Charlotte. Although Mexican immigrants make up the largest group of Latinos in Charlotte and there is a core audience of young fans in their twenties, several musicians expressed concern that *regional mexicano* styles did not appeal to other Latinos from outside Mexico and Central America and particularly to the second generation of children who have grown up bicultural-speaking Spanish to their parents but embracing other styles of Latin music- *reggaetón*, *bachata*, rock- and mainstream US popular culture and music.

Gonzalo, Banda TecnoCaliente’s promoter, commented on what he perceives as a need for *regional mexicano* bands to seek out wider audiences. Speaking about a concert the group had

⁶⁵ However, one Eastside club, Skandalos, was known for the high quality of its sound system and sound guy. In a conversation I had soon after I arrived in Charlotte, a journalist who covered the Latin club scene (both live and DJ music) quizzed me on what club had the best sound system. “It’s not downtown,” he stressed, “in my opinion Skandalos has the best sound.”

recently performed at the Club Dominicano's annual gathering in Park Road Park, Gonzalo explained their strategy:

“We were creating an audience [with Dominicans], the group's image has changed a lot, because this is a Mexican area, but we have to think that there are other Latinos- there are Ecuadorians, Colombians, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans; so the band thought it would open up the market (*la plaza*) a little and we are going to include, to bring in themes from other cultures here, to give them a Mexican touch...”

(Interview with Gonzalo Perez, 9/20/2010) [Translation by Author]

b) *Música Tropical*

Música Tropical refers to genres of popular music from the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and its associated cities of migration, namely Miami and New York, including *salsa*, *merengue*, *bachata*, and *reggaetón* (Flores 2000, Pacini Hernández 1995, Washburne 2008, Austerlitz 1997, Manuel et al. 2006). There are similarities and differences between these musical forms, but the infrequency with which musicians in Charlotte described their music as *música tropical* belies the lack of salience this term holds. People more often related musical genre to national and island identity, conveying the Dominican-ness of *merengue* or equating loving *salsa* with being Puerto Rican. Yet, almost everybody acknowledges the common ties that link Dominican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Nuyorican, and even peri-Caribbean Panamanian, Venezuelan, Colombian, and peri-Atlantic Brazilian music together with common histories and shared rhythms and tropes. Aware of the tension between commonality and particularity that permeates popular Spanish-Caribbean music, we can describe its genres and their permutations in Charlotte.

First, the political history of Spanish-Caribbean music warrants mention. The relatively late emergence of large-scale plantation slavery in Cuba (and its persistence in Brazil) meant that African-derived music survived in great diversity (Sublette 2004, Herskovits 1990). While the early colonial period in Cuba created an economy based on cattle ranching and contraband, corresponding to the island and Havana's location as a supply stopover for Spanish galleons

taking silver back to Spain, after the British briefly occupied Havana during the Seven Years' War (1762-3) and introduced sugar refining technology, the island began a transition to a plantation economy based on sugar cane production (Ortiz 1995, Mintz & Wolf 1957, Guerra y Sánchez 1964). This economy relied on large numbers of slaves imported from Africa, who brought elements of their culture, belief systems, and music with them to Cuba. The sheer numbers of slaves, the relatively permissive Spanish late-colonial racial regime, the continuing slave trade that brought in new generations of Africans, and the late abolition of slavery in Cuba (1886) in comparison with other plantation economies (except Brazil) all help account for the strength of African-derived music and cultural expressions in the island's culture. Another factor was the vitality of Afro-Cuban political and social organizations, which continued to struggle for civil rights and cultural autonomy throughout the independence period and US occupation (Helg 1995, de la Fuente 2001). Cultural and political crosscurrents between Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico (and to a lesser extent the English-speaking Caribbean) have had a strong impact on the region's music, whether through the exile of plantation owners and slaves after the Haitian Revolution to eastern Cuba (Sublette 2004), the involvement of Dominican soldiers in Cuba's independence movement, or the parallel yet distinct trajectories of Cuban and Puerto Rican national identities and music. In comparing the African-derived music of the United States and Cuba, it is important to consider the different origin points of many of the slaves that were brought to each place as the slave trade moved from coastal forays in West Africa to the Congo River Basin, Angola, and points eastward.

After 1898, US imperial ambitions in the region (Foner 1972, McCullough 1978) created economic shifts (liberalization, US corporate takeovers of sugar plantations, Panama Canal), political developments (the status of Puerto Rico, new racial regimes, the Cuban revolution) and

social transformations (migration to the US) that contributed to the distillation of specific genres of music. For example, without large-scale migration of Puerto Ricans to New York and transnational connections between New York and Havana during the 1940s and 1950s, the cross-cultural exchange of musicians that developed Latin jazz, *mambo*, and *boogaloo* in New York would not have happened, a stream of music-making that by the 1970s was molded into *salsa* (Sublette 2004, Roberts 1979, Flores 2000). But 1970s *salsa* also developed in the absence of Cuban influences that had been cut off by the US embargo, heavily favoring a conceptualization of the genre as Puerto Rican and Nuyorican (Washburne 2008). Dictator Rafael Trujillo promoted *merengue* as the national music of the Dominican Republic in response to what he perceived as threats to national cultural sovereignty from outside (mainly Haiti) and from working-class forms of music like *bachata* (Austerlitz 1997, Pacini Hernandez 1995). *Reggaetón* traces its origins to Panamanian reggae (sung in Spanish, derived from Jamaican reggae and created by people of West Indian descent living on the isthmus) and is widely accepted as a Puerto Rican genre, yet it quickly became popularized among Nuyorican and Dominican audiences in New York.

Among musicians in Charlotte, several key debates have emerged regarding *música tropical*. First, to what extent are *tropical* genres defined by songs sung in Spanish? Leydy Bonilla and DS The Evolution have experimented with songs that are written and sung in English that retain the rhythmic elements and instrumentation of *bachata* and *reggaetón*, respectively. These attempts are part of an attempt to “crossover” to an English-speaking audience, both among non-Latinos and second generation Latinos with limited Spanish skills. Second, musicians negotiate the tension between creating new music and staying true to the traditions and rules of genre. For example, Orquesta Mayor often plays covers of classic *salsa* tunes, but with fresh arrangements

written by band members, and these covers often receive an enthusiastic reception from their audience. While covering the canon of classic 1970s *salsa*, their bandleader, Helder, expresses a desire for the band to make it on the national stage by coming up with new compositions that reference this tradition but with a new twist. The idea of professionalism plays an important part in negotiating this tension; in addition to showing up on time and giving a good show, being “professional” also means knowing your group’s style and staying true to that sound. Bachata Flow implements this professionalism in their performances and comportment by mixing long-established elements of *bachata*, such as using multiple guitars, *güiro*, and *tambor* (and not using synthesizers), with a singing style and bridges that take cues from R&B music. The group often dresses in up-to-date outfits that might be seen on Dominican youths in Washington Heights or Santo Domingo, but are not afraid to occasionally break into a performance of *perico ripiao*- an older style of *merengue* from the Cibao region of the Dominican Republic. A third debate involves the deployment of genre names in the public sphere. During an interview with Gonzalo, I made the mistake of referring to one of the groups he manages, DS Evolution, as a *reggaetón* band. He was quick to set the record straight:

Gonzalo: “Look, *reggaetón*, people say the word *reggaetón*, I don’t like it very much, the (music) industry calls it that, the police...because there is a *reggaetón sucio* (dirty, foul-mouthed)-without offending those who sing it- *reggaetón sucio* has lead to a market of vices, DS (Evolution) is different, what DS plays is ‘*urbano*,’ they are not *reggaetoneros*, (instead they are) *urbanos*. Why? Because they play a *cumbia*, a *bachata*...”

SB: A mix (of styles)

Gonzalo: “Yes, they play a mix of clean *reggaetón* and hip-hop, therefore, it’s something different, it’s what people are listening to now at parties, it’s catching on quickly with the public, if you pay to get in to a show you won’t just hear “pum, pum, pum” all the time, you’ll hear something different, and the guys (in the band) are *jovenes sanos* (wholesome kids)...”

“... If you want to bring a *reggaetonero* now, no one is interested; when you say the word ‘*urbano*,’ you have to demonstrate that it really is ‘*urbano*’- Aventura⁶⁶ is ‘*urbano*’- because ‘*urbano*’ means you play for the street, what the street wants.” [Interview with Gonzalo Perez, 9/20/2010]



Figure 18: DS The Evolution performing

Latin Rock

The third genre category relevant to the Latin music scene in Charlotte is Latin rock. For this study, I prefer the term Latin rock over the more well-known phrase *rock en español* for several reasons. First, the simple fact that the bands included in this category at times sing songs in English, Portuguese, and Spanglish, in addition to Spanish. Second, many musicians spoke of *rock en español* as a musical movement that had emerged in the 1990s and reached its apex around a decade later only to be superseded by a fragmentation of the genre into subcategories that are sometimes referred to as “Latin Alternative” music. Third, many bands in Charlotte played a mix of rock and other genres- pop, electronica, ska, reggae, funk, heavy metal, blues, and punk. I have included them under the umbrella of Latin rock because of the outlook of their musical community, despite the diversity of the bands’ styles. Of the three genre categories discussed here, these bands and their audience go the furthest in adopting notions of pan-Latino

⁶⁶ Aventura were a popular Latin group of Dominican musicians from New York who fused *bachata* with hip-hop and R&B. During my time in Charlotte, they performed on their farewell tour.

identity that bridge nationalistic notions of identity; Latin rock acknowledges both this positioning as “Latino” and the genres historical roots in rock music, from both the United States and Latin America.

The historical record of rock music in Latin America supports this complicated view of genre. As Zolov documents (1999), rock musicians in 1960s Mexico first sang songs in English, but eventually switched to singing in Spanish (under pressure from cultural elites and government crackdowns) developing the idea of *rock en tu idioma* (rock in your language) which eventually became *rock en español*. This transition, which occurred during the heady years of student revolt and government repression in the late 1960s and early 1970s, even affected band names- “Three Souls of the Mind” became “El Tri,” one of Mexico’s most famous and long-standing rock bands. But even the “rock” in *rock en español* exists as a catch-all category for Latin American bands that have consistently blurred genres in their recordings and performances. Los Fabulosos Cadillacs, for example, mix rock elements with ska, reggae, jazz, and funk in a style that often departs from the straight-up backbeat rhythm or singing style of rock music.

Musicians in Charlotte engage in several ongoing debates about Latin rock. First, they worry about the future of the genre locally. During 2009-2010, many groups counted fewer audience members at shows, and several bands took a break from performing or dissolved. Some wondered where the next generation of musicians was that would follow. Others lamented that a special moment had passed, with Carlotan Rock festivals mid-decade, which was not likely to be reproduced. Second, musicians argued about the creative process and with it the direction of their band. As we have seen, this debate was often not just about coming up with new material, but about fundamental questions of work and play. Engaging in the creative process following

the rules of rock music sometimes means deciding whether to pursue ambitions (and dedicate limited resources and time) of touring and promotion outside the local community or to adopt an attitude of nonchalance (or fatalism, depending on who you ask) towards questions of fame. Several bands (Tropic Culture, Dorian Gris, Ultimanota) went through divisive and, at times heart-wrenching iterations of this debate, while others (Bakalao Stars) adhered to a clear philosophy of not pursuing fame. Third, Latin rock bands inserted themselves in debates over what it means to be Latino in Charlotte through their music and music-making. Unlike *regional mexicano* and *música tropical*, both of which have clear genealogies of national identity (or at least in *música tropical*'s case, pan-Caribbean island identity), the canon of Latin rock relies on songs from artists spanning Latin America, Spain, and the underlying but continuous influence of US and British rock music.⁶⁷ As we shall see, musicians drew upon a diverse repertoire of music- reinterpreting classic covers, mixing languages, juxtaposing musical styles, and borrowing riffs- to create original performances that spoke to the diversity of their audience of Latino immigrants from a variety of countries and backgrounds. Finally, the question of crossing over, of appealing to white audiences, dogged many musicians in this community. Musicians debated what efforts should be made to sing and promote their music in English and outside the Latino community, and to what extent crossing over might benefit or detract from the relaxed interactions they had established with their core audience.

By outlining a brief explanation of each genre category and the major debates that musicians in each musical community hold, I have erected a framework within which we can now enter into a deeper investigation of the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter. Rather than enter into a formulaic discussion to each question, I will use ethnographic material and

⁶⁷ The exception to this may be Mexican rock, specifically the working-class styles of heavy metal and punk covered by Dorian Gris, which is why I often group them with *regional mexicano* groups that play at Charlotte's Eastside clubs.

musicians' songs to understand genre in Charlotte's Latin music scene. The music and performances, I believe, do the best job of explaining links between genre and nationality, class, and ethnicity, the creative process and genre rules, the idea of *feeling* and its relation to authenticity, and the local geography of genre in Charlotte. When relevant, I will include web links or sources where the reader can listen and view the music referenced.

Nationality, Class, and Ethnicity

The *regional mexicano* group Banda TecnoCaliente has performed in Charlotte since 2000. They write and perform songs that often deal with issues of romance and intimate relationships, set to a steady backbeat of oom-pah *polca* rhythm that is typical of *norteño* music. Because of the band's line-up- they use up to seven keyboards, a bass player and percussionist, along with shared vocals (but no other instruments)- their sound is highly-synthesized, with keyboards replacing the brass section, accordion, and other instruments often used in *regional mexicano* groups. The band's name is a play on *Tierra Caliente*, the region of Mexico that includes Guerrero, where several members of the band are from- including the band leader Alejandro and his three brothers. However, the band's contemporary, synthesized sound bears little resemblance to the traditional violin and harp music of *Tierra Caliente*; instead it follows the style of *norteño* that originated in the border provinces, but has become popularized across Mexico and particularly among Mexican immigrants to the United States. Using TecnoCaliente as an example, we can see that *regional mexicano* as a genre relies on an appeal to modernity and technological innovation, while still constantly referencing the idea of "tradition" and the identity of immigrants who come not just from a country but a province/region within Mexico.

In an appearance on a Spanish-language television variety show, Telemundo's *Titulares y Más*,⁶⁸ a television personality introducing the band joked with them about who their "romantic" new single was written for. Then, he pointed out the band's outfits, including jackets with the band's name stitched on the back, and a band member who had a cartoonish flame shaved into the back of his dyed-blond hairdo. The anthropomorphic flame, "*Pirulo*," represents the band and its region- *Tierra Caliente*. The host continues by asking where they were from in Mexico and what soccer team they cheer for; the band elicits a positive response when one band member from Jalisco says he like Chivas (a successful and popular club from Guadalajara). It is only after this small talk that the host calls for the studio audience to applaud the band and TecnoCaliente starts into a performance of their song, "*Porque me enamoré de ti*" (2008).

This type of small talk, whether on television, in radio interviews, or on stage by the band leader between songs, serves an important purpose in framing TecnoCaliente's image and relationship with fans. It helps establish bonafides, as Mexican immigrants from a particular region, *Tierra Caliente*, who follow a popular soccer club, Chivas. The small talk also frames the band members as heterosexual men (writing songs for a particular unnamed woman) and family members (a group of brothers). It also is an opportunity for branding; the band markets themselves with matching, brightly-colored outfit with the band's name on back and even a touch of novelty with the appearance of *Pirulo*.⁶⁹

Another song and video by Banda TecnoCaliente, "*Así Te Amo*" (2009), is a cover of a *bachata* by Elvis Martínez and a *merengue* by Banda XXI. This example shows how *regional mexicano* lends itself to interpreting material from other genres in a way that is distinctly tied to a Mexican, working-class, and immigrant identity. It also shows the influence of the band's

⁶⁸ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Y4NrLb0DiQ

⁶⁹ Matching outfits and name branding on instruments (esp. drum sets) and clothing is common practice among *regional mexicano* groups.

manager/promoter, Gonzalo Pérez, who is Dominican and has worked with *merengue* and *bachata* artists. While keeping the melody and lyrics, TecnoCaliente changes the rhythm and orchestration to give it a Mexican sound, adding a *polca* beat marked by synthesized tuba, bass, snare, and cymbals. The singing style draws on *norteño* phrasing and the posturing of Mexican ballad singers like Luis Miguel. The video portrays two star-crossed lovers who are kept separate by the woman's parents, who dislike the working-class origins of her boyfriend. Various scenes were shot around Charlotte, including in Plaza Fiesta Carolinas, an indoor shopping mall that recreates a staid version of a Mexican town marketplace and *zócalo*.⁷⁰ The female protagonist is played by a light-skinned, blond actress who looks like a *gringa*, or a Mexican television equivalent, speaking to elements of desire and cross-cultural love that at times appear in *regional mexicano* lyrics about immigrants in the US.⁷¹ The male protagonist in the music video, played by the band's lead singer, exhibits elements of striving to be middle-class and part of American consumer culture, by taking his girlfriend to an upscale store to shop for dresses and going on a date to a video arcade, while retaining an awareness of his diminished social status, through the lyrics that ask:

<i>De seguro que me aceptarán</i>	Surely they would accept me
<i>si yo me vistiera como algún doctor</i>	if they saw me dressed like a doctor
<i>Pero dile que me amas así</i>	but tell them that you love me this way
<i>como visto así como soy</i>	the way you see me is the way I am

The music video's penultimate scene is a clip of TecnoCaliente performing in front of a large crowd of their fans. Then, the lovers are reunited as the boyfriend drives up in a tricked-out Chevy Suburban SUV to pick up the girlfriend waiting outside her parent's house.

The fact that Banda TecnoCaliente can take a song from another genre and make it work as *regional mexicano* speaks to the versatility of the genre, the ability of artists trained in its rules

⁷⁰ See Marske (2008) for an analysis of Plaza Fiesta as re-imagined homeland for Latino immigrants.

⁷¹ See for example, Los Tigres del Norte "El Mojado Acaudalado" (1997).

to incorporate outside material, and some aspects that Latin American genres hold in common. In this case, *bachata* and *norteño* are genres that both draw on a working-class values system (Peña 1985, Pacini Hernández 1995), regular (yet distinct) dance steps, and themes of love and despair. This borrowing of song material is fairly common in Latin American genres, from Café Tacuba's rock version (1996) of Leo Dan's "Como Te Extraño" to Los Tigres del Norte's "América" (1988) with a melody and bass line that riffs on "Twist and Shout" (which is derived from Mexican folk song, "La Bamba"). Yet what makes each version distinct is the way that the genre's performers make it their own. TecnoCaliente takes "Así Te Amo" and adds rhythmic and stylistic elements to their performance, but they also situate the song through their video in an imaginary of working-class Mexican identity and immigrant striving for a better life in the United States.



Figure 19: Leydy Bonilla and Bachata Flow

Songs can sound like different things to different audiences. As part of a strategy to appeal to a wider audience, in summer 2010, Banda TecnoCaliente released a single with Leydy Bonilla, “A Dormir Juntitos” (2010).⁷² During performances around Charlotte, Leydy Bonilla would call TecnoCaliente on stage to perform the song, or vice versa. At the Club Dominicano’s annual end-of-summer picnic, Leydy Bonilla took the stage, singing a few songs with her band, Bachata Flow. Then, later in the day, she retook the stage with Banda TecnoCaliente to sing together. While many in the audience had been dancing to *merengue* and *bachata* throughout the day, when TecnoCaliente were on stage, the grass dance space in front of the stage was empty except for a lone couple dancing. Midway through the song, Leydy commented on the rhythm of the song: “¡Eso es medio como merengue ahí! (This is almost like a *merengue* here!).”⁷³

Genre Rules and Boundaries

So what exactly do the rules of genre do, and where are the boundaries of genre situated? While I have already outlined some of the performance characteristics and social relations that help define the genres of *regional mexicano*, *música tropical*, and Latin rock, by now we should be aware of the fluidity of popular music genres (Walser 1993, White 2008). What may develop our understanding better is a consideration of these genres as a method, a tool, or a project that musicians and audience engage in to interpret particular streams of popular culture. In this sense, genre becomes a process, not just a static body of work. The rules and boundaries of the genre become evident through the method, rather than the material, per se. It doesn’t matter, then that TecnoCaliente is covering a *merengue* classic, if their interpretation imbues a *mexicano* method into the performance. As Bourdieu (1984) states, genre becomes a form of social distinction that marks affiliation amongst and difference between groups of people based on axes

⁷² Itself a cover of a song by Dominican *merengue* singer Eddy Herrera and Venezuelan singer Liz.

⁷³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pHwyyJxtTfc>

of class, race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, and sexuality. But the analysis can be taken a step further; genre can also be “something that does the work of a particular social relation or cultural encounter” (White 2008, p.177; Fabian 1998). In the case of Latin music in Charlotte, this “work” might include voicing the immigrant experience of audience members by representing their stories of romance and love in song, such as La Rúa’s “El Chanchito” or Banda TecnoCaliente’s “Así Te Amo.” In Charlotte, cultural encounters and social relations take place on an uneven playing field that disfavors certain groups: recent immigrants, those without legal status, monolingual Spanish speakers (and speakers of indigenous languages), immigrant women, the impoverished, and those without access to an automobile. Genres become ways to comment on these social relations and cultural encounters, to mediate a person’s position by appropriating material as one’s own, and to negotiate new forms of belonging and understanding the world. The next few examples illustrate how Charlotte’s Latino musical communities are plying the method of genre(s).

Los Mentirosos

At the 2010 Fanta Festival, I was working as the stage manager, helping bands set up on stage, calling band leaders to give directions and make sure they showed up on time, and signaling to bands when it was time to stop their set. Mid-afternoon, a band I had never heard perform before, but had limited conversations with band members, took the stage. Los Mentirosos were dressed in all white- white sneakers, white shorts, white designer t-shirts, and white visors- and as they took the stage, the sound guy played a long pre-recorded introduction (typical for most of the *regional mexicano* bands) announcing the band. This introduction featured Michael Jackson and the band danced around, imitating Jackson’s dance moves as their names and accomplishments were dramatically announced over the speakers. They launched

into their set of *banda* music and I busied myself with pressing matters backstage. About midway through their set, I found myself humming along to one of their songs with a driving, up-tempo melody led by the band's trumpet player and keyboard's synthesized horns. The singer sang a few lines and then launched into the chorus: "*Si no supiste amar, ahora te puedes marchar*" (If you don't know how to love, then you can leave). I knew this song, this melody, but yet I did not, I had never heard this band before nor did I recognize the words. Then it hit me, the words I knew went like this: "it happens to be true, I only want to be with you." Los Mentirosos were covering a version of Dusty Springfield's (1963) pop song 'I Only Want to be with You.' Later that night, I did some research on the iterations of this song. Luis Miguel, Latin ballad singer, recorded a Spanish version, "Ahora te puedes marchar" (1987) on which Los Mentirosos based their *regional mexicano* interpretation.⁷⁴

What exactly does Los Mentirosos cover of "I Only Want to be with You/Ahora te Puedes Marchar" and other covers and riffs on popular music mean? Is it representative of the overarching (and over-reaching) global hegemony of American popular music and cultural taste-making? What does it do for Los Mentirosos, who draw on urban, African-American styles of dress, dance, and stage performance, yet make music in a Mexican, regional style? While some might dismiss the band's use of an old pop song as derivative and uncreative, is their cover more or less legitimate than, say, Hootie and the Blowfish's cover (1995) of the song which also includes references to Bob Dylan's "Tangled up in Blue" (1975)? Perhaps the idea of *bricolage* (Derrida 1980, Levi-Straus 1968) best describes the way Los Mentirosos crib from American and Latin American popular culture, assembling a mix of hip-hop fashion, pop ballads, and *banda duranguense*. But musical *bricolage* does not exist in a vacuum, as a text or document to be

⁷⁴ I wrote a blog entry outlining the song's different cover versions: <http://samssounds.blogspot.com/2010/05/ahora-te-puedes-marchar.html>

analyzed, even if it is recorded and put up on the internet on a site like MySpace or Youtube. As Hebdige (1979) explained for punk music in Britain, the punk rocker's safety pin is not just appropriated- it takes on meaning of its own within a subculture and the performance of genre. Again, genre becomes a method for interpreting the world through music and bringing music into the world, a way of organizing a community of taste (listeners/participants) around a particular style or category of popular music (White 2008).



Figure 20: Los Mentirosos with the author

It is here that we run into a Spanish-English translation problem of the words *folklore* and *popular* music. In the United States, popular music is seen as distinct from folklore and folk music (both the genre “folk music” and other categories of folkloric music-Appalachian Scotch-Irish ballads, Gullah Sea Island songs, cowboy songs, Tex-Mex- that are often associated with a regional and ethnic/racial identity), which is classified as “traditional” music. Popular music is modern music, electronically amplified rather than acoustic, that, while it may take cues from folk music (i.e., jazz, Chicago blues, country), sets out in a direction that separates it from its

folkloric roots. Occasionally, folk forms make repeat appearances in US popular music- the folk revival in the 1960s, African-American dozens in 1980's rap music- but they are quickly enfolded and commoditized in popular genre form. While US folkloric music has been commercialized through recordings and genre formation (such as 'Americana'), it retains a low profile in comparison to the volume of sales and cultural profile of popular music.

In Latin America, folklore is classified as part of popular culture. A distinction is often made between "traditional" music (usually indigenous music from the pre-Columbian era) and national folklore that arose out of the formation of the nation-state in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. *Música popular* is a term that can encompass elements of both folk and popular music, spanning early precursors and contemporary styles, for example from Cuban *son* and Puerto Rican *bomba y plena* to contemporary *salsa*. *Música popular* is music of the people, the *pueblo* meaning not just the village, but the collective encompassing of people in a musical community, and also an oppositional term that distinguishes the populace from upper-class forms of music- classical, opera- that in Latin America take their cues from Europe and a *criollo* identity in the (former) colonies of Spain. National folklore included attempts by elites to distill the essence of a particular music/dance style (often from one region within the nation) into an easily recognizable and reproducible form (sometimes at the expense of other folkloric forms). These national cultural projects, such as Mexico's *ballet folklórico* or Trujillo's preference for Dominican *merengue*, codified the music and its performance, spread localized styles to broader scales, and kept these genres from being eclipsed totally by waves of popular music from the US and Latin American cultural centers, even as they sometimes served reprehensible masters. The development of Latin American "popular music" in the US vein, with mass-consumed sounds that deviate significantly from folkloric forms, i.e., Latin rock, pop, and hip-hop, only occurs in

the openings created by the failures of these national projects. Meanwhile, many popular genres, including *regional mexicano* and *música tropical*, continue to reference and draw upon folkloric forms even as they embrace the latest electronic technology and a repertoire of pop music. What makes *música popular* work, I argue, is the method that it uses to engage and move forward with an audience. The audience's reaction to Los Mentirosos' cover was enthusiastic and reiterated the idea that a band can cover an old song in a new, creative way while following the rules of a genre category.

Ultimanota

For a second example, I turn to a band, Ultimanota, whom I witnessed perform numerous times and carefully noted the audience's reaction to and interaction with the band. On the band's website, they give a description of their sound and approach to genre:

“Ultima Nota fuses tropical rhythms with bossa nova and rock undertones. This versatile five piece band can adapt to your event's needs; from providing ambient music at a dinner banquet, such as boleros and Cuban son, to getting a crowd on its feet dancing to salsa, cumbia and merengue. We can also do cocktail hours, weddings, private and corporate events, etc.”

“Our repertoire includes songs from Buena Vista Social Club to Santana and from Old School Salsa to Michael Jackson with a tropical twist.”⁷⁵

Ultimanota's website also provides several sample songs- a *salsa* cover of U2's “I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking for” (1987); a *bolero* cover of Carlos Eleta Almarán's “Historia de un Amor” (1956); another *salsa* cover of Héctor Lavoe's “El Cantante” (1978); an acoustic cover of Jack Johnson's “Upside Down” (2006); and a second *bolero* cover of Bebo Valdés and El Cigala's version of the Cuban classic “Lagrimas Negras” (2003). The website

⁷⁵ <http://ultimanotamusic.com/>. Full disclosure: after Ultimanota's bandleader, Tony wrote this description, I helped him edit the statement.

also provides two Youtube videos from live performances, a list of upcoming shows, and contact information.

I mention the website because of what it reveals and does not reveal about Ultimanota's music and music-making process, particularly in terms of how they view genre. I was introduced to Ultimanota, as a band and concept, almost as soon as I arrived in Charlotte. Talking with Tony Arreaza, the bandleader, on my first day volunteering at the Latin American Coalition, he mentioned he had a band, a "project" as he called it, that played "cheesy cocktail music" at restaurants and parties around town. I knew Tony had been part of several other bands in Charlotte (La Rúa, EvaFina, and Los de Paula), and he seemed to want to lower my expectations about Ultimanota. In the next few weeks as I saw the group perform and meet the other band members, they also stressed the casual nature of the band- as a way to get together and play on the weekends, to earn a little cash on the side. However, the trajectory of Ultimanota from 2009-2011 contradicts the band members' humble and self-deprecating assessment of their music-making. Over a two-year period, they built audiences or regular customers at several restaurants, became known for playing at weddings, birthdays, and other private parties, and even edged their way into playing at festivals and opening for other bands. Ultimanota's relative success, particularly in an economic situation when other bands struggled to find shows, needs further analysis. What is "cheesy cocktail music" and why do audiences eat it up? What are the limitations and benefits to being a cover band?

Ultimanota's self-deprecation may be a posture put on when describing their music to fellow musicians and music critics, but in fact their music does at times border on the saccharine as they cover "top forty" pop songs and romantic ballads in an intimate restaurant setting. As a "project," playing cover songs differs from the music-making of Bakalao Stars, Dorian Gris, or

Leydy Bonilla who, although they occasionally play covers, spend most of their time working on their own material. Playing covers allows Ultimanota to spend fewer hours rehearsing and more time performing; in practice, performances become another rehearsal where material is fleshed out and tightened on stage. This strategy of composition-*in*-performance (Finnegan 2007) allows for flexibility within the structure of the chords and lyrics of a song selection to bend genre boundaries according to the band's aesthetic. If a song's interpretation works for the band (i.e., not too tricky to perform) and the audience likes it, then they integrate the cover into their repertoire. For private parties, clients sometimes request that the band learn a favorite song, or that they alter their playlist- to play upbeat *salsa* at a wedding reception, for example. Over time, audiences have come to learn and appreciate Ultimanota's repertoire, requesting particular songs between sets, singing along, or dancing enthusiastically to an up-tempo number. Like the band's musicians, the audience is often made up of people approaching middle age, some with young children, middle class or with some discretionary income to dine out at the restaurants the band plays in. The racial makeup of the audience depends largely on the location, with Latinos frequenting suburban Cuban restaurant A Piece of Havana and more whites attending shows at an Intown steakhouse. However, it must be stressed that Latino or white, English or Spanish-speaking, audiences are often very familiar with the songs and audience members often would come up afterwards to remark to band members about how much they loved "that song" and the band's version of it. Coming from similar class backgrounds and with an awareness of global pop music, audiences expected the band to formulate a set that would appeal to their tastes and provide a pleasant evening at the restaurant with familiar sounds. Particularly with private events, clients would place their trust in Tony, as bandleader, to arrange a show that appealed to the party's attendees and stayed true to the relaxed, intimate interactions with the audience the

band is known for. Essentially, Ultimanota acts as curators, compiling a canon of (Latin) American pop songs- selections that bridge the divide between Latin American and US popular musics.

The canon included songs by Latin American artists juxtaposed with songs by American and British artists. Thus, Ultimanota might play Maroon 5's "Sunday Morning" (2003) back to back with Juan Luis Guerra's "Burbujas de Amor" (1990), or Andrés Calamaro's "Mil Horas" (1983) before Santana's "Evil Ways" (1969); or maybe start out a set with Café Tacuba's "Como te Extraño" (1996) before launching into a cover of David Gray's "Babylon" (1999). Ultimanota gave each song a twist, whether it was adding congas to the percussion part, voicing the trumpet as a sax part, adding a blues tinge to the guitar solos, or through Fred, the lead singer, and his personal vocal style.

Perhaps the best example of this reformulation of popular styles is in the band's cover of Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean" (1982)- which they covered often in the winter and spring of 2010.⁷⁶ Reworking the backbeat with an Afro-Cuban clave pattern rhythm, the cover became a dance song that was instantly recognizable yet subtly different from the original. "Billie Jean" became a way to engage the audience, an American pop song that band members grew up listening to in Venezuela, Mexico and El Salvador, that expressed some of the common musical roots and genre expressions of (Latin) American popular culture. Moreover, with the addition of Tony's bluesy guitar and Fred's vocals, the song took on new meaning as they stressed the heartbreak and betrayal of the song's lyrics, departing from the original's upbeat and casual tone. Because it was being sung in a different era, the song took on meaning for audience members; it

⁷⁶ This is an intriguing connection, particularly since Michael Jackson at times borrowed elements of Latin (and African) music, such as the coda of "Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'" (1982) which borrows the phrase "Mama say, mama sah, ma-ma coo-sah" from Cameroon saxophonist Manu Dibango's "Soul Makossa (1972)" which was covered by Fania All-Stars in the 1970s (n/d).

expressed a bit of nostalgia for the music of their youth in the 1980s while containing novel elements that made it an interesting listen and a good dance number. For audience members approaching middle age, married and with kids, there was a certain melancholy in listening to a song about a young woman who claims to be someone's lover and to have borne his child.

Besides song selection, Ultimanota used other tactics to engage their audience in a continuing musical conversation. At gigs, a tip jar (often just an empty beer glass) was placed on a table next to the band. This was not just a way to earn extra cash, but a way for audience members to express their approval of a particular song by tipping during or at the conclusion of one of their favorites. Between sets, Ultimanota would sit at the bar or, on warm evenings, outside the restaurant and customers would approach them and talk about music. Fans would request a number for the next set, which the band would oblige either by playing the song, or if they didn't know it, a similar song of the same genre. Fred would use certain songs as platforms to engage the audience, dedicating a love song to an audience member who had made an earlier request, or splicing in the names of familiar faces into lyrics. For example, in the band's cover of Héctor Lavoe's "El Cantante" (1978), Fred would insert a name into a well-known line of the song, singing:

*Me paran siempre en la calle
mucha gente que comenta
¡Oye Sam Byrd ah! tú estás (bien) hecho
siempre con hembras y en fiestas."*

They always stop me in the street
Many people comment
Hey! Sam Byrd, you're looking good
Always with girls and at parties."

Of course, when Fred used my name, he wanted to make sure I was paying attention and in on the joke. But other times he would insert Oscar (the sax player) or a friend sitting at a booth near the band.

Ultimanota's appropriation of popular music- American and Latin American styles, Spanish- and English-language songs- found initial success as they played in a casual setting for

an audience that saw their performance as part of the ambience of a restaurant or private party. In this setting, there is a sort of mystification of the experience they present, a sublimation of the hard work and sweat that goes into their performances as they present an image of relaxation and ease. This image corresponds to the “chill” atmosphere of a restaurant; their “cheesy cocktail music” fits into the experience desired by diners out on a date or a family dinner. The low pay and long playing hours lower expectations for a band that started as a way for an older generation to get out of the house and play on the weekends with minimal rehearsal. Yet, during 2010-11, Ultimanota evolved into a more versatile group with renewed focus. They added band members, at times using another percussionist (adding timbales to the existing congas) to play more *salsa*-infused dance numbers. They also ventured outside of restaurants and private parties, playing at Latin music festivals and opening for other bands at concerts. While their mix of styles and exploration of genre remained constant, this new shift raised important issues. Tensions arose between band members over increased demands on time for rehearsals and more frequent performances that took musicians away from family. As a cover band, Ultimanota cannot easily record an album to release as a CD or to send to venues for performance bookings. The band draws from recent popular music copyrighted by artists and labels with deep pockets and hefty royalty fees for recorded versions of their material. The expense of paying an artist for use of his or her song, the hassle of getting permission, and the threat of a lawsuit all restrict Ultimanota’s willingness to record an album (not to mention the limited financial gains of albums in a world of MP3 downloads). Instead, the band has pursued an under-the-radar strategy of presenting their music through MP3 samples and Youtube videos on their website that do not mention the artist’s name and are not transferrable through downloading. In this way,

they avoid releasing the covers for public consumption as a commodity and having to pay royalties, while encouraging people to come hear them live.

Tropic Culture

As Ultimanota drew upon and at times explored the limitations of genre categories by mixing and matching popular music categories together during gigs at restaurants, another band, Tropic Culture, pursued a similar path with its own original songs during concerts at Intown clubs in Charlotte. Tropic Culture consists of a core of three Puerto Rican siblings (Jorge, Alberto, and Jani Espinoza) and other musicians from Latin America and the US; their sound follows their name, they reference what they see as common expressive culture of the “tropics.” In playing for an audience of mostly second generation, middle-class young fans, they mix songs with a message (“Eliminate the Hate,” “Freedom Fighters”) with songs for dancing and pure enjoyment. With Bakalao Stars and several other in-town groups, they represent a “multicultural” musical community that centers on genres like rock, funk, and reggae/ska and exists in a separate sphere from both the Eastside and Uptown musical communities. Thus despite their name, Tropical Culture presents a lineup of instruments and songs that is distinct from *música tropical* of uptown bands like Orquesta Mayor or Bachata Flow. Tropic Culture demonstrated a chameleon-like versatility during 2010, when band members acknowledged that they were going through a process of transition and redefining the band’s goals and sound. At one show at Latina-owned coffee and gift shop Pura Vida, the band presented a paired-down acoustic line-up (guitars, congas, vocals, güiro) while a few months later they performed at the Visulite Theatre in the full regalia of a funk band- horn section, multiple guitars, drum set and congas. By 2011, Tropic Culture was on hiatus as the band’s members again debated what its next steps should be.

I now turn to a Tropic Culture song, “Noche Guerra” (2008), which they often performed during 2009-2010 and released as one of their promotional singles. I add commentary and descriptions to the lyrics in order to demonstrate how the song explores genre categories.

“Noche Guerra” (Espinosa 2008)

[The song begins with drums setting a medium tempo, disco-like beat, then guitars playing the melody, then horns joining with a funk sound, then a male voice (Alberto) singing in English in a pop style:]

*It's getting late and people say that it's all done
We look outside and we know that it's just begun
The sun is gone and what do you know here comes the moon
So go get dressed put on your best get in the mood*

[Violin joins the guitar, giving the song a *charanga cubana* feel]

*I don't know what will happen if we just let go
Chances are if we don't try we'll never know
Let's go out enjoy ourselves for just one night
When morning comes we'll notice if we've done alright*

*So let's go, have one on me
Before we can see we're having fun
La la la la la la
So let's dance,
The Salsa, Merengue
We'll Mambo, we'll Reggae
All night long, the party's on*

[a bluesy guitar solo is played here, then Alberto switches to Spanish to sing:]

*Mira el cielo
Como ya brilla
Estrellas, la luna, amigos y yo
Mezclando emociones*

*Y voz llena de energía
Te encuentras ansiosa por ir a bailar
Toda la noche*

[Alberto is joined by a feminine voice, his sister Jani, to sing the next lines three times:]

Vamos no te quedas sentado

*Ve y tomate un trago
Disfruta tu vida
Que se va y no vuelve
No pierdas tu tiempo
Y pasala bien (x3)*

[A trumpet solo here sounds like Latin jazz, Alberto returns to singing the chorus alone:]

In “Noche Guerra,” Tropic Culture mixes genres in the instrumentation and arrangement of the music, drawing on disco, funk, blues, *charanga cubana*, Latin jazz and pop. Ironically, the song’s lyrics reference further genres- *salsa*, *merengue*, *mambo*, and reggae- that are not contained in the song’s rhythmic and harmonic elements, even if it touches on related genres. The bilingual aspect of the song presents an interesting formulation- rather than demonstrating code switching (by having Spanish and English in the same phrase or as joining clauses in a sentence) or the use of Spanglish- the Spanish section of the lyrics are set apart by breaks in the vocals for instrumental solos. Yet the Spanish lyrics follow the sentiment of the English lyrics, namely the desire to keep the party going all night and enjoying the moment by dancing and participating in the performance of music-making. It is here that the meaning of the song’s title becomes clear; “Noche Guerra” (War Night) is about fighting the desire to stay home, to not dance and to not find joy in life.

“Noche Guerra” represents some of the ideological work that Tropic Culture, perhaps subconsciously, engages in with their audience. An admonition to enjoy life, to embrace the physicality of dance- the song comments on the middle-class melancholy and reserve of the Americanized second generation that is all but absent from working-class musical community on Charlotte’s Eastside. At concerts, Tropic Culture often had to ask, sometimes repeatedly, for the audience to start dancing, to join in by clapping hands, singing a chorus, or joining them on stage. Their songs present a twist on traditions of (old-school) reggae and funk by linking dance

to a political stance- “Noche Guerra,” “Eliminate the Hate,” and “Freedom Fighters” are much more about a crisis of the ego. These songs call for self-exploration and a need to find collective cause through celebration. As “Eliminate the Hate” reads: “Hatred amongst the people, makes us all feel a little small sometimes. Ask yourself, do you love yourself, can you hate yourself...Live to love, love to Live!!” Tropic Culture demonstrates a fluency in multiple genres and their songs and performances are an attempt to work through this multiculturalism and the multiple allegiances it entails. The Espinozas speak Spanish, but also English with a Southern accent. They include Spanish in their music, but sing in a musical community where English dominates. They want to include genres that in origin might seem incompatible (disco and funk, for example) in a “big tent” of musical inclusion that corresponds to the politics of their musical community.

Feeling and Authenticity

Pierre Bourdieu (1984), in his analysis of style and genre, laid out a class-based theory of distinction:

“The aesthetic sense is the sense of distinction. Thus, the aesthetic disposition is one dimension of a distant, self-assured relation to the world and to others which presupposes objective assurance and distance...But it is also a distinctive expression of a privileged position in social space whose distinctive value is objectively established in its relationship to expressions generated from different conditions. Like every sort of taste, it unites and separates...Tastes (i.e., manifested preferences) are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference. It is no accident that, when they have to be justified, they are asserted purely negatively, by the refusal of other tastes” (Bourdieu 1984: 56).

During research in Charlotte, I heard numerous comments and witnessed situations where aesthetic judgments surfaced. Middle-class and striving musicians, many members of the Intown musical community, often distinguished their musical style through aesthetic judgments of music they viewed as irreconcilably different, incomprehensible, or lacking in particular musical elements they perceive as necessary. These judgments primarily focused on *regional mexicano*,

but at times included other genres rooted in working-class and non-white racial identities such as *reggaetón*, *bachata*, and American rap. In a move to mark distinction and define taste, musicians denigrated or dismissed these styles in comparison to their own music-making. However, and somewhat contradictory, they sometimes celebrated and drew on related stylistic legacies from the African-American and Afro-Caribbean tradition, in particular the blues and reggae, to help define their music. In addition to highlighting the class differences between Mexican (and Central American) immigrants and other Latino immigrants from the Caribbean and South America, this aesthetic move reveals an often hidden narrative of racial and ethnic identity formation among Latino immigrants. The following section will analyze this phenomenon through a folk concept that many musicians deployed- the idea of *feeling*- and through debates about the use of English-language lyrics in Latin music.

Feeling

Tony Arreaza, the lead guitarist for Ultimanota, often plays short guitar solos during performances that have a bluesy sound. His referencing of the African-American blues is no coincidence; in conversations about music, Tony often stressed to me his deep appreciation of blues songs and artists like Buddy Guy and B.B. King. Listening to a song or watching a video (of any musical genre) in his office, Tony would call my attention to a particularly striking point in the music and remark that this artist has *feeling*. Tony's focus was not on the technically proficient part of the music- the orchestration, the singer's vocal range, or the dubbing and mixing that goes into a good studio recording- but rather on an emotive quality of performance that brought the song out of the doldrums of being ordinary. If we were to transcribe the idea of *feeling* musically, it might be the use of minor seventh and diminished chords in a rock harmony, or the polyrhythm between the clave and timbales during the break in a *salsa* number, or the

“soulful” timbre of a singer’s voice the third time around when she changes up the vocal attack on a chorus. But *feeling* also refers to the interaction between band and audience, the buzz in the room during an intense live performance. Sometimes this comes through in studio recordings, but often live recordings on Youtube (even with poor sound quality) reveal this quality of a band’s performance abilities. Even more so, whether or not a band had *feeling* was debated among fellow musicians who had attended a group’s show; being in the audience was the ultimate position from which to judge and often document (through photos and short videos taken on cell phones) the extent of a band’s ability to evoke *feeling*.

The concept of *feeling* within the Latin music scene goes back at least to Tony’s days with La Rúa, one of the pioneer *rock en español* groups in Charlotte. In an article (de los Cobos 2009) commemorating the band’s reunion in 2009, Tony reminisced about a series of concerts the band did with other local Latin rock groups, “*Fueron eventos pequeños, pero a full feeling* (They were small events, but with *full feeling*).” In planning festivals and concerts for the Latin American Coalition and Carlotan Rock, Tony has to decide which acts to bring to perform from outside Charlotte. If the band has never toured through Charlotte, he has to rely on demo recordings and online videos to understand their sound. *Feeling* plays a major part in this decision-making process; Tony knows that a band that lacks *feeling* will probably not move a crowd to dance and sing. Because of his years of experience, thoroughness, and skill at picking bands, Tony’s assessment of a band’s *feeling* is often correct and the band gives a successful show with much appreciation from audience members. However, this theory of band selection is not failsafe and some bands do not live up expectations. For example, at one Festival Latinoamericano, an electronica/pop group that Tony selected did not hold the audience’s attention and people filtered out to view folkloric dances at the other stage or went to buy food.

Other band selections possess *feeling*, just not in a way that manifests in a festival performance. At the 2011 Festival Latinoamericano, Miami band Xperimento played a mix of *merengue*, *cumbia*, and reggae on the festival main stage to an attentive but not particularly enthusiastic audience. However, Tony had also contracted Xperimento to play the after party at the Neighborhood Theatre. Playing more or less the same set list, but in a more intimate and club-like setting, the band played to a cheering, dancing, and riveted (smaller) audience that had been warmed up by local group Bakalao Stars.

This commitment to defining and refining the notion of *feeling* contrasts with the distaste and incomprehension that many members of the Intown community (Tony included) felt for *regional mexicano* music. Many Latin rock musicians could not understand the appeal of *regional mexicano*; they cringed at the nasal vocal tones, reliance on electronic keyboards, saccharine lyrics, and cowboy fashion aesthetic that for them typified the genre category. If there is one proof of inability to appreciate a genre, it is the comment that all the songs “sound the same,” a phrase I often heard non-Mexican Latinos use to describe *regional mexicano*. While there was often a begrudging respect that *regional mexicano* music served an enthusiastic audience that in Charlotte’s Latin scene was numerically largest and that it was important to have concerts and festivals that catered to Mexican immigrants, many Latin rock musicians dismissed the music in negative and often stereotypical terms.

Following from Bourdieu (1984), I want to stress that this expression of distinction between Latin rock (which includes a deep appreciation for Mexican rock) and *regional mexicano* follows lines of difference that are drawn between Mexican immigrants and South American and Caribbean immigrants to Charlotte. Difference is etched through geographic segregation and socio-economic class position, and aggravated by factors of legal status, length

of time in the US, access to social capital, and physical appearance. The perceived difference of Mexican immigrants, then, is not limited to anti-immigrant politics that label them as “illegal immigrants” and other overarching stereotypes. What is occurring in Charlotte and other cities in the US South is a process of racialization of Mexican immigrants (Omi & Winant 1994, Doane & Bonilla-Silva 2003), where “Mexicans” have complicated racial orders that previously placed people in polar opposites of black and white. Being “Mexican” has taken on a negative connotation in many Southern cities; is it any wonder that many Latinos move to disassociate themselves from cultural markers of *mexicanidad*, such as the “typical” music of the Mexican working class? This move builds upon Latin American mainstream attitudes towards race, which, although perhaps not as polarized as US mores, favor whitening and denial of African and indigenous heritage (Jiménez-Roman & Flores 2010, de la Fuente 2001, Cruz-Janzen 2001). This does not mean that Latinos who express distaste for *regional mexicano* align themselves politically with anti-immigrant positions on policing and rights, many of these same musicians expressed solidarity with fellow (Mexican) immigrants and support immigration reform.

However, some Latino immigrants from the Caribbean, in particular Dominicans, present a different viewpoint in regards to taste and *regional mexicano* music. Many darker-skinned Dominicans, like Gonzalo, the promoter of TecnoCaliente, expressed empathy and held close social ties with Mexican immigrants, perhaps because they themselves had experienced incidents of racism and discrimination. As musical styles, *regional mexicano* and Dominican *bachata* and *merengue* share commonalities: all are primarily dance music, emerging out of nationalist musical projects that constantly reference rural life, steeped in romantic imagery and archetypal gender roles, and have been transformed by electronic technology of keyboards, digital playback, and auto-tune. These common trajectories facilitate Leydy Bonilla’s

commentary that her duet with TecnoCaliente is “almost like a *merengue*.” The relationship between Dominican and Mexican immigrants to Charlotte is complicated and intertwined. The Dominican-owned supermarket chain Compare Foods found success by recognizing that increased Latino immigration to the US South, (the majority Mexican immigrants), meant an emerging market of consumers that was not being served by regional grocery chains. Compare Foods began offering Mexican staples- tortillas, cuts of meat, chiles, nopal, snacks- as well as food products from across Latin America that previously might only be found in a smaller Mexican-run *mercadito* or corner store. This type of ethnic entrepreneurship stems from the fact that most Dominican residents of Charlotte are not direct migrants, but transplants who first lived in the New York metropolitan area, gaining business acumen, English-language skills, legal status and drawing on the resources of a well-established immigrant enclave before deciding to move south. While Dominican immigrants often start out living in Charlotte with limited resources, because of this social capital they often move up the economic ladder with greater ease than undocumented and newly arrived immigrants from Mexico and Central America. For example, Gonzalo remembers moving to Charlotte on a whim after visiting friends who lived there. He began working in Compare Foods to make money, but quickly moved into the music industry where he had previous experience and is now the promoter/manager of several Latin bands. In comparison, another musician I befriended in Charlotte, an undocumented immigrant from Central America, worked off and on at Compare Foods for several months, but could not keep up with the irregular shifts that interrupted his musical gigs. Eventually, he found another day job working as a painter and drywall installer. Dominican immigrants in Charlotte’s Eastside own or run small businesses - auto repair shops, insurance agencies, and grocery stores- that position them in a somewhat exploitative relationship with Mexican immigrants, who are

their main customer base, but also puts them in close contact on a daily basis. This fact, perhaps even more than the technical similarity between genres, accounts for the feeling of mutual affiliation between the two groups.

Language

A second issue regarding distinction among Latino musical communities in Charlotte revolves around language- specifically the use of English in songs lyrics. Leydy Bonilla often includes *bachata* and *merengue* songs sung in English on her albums. This is an effort on Bonilla's part to appeal to non-Latino audiences and to second generation Latinos who, having grown up in the United States, speak more English than Spanish. As the opening account of Bonilla's cover of Lady Gaga's "Bad Romance" reveals, the usage of some English-language singing in Latin music can be successful, if we judge by the audience's enthusiastic reaction. However, in other cases it falls short or does not fit into the musical community's idea of how a genre should sound. For example, singing in Spanish and even having a certain vocal attack while on stage is, for many musicians and audience members, a prerequisite for a good *salsa* song. Other genres, such as Latin rock, are more open to English-language and bilingual lyrics, as Tropic Culture's repertoire attests.

The debate about English-language use in Latin music in Charlotte is as much about generation as it is about genre. While musicians and audience members who are first generation immigrants almost exclusively use Spanish during performances, singing and interacting with audience in the language, musicians who are of a second generation of Latinos, or who wish to count this group as a major part of their audience (Leydy Bonilla) often use English-language lyrics, or a mix of English and Spanish in between songs as they patter with audience members. Musicians and community members predicted an "inevitable" shift occurring between an older

generation of musicians (relatively, many are only in their 20s and 30s) and younger musicians coming on the scene. Some were enthusiastic about this shift, while others worried about the decline of established genre categories to an onslaught on English-language dominant music.



Figure 21: Music and dance at the Puerto Rican Cultural Society of Charlotte’s annual picnic

One example of celebration of this “changing of the guard” occurred in the Puerto Rican community, where a young vocalist, Leo Morel, was introduced in a series of events as an up-and-coming *salsa* singer, often by prominent, older musicians or important community leaders. At the Puerto Rican Cultural Society of Charlotte’s annual end-of-summer picnic, several members of Orquesta Mayor and Tropic Culture played traditional Puerto Rican ballads and *danzas* for the first hour of the event, and then Morel covered a few popular *salsa* numbers in Spanish with pre-recorded playback for the lively audience. It appears that Morel appeals to the older generation and his younger cohort because he continues to adhere to genre rules that mark *salsa* as a Spanish language vocal style.

However, with Latin rock musicians, the generational transition evokes mixed feelings of hope and melancholy, they are supportive of younger musicians, but face the realization that the trajectory of *rock en español* may be drawing to a close. A conversation with Bakalao Stars underlined these perceptions:

Christian: “When it comes to the actual scene, no one will know what’s gonna happen, but I see it like a wave, now it’s probably dying out [Bakalao’s time], but there’s a new generation, younger kids, since when we started the band I was sixteen and now I’m twenty-three, maybe in two years there’s going to be that new generation of Hispanic kids that grew up here and are going to start doing that...”

SB: “Do you see any bands that are coming up?”

Javier: “I mean, I know there is some of them, probably, I mean you probably know more of the new bands...”

Daniel: “Avión Sans Pilot?”

SB: “Avión Sans Pilot. Yeah, I’ve talked to them.”

Daniel: “There young kids, but they’re good.”

SB: “They’re cool, yeah.”

Javier: “Yeah, but they sing in English!”

SB: “Yeah?”

Javier: “THAT’S A HUGE THING! It’s different, I mean you’re Latino, but you’re playing in English, it really doesn’t matter, because it’s not *rock en español*, you know what I mean, it’s just a completely different angle. I hope that...”

Christian: “I think, one of the things that I see most is Latin people, yeah, keep playing, but play more like English bands, you know because, maybe a thirty-year old or twenty-five year old person that moves here, they’re trying to get their life together, maybe they’re not thinking about music, but sixteen-year old kids..

Javier: “grow up here...”

Christian: “Most of them grow up here, unless they just move here and then it’s hard to [get involved in music], but hopefully it keeps going, you know, there’s a lot of really talented musicians but everybody’s kind of spread out, you know what I mean?”
(Author Interview with Bakalao Stars 7/20/2010)

Avión Sans Pilot is a Charlotte band made up of teenage musicians that play heavy metal and goth-rock, singing in English. In 2009-2010, they played a few shows, including one where they opened for Bakalao Stars at the Evening Muse, but also went through a period of dissolution before reuniting as a band in early 2011. While Bakalao Stars' members appreciate the new "wave" of young(er) musicians coming up, they also reveal their opinion about how the music is different because it is sung in English. Javier, the older of the Anzola brothers, stresses that Avión Sans Pilot's music is not *rock en español*, while Christian, the younger brother, is more understanding, even recommending to Latin musicians to play music "like English bands" to appeal to a younger audience of American-born Latinos. What becomes clear is how flexible *rock en español* is in terms of including the stylistic diversity of Bakalao Stars' use of ska, reggae, and *cumbia*, but also how this breaks down in the face of linguistic and generational shifts to younger musicians singing in English and performing "like English bands." There is distance (and difference) both symbolically rooted in language usage but also real geographic distance as a second generation with American education and social capital seeks to move out of residential and performance enclaves into mainstream society.

Local Geography

Many Latin bands engage with the city's local geography in their songs and performance, especially through music videos that are posted online on Youtube, and this strategy helps connect them to their audience. As mentioned earlier, La Rúa shot one of the first Latin rock videos in Charlotte by gathering friends and family together on a local streetscape as a backdrop to their performance of "El Chanchito." Bakalao Stars managed to get permission to shot a music video in TimeWarner Arena, Charlotte's pro basketball stadium, for their song "Kokoa Brown" (2007). Banda TecnoCaliente and Leydy Bonilla filmed portions of their video "A

Dormir Juntitos” at a public plaza overlooking the city center- the plaza is part of a luxury condominium development with upscale restaurants and shops that replaced one of Charlotte’s first shopping malls built in the 1950s. These videos as texts reveal the desires of bands to position their musical community as belonging to Charlotte, striving for a glamorous life style, and access to performance spaces. Other artists’ videos show little connection to Charlotte or its geography. DS the Evolution has released several new videos that take place in tropical locales- Santo Domingo and Miami. Leydy Bonilla’s single “Pienso en Ti” (2011) features a dramatic story of love and betrayal but does not feature recognizable Charlotte landmarks like some of her earlier videos, instead being shot as if the drama takes place in a secret, “secure” location out of a spy movie. These videos shot outside of the city position Charlotte musicians in relation to international and cosmopolitan visions of Latino cultural representation.

But these videos are mere representations of larger processes of class and racial formation that lead groups within the larger Latino population to position themselves as similar or distinct to others. As we have seen, this results in musicians and their audiences forming musical communities separated by neighborhood, access to certain performance spaces, and geographic mobility. Despite the framework that I have presented (based on commentary from members of all three music districts) that classifies the Eastside, Intown, and Uptown areas into distinct purviews, there were artistic developments that complicated this categorization during my time in Charlotte. None proved more intriguing than the music of the Brazilian immigrant community in Charlotte.

Brazilian immigrants to Charlotte have largely settled in Pineville, a former small town south east of the city that has been swallowed up by the expansion of Charlotte’s suburbs. In Pineville, Brazilians own small corner stores and bakeries selling Brazilian food, soccer jerseys,

magazines and, of course, a selection of Brazilian popular music CDs. Perhaps the best known Brazilian musician in Charlotte, Reinaldo Brahn plays weekly at a nearby seafood restaurant. This humble ethnic enclave contrasts with the other center of Brazilian social life in Charlotte, Chima- a Brazilian *churrascaria* restaurant on a prominent corner block Uptown. Chima is one of the most expensive restaurants in the city, frequented by bankers and visiting businessmen for power lunches and expense-account client dinners for all you-can-eat steak extravaganzas. Chima also has an upstairs cocktail lounge with modernist décor and lower-priced appetizers at the bar. Once a month, the upstairs lounge hosts Reinaldo and several members of his group SoulBrazil for a Friday night Brazilian party. For the first hour or two, Reinaldo plays solo guitar, singing *bossa nova* classics for the sparse audience of upper middle-class businessmen grabbing a pre-dinner drink or fashionable couples out on a date. Then, groups of Brazilian men and women filter in, dressed casually but with flair, and grab tables near the music. Reinaldo is joined by his band mates- a drummer and a percussionist playing a Brazilian tambourine- and they launch into *samba* covers. People get up to dance and some of the tables are moved to the side. On occasion, a group might be celebrating someone's birthday and a cake is brought out with everyone singing happy birthday in Portuguese. Or some dancers from the local dance troupe, Movimentos de Samba, might emerge from a back room clad in carnival costumes- high heels, tiny mini-skirts, bikini tops and feathered headdresses- to lead the crowd in a dance.



Figure 22: Brazilian music at Chima

During late 2009 and early 2010, Brazilian music also played a prominent role in a changing outlook within the Latin American Coalition and its cultural programs. In previous years, the Coalition had organized *tertulias*- sit-down events celebrating the culture of a particular Latin American country with folkloric dances, singers, and poetry reading. Due to funding cuts and staff downsizing, the *tertulias* were cancelled and the non-profit looked for a new model of cultural celebration that could bring in more revenue. Among the ideas that were being floated around in late 2009 was a Brazilian-themed event; Tony, being an enthusiastic fan of *bossa nova* music, jumped on the idea and quickly found a few potential performers. The choice of Brazil as a focus was beneficial for other reasons as well. A Brazilian event could help publicize the Coalition's services and programs to a new demographic that knew little about the organization. Politically, by reaching out to the Brazilian community, the Coalition would show its inclusiveness and an expansion of what it meant to be "Latino"- including Luso-Brazilian culture in the fold. In the internal politics of the Latino community, the choice of Brazil, because

it had never been done before, avoided disgruntled community members who might wonder, “why are they celebrating Ecuador, again?” “Why not El Salvador?”

The Latin American Coalition began organizing an event, entitled A Night in Rio, and taking place on a Thursday during the week of Brazilian Carnival, at the Neighborhood Theatre in the Intown NoDa neighborhood. In contrast to the *tertulias*, this event was set up as a concert and dance party; although there would be interludes for cultural exhibitions, like a *capoeira* demonstration, most of the night would be dedicated to performances by musical and dance groups that would keep the audience on their feet. Revenues would be brought in by bringing on sponsors and vendors- a Brazilian corner market and a bakery sold food, Chima donated gift certificates- and through ticket sales for a ‘professional,’ well-produced event. Tony drew on his experience promoting events through the Spanish-language press and expanded this promotion to a local Portuguese-language newspaper. But perhaps more interestingly, the imagery and timeliness of Brazilian Carnival facilitated the promotion of the event to a wider non-Latino audience of white and black Charlotte residents. Press releases given to newspapers and posters placed around town featured photos of the dancers and linked Brazilian Carnival to *samba*, partying, and experiencing what it might be like to spend a ‘night in Rio,’ without actually leaving Charlotte. In other words, unlike the *tertulias*, which to many in both the Coalition and the Latino community, represented a sort of museum-ification of Latino culture, A Night in Rio promised authenticity and the vibrancy of contemporary Brazilian expressive culture that could bring in a wider audience.

The actual event fulfilled this promise, while revealing the diversity and inclusiveness of Brazilian culture in Charlotte that non-Brazilians had hardly imagined. Reinaldo’s band, SoulBrazil, played two sets of their music, at the beginning and to close out the show. While the

closing set featured upbeat *samba* and *batucada*, the opening set drew on Latin jazz, light jazz, Brazilian popular music (MPB), and American R&B. While some in the audience remarked that the set was “slow,” to me it demonstrated the versatility of SoulBrazil’s music-making and their dialogue with non-Brazilian music forms- particularly the “soul” of contemporary African-American popular music such as jazz and R&B. Paulo and Ezio, another musical group, sang Brazilian country music to an audience of enthusiastic Brazilians and perplexed non-Brazilians who had never heard this genre of music before. Movimentos de Samba, the main Brazilian dance group, was led by Iya Silva, a dancer with family ties to Jamaica and Brazil. Many people expressed amazement to Tony afterwards- that these were local artists and that there was this unknown world of Brazilian music and dance in Charlotte.⁷⁷ The event raised money for the Latin American Coalition and became a brand; to be repeated annually and moved to a Saturday night, a more prominent night in the venue’s schedule.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analyzed the meaning of genre- as a set of rules and identifiable traits and as an expression of a community of taste (Bourdieu 1984, White 2008)- in popular musical forms among Latino musicians in Charlotte. Genre comes to mean more than just a category of music; it also describes a method of performance, an ideology of culture, and a philosophy of music-making. Paired with the politics of the everyday life of being a musician and situated in the geographically segregated spaces of Charlotte’s Latin music scene, genre reveals affiliations of nationality, class, language, and ethnicity in ways that foster belonging and feelings of community, but also separation and distinction from other musical communities. Some of these elements of taste and distinction are readily observable- rhythmic patterns, instrumentation, song

⁷⁷ This matches Maxine Margolis’ analysis that Brazilian immigrants are the “invisible minority” among Latino immigrants (2009).

naming, language-usage, dress, etc.- while other elements are more subjective- the *feeling* that a good performance has. Notions of authenticity and legitimacy differ from within and between musical communities. Sometimes this leads to wholesale dismissal of a genre, for example a Latin rocker's incomprehension of *regional mexicano*, while in other instances it can create cross-pollination when artists collaborate across genre.

One of the most important findings of this research has been that Latin genres in Charlotte follow new trajectories and form different permutations than in well-researched centers of Latin musical production like New York and Los Angeles. Although Latin musicians retain strong links to these musical centers and remain imbricated in musical conversation taking place there, they have created new spaces in Charlotte for explorations of what genre means. I reject the notion that the advent of electronically downloaded music, the demise of the dominance of major record labels as tastemakers, and internet videos means that music now exists outside of place; and the evidence from Charlotte supports this counterargument. Latin genres in Charlotte grow out of a sense of place, of living on the Eastside and going to a club on Sunday night to dance to *regional mexicano*, of hanging out in NoDa and catching Bakalao Stars play a show at the Evening Muse, of dressing to the nines and going Uptown to dance *salsa* at Cosmo's Café, or taking the family to A Piece of Havana and requesting your favorite song be played by Ultimanota. When Tony points to a guitar solo that has *feeling*, he is connecting Latin music to Southern music-*Southern* blues, rock & roll, rhythm & blues- that made the circuit through Latin America mixing with local forms to create *rock en español* that he brought back to the US South. Latin genres in Charlotte express a dialogue with the city, carving out spaces of performance and community, testing and negotiating genre boundaries, and determining what Latin music means in the US South, or what it will mean to have Southern Latin music.

Chapter 7: The Festival: Marketing *Latinidad*

This chapter gives a behind-the-scenes look at how Latino festivals are organized, how organizers market “Latino” culture, and the role of musicians in these events. The festival highlights the contingent nature of musicians’ labor, but also their irreplaceable role as bearers of cultural capital. Musicians are irreplaceable because they do the hard work of forming community around music-making in the local setting of the club, creating culturally “authentic” expressions that can then be inserted into a commodified festival presentation. Musicians engage in heated intellectual debates about the “proper” way to organize festivals and treat performers, constructing social rules that guide their sense of ethics and their judgments about the “success” of an event. These ethical sensibilities stem from musicians’ training, whether in a music school or informal setting, and their relationships with fellow musicians and audience members that shape what constitutes “professional” behavior. By situating musicians’ labor in the nexus of cultural production and consumption practices associated with festivals, the analysis shows how “working musicians” face many of the same political and economic limitations that dull to gray the immigrant dream. Moreover, the internal divisions and structural constraints that festival organizers face illustrate how difficult constructing an accurate vision of *latinidad* is, even on the scale of the city.

Latinos in Charlotte gather to attend festivals where they listen to music, watch dancers perform, enjoy food, and make the rounds at the tents of corporate sponsors. The important festivals in Charlotte include the Cinco de Mayo Fanta Festival, the Festival Latinoamericano, and Carnaval Carolina, each held annually. In addition, other attempts to establish festivals, for example around “el Grito,” the Mexican Independence Day celebration, have begun with initial success. These festivals attract thousands of attendees, including many members of the various

musical communities I have outlined, and are often the result of months of planning by festival organizers and cultural brokers to recruit musicians, sign up sponsors, arrange logistics, and promote the festival through local media. But what are these festivals exactly? Are they events that embody the larger cultural values of Charlotte's Latino community? Are festivals places where immigrants from across Latin America stake a claim to belonging in North Carolina, as anthropologist Hannah Gill argues in her analysis of Raleigh's Fiesta del Pueblo (Gill 2010)? Are festivals opportunities for Latino immigrants to perform in carnivalesque ways that turn the tables on their marginalized place in Southern society? Does the festival reconstitute Latin American small town traditions in the US, becoming a metaphoric town plaza where immigrants can socialize in the summer twilight?

The festivals are all of these things and more. I argue that Latino festivals in Charlotte are sites of contestation where different groups negotiate over competing notions of what it means to be Latino, Mexican, Latin American, immigrant, and American. Festivals are a way to mark the calendar into intervals (Leach 1966) and to create a sense of community through ritual behavior tied to musical expression (Finnegan 2007). Moreover, festivals are where Latino musicians present their work to the largest audiences. Often, this performance beyond the friendly confines of the musical community entails recalibrating or refining aesthetic choices for musicians as they encounter a wider audience and contact musicians from outside Charlotte. Festivals also crystallize ideas about morality, as musicians interact with organizers who have different priorities concerning what should happen onstage. Much of this negotiation takes place behind the scenes, before the festival even starts, among festival organizers and prominent musical brokers who decide which musical acts and dancers will perform (and how they will be treated), what types of food will be offered, and which corporate sponsors will be positioned

favorably to plug their products. Other negotiations take place backstage during the festival as schedules are squeezed or rearranged, for example when a band gets lost and arrives late for its set, or when an assembled crowd enthusiastically responds during a band's performance. But festival-goers also contest the structure of the festival; audiences vote with their feet, eyes, and wallets, musicians and audiences successfully or unsuccessfully perform tropes of festival-specific musical enjoyment, and vendors and sponsors position themselves for cultural consumption by attendees.

By examining the festival, and musicians involvement in events like the festival, I link together musicians' training and their ideas of professionalism (discussed in chapter 4) with their ideas of morality and ethics. In other words, the aesthetic decisions that are made in organizing the festival and that are displayed through the physical layout of the grounds- the choice of bands, dancers, sponsors, and food vendors- get interpreted through music-making and the vibe between audience and performers at the festival. Aesthetics and ethics become inseparable, particularly in the positive and negative assessment musicians make after a festival is completed about how things went. The festival is a different kind of public space from the regular performance spaces of most bands and their musical community. Playing in a club, bar, or restaurant involves a different scale of performance; at the festival the crowds are bigger, the "regulars" mix with new, potential fans (often families with children) who must be won over by the strength of the performance as bands compete with the other forms of entertainment present: kiddie rides, food trucks, folkloric dancers, and sponsor booths. The festival is also one of the few spaces where Latina/o musicians from different musical communities come together and share their music with any regularity. Latino Festivals make community, but in particular ways that involve learning how to consume, how to appreciate music and art, and how to become part

of particular visions of *latinidad*. Musicians play a major role in these processes, particularly since they are the major focal point of the festival through their placement on its main stage(s).

In this chapter, I examine the festival using a multifocal lens that passes through the viewpoint of artists (musicians and dancers), festival organizers, attendees, vendors, and corporate sponsors. While the outward appearance of a festival often approaches the carnivalesque, behind the scenes a regimented structure ensure that the event runs smoothly. Much of this analysis stems from my involvement in organizing three major festivals with the Latin American Coalition, starting with the 2009 Festival Latinoamericano, through the 2010 Cinco de Mayo Fanta Festival, and ending in the 2010 Festival Latinoamericano.⁷⁸ The main focus of this chapter, the Festival Latinoamericano, is the culmination of a festival season that for Latinos stretches from late spring to early autumn. During some months, there are minor festivals and other outdoor events every weekend. These might include celebrations such as: Bolivian Independence Day, *Parranda Venezolana*, or a *jaripeo* (Mexican rodeo). For the 2009 and 2010 Festival Latinoamericano and 2010 Fanta Festival, I participated in the planning stages, worked as a stage manager during the festival, and archived much of the festival by collecting promotional materials, photographs, video, and field notes. In addition to this work, I attended several other festivals, including Carnaval Carolina 2010 and El Grito 2010 as an observer, where I chatted with organizers, musicians, and audience members, took photos, and noted the layout, musical line-up, and general atmosphere of the events.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Festival Latinoamericano is also called by its English name, the Latin American Festival. To avoid confusion and to stress the “Latin” aspect of the event, I use its Spanish name.

⁷⁹ I take caution to note my role in the events described below and assess the limitations and benefits of my position as an insider in these festivals. Also, I have taken care, when necessary to hide the identities of certain individuals, whose reputations or interpersonal relationships could be damaged by conversations we had in private.

Festival Latinoamericano

The 2010 Festival Latinoamericano began on a Sunday morning with a torrent of preparations: trucks dropping off boxes and banners in front of sponsors' tents, sound checks, city officials arriving to inspect food vendors' equipment, volunteers directing traffic, non-profit staff counting moneyboxes for beverage sales, and everyone waiting in anticipation of the rush of a long and stressful day. Backstage, I arrange couches and tables, and lay out all the food and drinks for the artists. I start calling bands to make sure they are on their way to the festival grounds and to remind them where to unload their equipment. There are two stages, one for live music and the other for dance performances, on each end of the festival grounds, and in between-sponsors' tents, an aisle of food vendors, local artists and craft vendors selling their wares, and lawn for attendees to stand or set up chairs to sit and listen to music. The gates open and festival-goers start filtering into the grounds. The opening band, Rhythm +, plays a set of instrumental Latin Jazz numbers, to virtually no audience as festival-goers have yet to make it around the grounds. By the time they finish, a small group has assembled, and *merengue* singer Leydy Bonilla croons "The Star-Spangled Banner" while a local recruiting post of the US Army provides the flag corps. The next group, Bakalao Stars, plays ska and rock songs as some of their usual crowd cheers them on. Next, Orquesta GarDel, a band from Raleigh/Chapel Hill, plays classic salsa and *son montuno* numbers.

Around the same time, at a smaller stage at the other end of the festival grounds, the dance stage begins to feature performances by local dance troupes. Many families come to the festival just to see their son or daughter perform as part of a *ballet folklórico*. Parents clamor for the best spots by the stage to snap photos. Troupes made up of children as young as five, teenagers, and middle age adults take the stage in riotously colorful costumes and perform *jarabe tapatío*, "*La*

Bruja” and other traditional Mexican dances. Later a group of *salsa* dancers will step out for a well-choreographed ballroom style performance. And some of the dances, for example, a Peruvian group, even feature live musicians who accompany the dancers on stage.



Figure 23: Dancers on the Cultural Stage, 2011 Festival Latinoamericano

Back at the main stage, between bands, the emcees, Sendy and Helen, take the stage and make jokes. They introduce sponsors, who send representatives onstage to talk about deals, give away free t-shirts, or announce raffle winners. Meanwhile, the stage manager, musicians, and volunteers rush to move amplifiers, tune instruments, check microphone sound levels, and get the next band ready to start their performance. If there is a delay, I give a signal to Sendy and he keeps talking, asking what countries people in the crowd are from, or telling another joke. Once everything is ready, the emcees get the crowd excited for the next band and the music starts.

Elastic Bond is the next group to take the stage; they are from Miami and play electronic, funk, and pop styles. The crowd gives their eclectic mix of music a polite but unenthusiastic reception. The following band, also from Miami, is Locos Por Juana. They play a mix of *cumbia* and reggae, and the audience grows. Locos Por Juana has a few minor hits and play a

very danceable style and feature a charismatic lead singer. By the last hour, when the headlining band, Plena Libre, is due to go onstage, the crowd has reached its peak. The dance stage has closed down after the final dance performance. Plena Libre is from Puerto Rico and an enthusiastic contingent of *puertorriqueños* gathers in front of the stage waving Puerto Rican flags. They play *bomba* and *plena*, traditional Puerto Rican African-derived rhythms that are precursors to *salsa*, but with a contemporary flair. A call and response pattern develops as the lead singer calls out a question, “¿Qué te pasa a ti?”(What’s happening with you?), and the audience answers, “Aaaahhhhhh!” The sun is going down and the temperature cools; the audience presses closer and dances to the encouragement of the band. The singers step to the front of the stage and get everyone in the audience jumping and shaking to the beat. The performance builds to a crescendo, ending with several encores. As the crowd disperses, some fans find their way on stage to congratulate the band, to mention their hometowns in Puerto Rico, and to take pictures with them.



Figure 24: Plena Libre headlines the 2010 Festival Latinoamericano

I spend another hour with volunteers and non-profit staff closing down the festival. In the dark, we take down signs, collect trash, and load equipment. We ask food vendors for their last bits of food to eat and celebrate the end of a long day. No one hangs around for that long, because we are all so tired we can barely stand and ready to go home and sleep. Luckily, the Coalition staff gets the next day off from work to rest and recover.

Planning the Festival

In many ways, a festival is organized chaos. For festival organizers, the trick is to manage what at times feels like an out-of control freight train barreling down the tracks. It helps if the vision for how the event should go is well-planned and flexible enough to deal with the series of unforeseen yet inevitable circumstances that arise to derail a festival- rain, late bands, poor turnout, or failing food inspections. It takes months of groundwork to prepare for an event that is over in a matter of hours. What does it take to manufacture this experience? What values are expressed through the manner in which the festival is organized? Finally, how does this relate to how musical communities fit into the festival schema?

a) Bands

It's January and in a windowless office at the Latin American Coalition, event manager Tony Arreaza and I are brainstorming about the 2010 Festival Latinoamericano.⁸⁰ The festival is 10 months away, but Tony knows that bands from Latin America are already beginning to solidify their tour dates for the summer and fall. We are trying to find a headliner and another well-known band from out of town to fill in prime slots for the event. For several years, the festival has featured a lineup with a mixture of two or three out of town bands (with one major headliner) and several local bands. The headliner helps draw in more people who pay the \$5

⁸⁰ To be clear, while I did give advice and opinions as to which artists and sponsors should be selected, Tony and other executive staff at the Latin American Coalition made all of the significant decisions regarding the festival. My role was that of apprentice being trained by a master craftsman, which in describing Tony is not hyperbole.

entry fee, funds which go to support the non-profit's programs. Thus it is imperative to choose someone who will appeal to a broad swath of people, both Latinos and non-Latinos. For Tony, it is also a point of pride to select a headliner that makes a statement about his musical taste as a musician and concert promoter. Over several days, we throw names back and forth. If we are unfamiliar with someone, we watch Youtube videos or search for the artist's website. Some of the names are promising, but too costly to bring to perform in Charlotte. Others have performed recently in town, either at a festival or at a local music venue; we don't want to repeat what has been done before. Still other bands don't appear to be touring, or are not journeying through the United States this year.

After narrowing down our list to a manageable number of artists, we begin to make initial contact with their managers or agents, feeling out how receptive they might be to performing at the festival. This is a tenuous and somewhat frustrating process, mainly because of the financial limitations of the festival budget, but also because Charlotte is not seen as a marquee city for Latin acts. The total budget Tony has to pay all the bands for the festival is around fifteen thousand dollars, which is less than many major acts charge for a single performance. Some bands want a guaranteed amount to perform, but also want the festival to pay airfare, which can add thousands of dollars into the budget. We have to choose between booking one major act and having no money left over for other bands, or booking lesser-known bands and having enough to pay everyone. Also, some bands do not seem that interested in coming to Charlotte, or are surprised to learn of the festival and the fact that there is a sizeable Latino audience in the city. Tony employs several strategies for dealing with these hurdles. First, he pitches the festival as part of a potential Southern swing of a tour, recommending that bands book gigs at clubs or festivals in nearby cities. For example, Asheville, NC holds an annual fall festival the same

week as the Festival Latinoamericano; often headliners end up playing both. He presents the festival as “professional,” established (20 years and running), and well-organized event, pointing bands to the festival website, where they can see videos of past festivals and sophisticated web design that shows that this is no fly-by-night operation.⁸¹ He appeals to their conscience, noting the limited budget to ask for a “non-profit rate” and linking the festival with the “good cause” of raising money for the Latin American Coalition and its community programs. Socially conscious groups, for example, 2009 headliner Grupo Fantasma, see their participation in the Festival as a way to give back to the community. Finally, Tony attempts to package groups together if they are represented by the same manager, agent, or record label, to get two groups to perform back to back and share expenses like equipment, travel costs, etc.

In 2010, finding the headliner and other major acts took several months. Finally, Tony and I booked Plena Libre, a Puerto Rican *bomba y plena* group, as the headliner. Slowly, the other musical pieces started to fall in place. Two acts from Miami represented by the same manager, Locos por Juana and Elastic Bond, agreed to perform. Locos por Juana had performed several years earlier at the festival; they performed at a festival in Virginia Beach alongside Tony’s band Ultimanota, and so he decided to bring them back to Charlotte. Tony and I came across Elastic Bond on the internet, they had an intriguing sound and it turned out Tony knew their producer.

With the major acts selected, it now was time to choose local bands to fill in the remaining slots. Several considerations went into our decisions. First, we wanted to present a diversity of genres. Since, we already had one band playing *música tropical*, we decided to only select one similar band, Orquesta GarDel, which played *salsa*. Local rock/ska band Bakalao Stars,

⁸¹ www.festivallatinoamericano.org. The website and Festival’s promotional materials are designed by Carlotan Rock co-investor and former La Rúa member Juan Miguel Marin.

Brazilian band SoulBrasil, and Latin Jazz group Rhythm + rounded out the picture. Second, the selections did not include *regional mexicano* groups because the Latin American Coalition has another festival, the Cinco de Mayo Fanta Festival, which features Mexican music. Third, we decided to exclude groups that had performed at the previous year's festival, which meant that prominent local artists such as Leydy Bonilla were not signed up. Instead, we asked her to participate by singing the US National Anthem.

It should be noted that Tony is well aware of the discrepancy in pay between what the major, out of town bands receive and what local groups get for playing the Festival. While a headliner may receive several thousand dollars for performing, local groups often get a few hundred dollars for their time. However, he contrasts his treatment of local bands with their experiences at other festivals, where they are paid less, or sometimes not paid at all. But the cost of bands is a major and sometimes determining factor in the decision to book them for the festival. Tony prefers to confirm the more expensive headliner before making any decisions about other bands. If a local band charges more or is inflexible in negotiating a lower booking rate, sometimes he has to find another local band to replace them.

b) Sponsors

The second phase of planning the Festival Latinoamericano involves signing up sponsors to financially support the festival and its associated non-profit organizations. The Latin American Coalition (LAC), the Mint Museum, and the Latin American Women's Association (LAWA) are the non-profit organizations that organize the festival; the proceeds from the \$5 entry fee, beverage sales, and sponsorship donations are split between the organizations (after accounting for the expenses of putting on the festival). As festival organizers, Tony and I were in charge of enlisting sponsors. Whereas choosing music was a joyous occasion, Tony dreaded

pitching the festival to potential sponsors, which at times had the spirit of going hat in hand to ask for alms. Occasionally, we would call on the LAC's executive director, Jess George, to lend a hand by making a call or using contacts gained through executive level networking to win over a sponsor.

Major national corporations with a strong presence in Charlotte comprised most of the sponsors of the festival. Other sponsors included local businesses, in particular Spanish-language media companies (newspapers, radio), with strong ties to the Latino immigrant community. The sponsors can sign up for several levels of sponsorship depending on how much money they are willing to donate; the donation amount determines the size of their tent space, font size of their logo on advertisements, number of times they can make announcements on stage, and proximity to the main stage (or other desirable locations). We employed several strategies to "pitch" the festival and gain sponsorship. First, several sponsors have long-standing relationships with festival; with a relationship already cultivated, it was often more a question of which level of sponsorship they desired. Second, we steered potential sponsors to the festival website and promo video where they could see photos and video footage of past festivals. This showed the scope of the festival and the excitement it generates. Third, we attempted to appeal to sponsors on multiple levels- the festival could be a way to appeal to the "Hispanic" market for their product/services, to demonstrate community engagement ("giving back to the community"), but also would attract bilingual, middle-class attendees that could be good recruits as future employees. Fourth, as enticement, sponsors could negotiate exclusivity; for example, if a beverage company or bank agreed to a certain level of sponsorship, the organizers would not allow competitors to sponsor the festival. Fifth, sponsors could make in-kind donations that would augment the benefits of their sponsorship level or lower their monetary donation; for

example, both beer and soda companies donated cans of their product to be sold with the proceeds going to the festival, rather than give monetary donations.

In 2010, the economic recession affected sponsorship levels. Several longstanding sponsors, including a national home improvement store that was a high-level sponsor, declined to sponsor the festival. Tony and I managed to find replacement sponsors, but it required signing up a larger number of small donation sponsors and getting creative about negotiating sponsorship levels. Many sponsors decided to give less money than in years past.

In addition to major sponsors another avenue to generate revenue for the festival is through other participants, namely food and craft vendors, who pay a small fee to participate in the festival. Tony and the LAC see this as an opportunity to promote small businesses, a goal that parallels the small business seminars offered by the non-profit throughout the year. However, Tony also screens the vendors that participate in the festival. He makes sure that the food vendors have significant experience working at festivals or training in food safety to pass the city's health inspection that takes place at the beginning of the festival day. He also recruits food vendors that will sell a diversity of food from across Latin America, so that as many national/provincial cuisines are represented as possible. Thus, there are usually only two taco trucks signed up, to allow space for Cuban sandwiches, for Venezuelan *arepas* and *cachapas*, Puerto Rican *tostones*, and Argentine *churrasco*. Tony also recruits craft vendors, again stressing diversity of national origin, but also preferring vendors that sell small, low-cost items (t-shirts and jewelry) that appeal to attendees' ethnic or national identity (i.e. bandanas with the Puerto Rican Flag). Craft vendors can negotiate down the price of their participation by bringing their own tent; but because they pay the least, they get smaller and less favorable spots on the festival grounds.



Figure 25: The food aisle at the 2011 Festival Latinoamericano

c) Promotion

Promoting the festival involves actions on multiple fronts. One of the first things we did was write up a press release, in both English and Spanish, to distribute to newspapers and radio stations. The Spanish-language print media promotes the event through advertisements that are part of their sponsorship agreements with the festival, but also covers the event through feature articles (often on the bands) in the weeks leading up to the festival. Tony, and several musicians, also made appearances on local Spanish-language radio to promote the festival in the days leading up to the event. My task, fitting for a cultural anthropologist, was to convince local English-language media that the festival was worth covering. I had attempted to promote the 2009 Festival as a volunteer new to Charlotte with no success. In 2010, I started by e-mailing editors and reporters at local and regional papers from a list of contacts that had been compiled from previous events, including immigration reform rallies. I got some responses, but little real interest. It appeared that the English-language media was not that interested in Latin music. Changing tactics, I stressed the food element of the festival, and got a food critic at a free weekly

paper, Creative Loafing, to cover the festival.⁸² This coverage led Creative Loafing to also write a feature story about the Latin American Coalition and its involvement in organizing the festival for 20 years. The paper sent a photographer to take photos of Tony and Jess George, the executive director, wearing festival T-shirts in the LAC offices. It was supposed to be a cover story, but got pushed off the cover by a feature, “The Music Issue,” which ironically did not mention any Latin bands or Latino musicians (Hahne 2010). However, coverage of both the history of the festival and a preview of the food vendors was included in that edition of the weekly paper (Hodges 2010b, Childress 2010a).

Promotion of the festival was not limited to traditional print and radio. We also employed electronic media. Tony and I constantly mentioned the festival website in e-mails and phone conversations, even embedding a link in our e-mail signature. During the summer of 2010, the Latin American Coalition started a twitter feed, and paired with a Facebook page, we enlisted a new employee, Beth Courtney, to post updates through these sites. She wrote Facebook posts announcing the name of a band that we had just booked to play the festival, or solicited among our followers for potential volunteers to work the day of the festival.

Finally, we promoted the festival through flyers and posters. Printing out thousands of bilingual flyers, we gave them to food vendors and sponsors who stopped by our office. We dropped off stacks of flyers at neighborhood restaurants and businesses. The Charlotte Observer, the city’s major English-language daily, as part of the deal to print the flyers in their presses,

⁸² It should be noted that in 2008-9, controversy over food trucks, in particular taco trucks run by Mexican entrepreneurs, had led the county commissioners to ban food trucks in certain places and during late night hours. By 2010, several local papers and magazines were bemoaning the city’s lack of food trucks in comparison with a flourishing of mobile food vendors in New York and Los Angeles and accolades for food trucks in national food magazines and on cable television’s Food Network: see Tricia Childress, “Where are our Food Trucks?” Creative Loafing Charlotte, December 15, 2010, p. 36.

distributed flyers in their circular section in the weekend edition of their paper. We taped up posters in windows and on walls around the neighborhood.

d) Logistics

Another major part of planning the Festival involves providing infrastructure and arranging the layout of the event. Sponsors need tents and tables, musicians need sound equipment, dancers need a stage, attendees need port-a-johns, volunteers need t-shirts, the city government requires noise permits, emergency medical personnel must be hired, and the festival grounds have to be reserved. Some of these tasks are taken care of up to a year in advance, while others must wait until the absolute last minute. The festival grounds for the Festival Latinoamericano are part of a private park that is adjacent and owned by the management company of the South Park Mall, a chic, upscale mall in South Charlotte. As part of a long-standing partnership, the Mall has hosted the festival for the past several years.⁸³ After each festival, the date is set for the next year's festival during a check-in about how the event went.

In 2010, Tony and I began planning the logistics for the festival in early summer. We met with the sound company to discuss prices for equipment- the dance stage, speakers, generators, and lights- and labor costs. Tony had a history with this company, having used them in festivals past and in Carlotan Rock events, and was almost certain to use them again for the 2010 Festival. He likes the sound quality of the show they produce and has a friendly relationship with their employees. Nevertheless, he had to ask them for an estimate because he must solicit other offers to submit to the Latin American Coalition's board of directors for their consideration. It turned out that their price was less than other companies' estimates, so the sound company was booked.

⁸³ Originally, the festival was held at the Mint Museum, located in a upscale neighborhood in South Charlotte. However, local residents complained about the noise and numerous cars parked on neighborhood streets, and eventually the festival moved to the more commercial area around the South Park Mall.

We also began discussions with a catering company that would provide tents, tables, and chairs for the festival. Again, this is a company that Tony has used before, so he felt comfortable giving them the business. Walking around the festival grounds with their representative, we estimated what we would need for the festival. Some of the equipment remained constant from past years- a big tent for attendees to eat and sit in the shade, a VIP tent for sponsors and staff, a tent for the LAC staff to provide community outreach- while other things vary. We could not provide a final number of tents, tables, and chairs because we had not yet signed up all the sponsors; this number was left open until the last week before the festival to accommodate last minute sponsorships.

Part of the wooing process for some sponsors involved a visit to the festival grounds. We met company representatives at the Mall and walked them through the park, showing them where their tent could potentially be placed- if they signed up for a lower tier sponsorship, in the parking lot, a higher tier sponsorship, in the grass lawn near the music stage. We tried to help them visualize a packed festival and where to place their tent to get maximum interaction with the crowd.

Much of the festival preparation took shape from the LAC offices. Tony and I made phone calls and faxed documents to arrange permits, hire EMTs, reserve port-a-johns, trash receptacles, and grease traps. The LAC volunteer coordinator solicited volunteers through Facebook, the LAC website, and by e-mailing former volunteers from festivals past. We came up with job assignments for volunteers and staff members for the festival, splitting the day into several shifts to alleviate the need for anyone but essential personnel to work the full day. Vendors and sponsors stopped by the office to pay fees or confirm where their tent will be placed. We worried over expenditures and revenue, wondering if the numbers will add up to

actually raise money for the non-profit organizers. We squinted over a computer program that maps out the festival grounds and constantly reconfigured tent positions to fit new sponsors in and get the best layout for the festival.

Finally, the week of the festival arrived. Almost every hour was spent at the festival grounds, or shuttling between the Mall and the office to take care of last minute paperwork. Tony and I measured out tent footprints and pedestrian walkways to make sure everything fit in the relatively small festival grounds. We used landscaper's paint to mark and number spots for sponsors and vendors. Small emergencies arose: a new sponsor needed to be shoehorned in; the Latin American Women's Association wanted to rearrange the layout of the local visual artists' tents. We resolved these issues and kept moving. On Friday, the major preparations had begun. The catering company started erecting tents. We put up storm fencing around the edges of the grounds to keep people from getting in with out paying. I borrowed a pick-up truck and transported large plastic signs with the line-up of the festival printed on both sides. We fixed the sign with plastic zip-ties by the festival entrance. Trash and recycling bins arrived, as did the port-a-johns. By Saturday, the place looked more like a festival. The sound company brought their equipment by; a security guard was posted through the night to watch over things. Golf carts have arrived, along with soda and beer trucks. Tony checked into an adjacent hotel; he stays the night before because he gets so busy he usually does not have time to go home, plus if anything goes wrong, he is within shouting distance. The tents are up, with tables and chairs underneath.



Figure 26: Tony preparing for the 2010 Fanta Festival

The day before the festival has periods of work, for example when the beer truck arrives and we have to count inventory and erect several beer tents, but also periods of waiting- for the next delivery to arrive, for the next sponsor to stop by. Tony's wife and son stop by for a moment. LAC staff and their spouses volunteer a few hours of help, or check in on their way to a movie or dinner. My wife and family are in town to see the festival, so I leave Tony and several volunteers to take care of last minute details. And the festival preparations are complete.

Corporate *Latinidad*

In a recent book (2010), anthropologist Hannah Gill analyzes Raleigh, NC's annual *Fiesta del Pueblo*, focusing on the importance of the festival as a community building exercise, as a celebration of Latin American cultures, and as a place to dance and listen to music. Similar to the Festival Latinoamericano, the *Fiesta del Pueblo* is organized by a local non-profit that provides services and advocates on behalf of the Latino community. Gill highlights the diversity of people present at this festival by providing four personal biographies of migration from individuals attending the festival. These biographies show the differences in background and life

trajectory between men and women, indigenous and *mestizo*, legal and undocumented, Dominican and Mexican migrants to North Carolina, but also some of the common threads tying this diverse group together, particularly family reunification as a pull factor and a tenuous economic situation in North Carolina.

These personal stories, like many of the stories of my interlocutors in Charlotte, demonstrate the diversity of *latinidad* in immigrant communities in North Carolina. Being “Latino” has multiple and contradictory meanings, including for some the rejection of the term as a salient category.⁸⁴ While immigrants’ narratives are often gripping, with tales of dangerous border crossings, class mobility, and culture shock, my purpose in this section is to juxtapose these individual formations of immigrant identity with the manner in which *latinidad* is constructed in the festival. Whereas Gill takes for granted that the surface expressions of Latino-ness at the festival— the music, dance, food, sponsor tents- are extensions of the immigrant story and one way immigrants stake a claim to public life in North Carolina, I argue that the picture is much more complicated. Latino cultural festivals (in the US South in 2010) raise important questions about *latinidad*. (How) is the *Festival* making Latino culture in North Carolina? Who gets to decide what cultural forms will be represented in the festival and how is Latino culture being codified? Of course, Latino culture is a nebulous term subject to much debate and interpretation (Delgado & Stefancic 1998, Stavans 1995, Dávila 2001, Oboler 2006). Moreover, as Arlene Dávila argues in *Latinos, Inc.*, diverse Latino identities are subject to unrelenting pressure by corporations and other interests, including non-profits, to consolidate into a more homogenous, easily marketable identity (see also Comaroff & Comaroff 2009). At the same time, various actors in the festival, whether it be corporate sponsors, non-profit organizers, or

⁸⁴ While I have deployed “Latino” as a descriptive term of convenience (see chapter 1), it is important to highlight the ways “Latino” materializes in practice, in this case through conversations, marketing, and promotion of the Festival Latinoamericano.

musicians, have a stake in the festival appearing “authentic”- being a legitimate representation of *latinidad*- which often entails acknowledging Latino diversity or breaking up Latino culture into its constituent parts- of national and regional identity, spicy and non-spicy food, or African and indigenous rhythms.

One way the festival constructs Latino culture is through the consumption patterns of festival-goers. While corporate sponsors and organizers often stress a pan-Latino vision, festival-goers instead mainly stress their identities: as members of particular nationalities, fans of a musical genre, or proponents of a class-based aestheticism. They don Puerto Rican flag bandanas, dance Mexican *quebradita*, eat Argentine *churrasco*, or browse for homemade “Latin American” crafts. For consumers, the festival creates an imagined space apart, where the work of gathering the raw elements of expressive culture- food, music, dance, crafts, art, and games- is prefabricated into one event. The assault on the senses of masses of people, cooking food, blaring music, scorching sun and colorful advertisements draws festival-goers into an alternate state of being that separates this space from the outside world. This carnivalesque atmosphere (Bakhtin 1984, Limón 1994) invites festival-goers to participate, to buy more, to embody *latinidad* through their purchases and interest in products that are being marketed as “Latino.” Yet, many festival-goers are acutely aware of this state, and they act in ways that they see as counteracting this rush to consumerism-by sneaking into the festival over a fence, by gathering as many free giveaways from corporate sponsors as possible, or by bargaining with food vendors for a discount in the closing minutes of the festival. These strategies went against what organizers and sponsors envisioned for the “proper” role of festival-goers as passive consumers and showed their agency as consumers.



Figure 27: Displaying *mexicanidad* at a festival

Festival organizers constructed Latino culture, as described above, through a process of complex considerations to select the artists, food vendors, dancers, and sponsors for a Latino festival. This construction was not automatic; in fact it developed over many years of festival organizing. 2010 marked the twentieth anniversary of the Festival Latinoamericano, and the festival's history presents a good example of the invention of tradition (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983) and the gradual commercialization of the festival. From a small, casual gathering of neighborhood activists and local artists, the festival has grown to a well-choreographed event with major music groups, numerous sponsors, and thousands of attendees. The transition from an ad hoc gathering to an event produced through months of planning took place gradually and corresponded to increasing numbers of immigrants from Latin America moving to the Charlotte area during the 1990s and 2000s. An important transition was the professionalization of the planning stages; Tony was hired, first as a consultant to plan the festival, and then as a full-time events manager. This hiring, in effect, took everyday planning operations away from the members of the Latin American Women's Association and into the hands of a male musician and concert promoter. During my time of observation, Tony occasionally sparred with LAWA

members who, as members of the executive festival committee, still had some say over how the festival was run. For example, during the planning for the 2010 Festival, LAWA members wanted to organize the *Plaza de Artistas* with a layout that involved a fountain and lights, but Tony argued that these additions would be costly and run over budget. In other years, they have debated musical acts and other layout issues. Planning for the festival has followed a pattern of building upon “what we did last year” (with the notable exception of changing musical acts), so that knowingly or unknowingly, certain facets get codified through yearly practice. Several musician acquaintances reiterated this impression; when I asked them if they were attending the festival, they wondered why they should bother, since it seems to them that the festival does not really change from year to year. During my time working on the festival, I was even charged with the task of assembling a book of names and contact information and writing instructions for future festival planners to codify what should be done to plan the festival.

I would now like to turn to one element of the planning stage of the Festival Latinoamericano- the relationship between the non-profit Latin American Coalition and the festival’s corporate sponsors. What role do corporate sponsors play in shaping the festival? As sponsors donating money to the non-profits and receiving prominent spots on the festival grounds, major corporations are highly visible at the festival. Much has been written about the emerging “Latino” market and the growth potential for businesses in this arena. For Spanish-language television and magazines, corporations run sophisticated advertisements that rival any promotions in English-language media. Yet, during conversations with potential sponsors, Tony, Jess and I often had to engage in a bit of handholding in terms of convincing sponsors as to the efficacy of their participation. Local representatives of national and multinational corporations seemed at times unsure about how to appeal to a “Latino” audience. In these cases, the LAC’s

strategy was to portray *latinidad* and Latino consumption patterns in ways that would appeal to our perceptions of what the company's goals were. For example, Latinos as homeowners could attract banks looking to loan money, or home improvement and electronics stores selling the accoutrements of a contemporary American home. Other company representatives needed no convincing. Some of the most successful (lucrative both for the company and the non-profit) partnerships centered on everyday consumption items, including a regional supermarket and beverage giant Coca-Cola. The soda company got prominent promotional space in exchange for donating sodas for the festival to sell as revenue. They also partnered with the Latin American Coalition to sponsor the Cinco de Mayo Fanta Festival, positioning a product name into the festival "brand." Another appeal made to corporate sponsors was to view the festival as a way to give back to the community, to show appreciation to Latino employees and consumers, and to win community goodwill. This strategy had only limited success, particularly in the difficult economic climate of 2010. Banks and other corporations who had been flush with money and philanthropic benevolence two years earlier now were slicing community giving to a minimum.

This relationship between corporate capital and non-profits around a cultural event raises interesting issues regarding the social relationships of capitalism. While corporations have embraced the productive element of low-cost immigrant labor in agribusiness, urban service employment (janitors, hotel maids, restaurants), and even high-tech labor, they appear to have not yet realized the full potential of the social consumption of Latino immigrants. Those most successful at tying into this market appear to be companies that have established consumer bases in Latin America, namely soda (and beer) companies and supermarkets carrying lines of ethnic and Latin foods. Thus, a Coca-Cola representative confided in me that Latinos are the fastest growing consumers of soda in the region. But another question- of social reproduction- remains

open ended. Are corporations willing to view Latino immigrant labor as a disposable resource that can be renewed through continuing cycles of immigration from Latin America, or will they decide to invest resources (both marketing and philanthropic) in stabilizing and acculturating Latino immigrants to US social norms and in the process creating a more clearly defined Latino market in the United States? Non-profit organizations, like the Latin American Coalition, can play a major part in the stabilization of social reproduction, providing social safety net programs, job training, English classes, and encouraging ethnic entrepreneurship. They provide a double layer of legitimacy; one, having established ongoing relationships with community members, non-profits can link corporations with grassroots while buffering the corporation from direct involvement in planning and implementing social programs and festivals and two, non-profits provide an alternate to government social welfare programs that have been attacked in a neoliberal political climate. Partnering with a non-profit can thus provide a corporation with an opportunity to shore up future consumers through positive branding and stabilizing community members' incomes.

Fanta Festival

However, the partnership between corporations and non-profits raises important questions for an organization, like the Latin American Coalition, that was founded as a grassroots community organization and retains the role of community advocate for Charlotte's Latinos. Does the festival reinforce deleterious relationships, say, between hack immigration lawyers and desperate migrants seeking papers, or soda companies and immigrant children struggling with obesity and diabetes? This issue was driven home to me in the planning stages for the 2010 Cinco de Mayo Fanta Festival. As Tony and I signed up sponsors for the event, an internal debate started within the Latin American Coalition senior staff concerning whether we

should allow immigration law firms to participate as sponsors. Adriana Taylor, the LAC'S Immigrants Rights Program Director, expressed her concern about several lawyers who had promised clients unrealistic results, in particular, that they could get them a green card or permanent residency in the United States, which they could not and did not deliver, taking clients' money in the process. These clients had then ended up at the Coalition, where Adriana was forced to tell them that they had little chance to getting legal status. She argued that accepting these firms sponsorship was tantamount to the non-profit endorsing the bad business practices of these firms. Others argued that sponsorship money was money nonetheless; how could we determine which law firms were suspect and which were not, and that many of these lawyers were prominent members of the Latino community and rejecting them could affect the organization's relationship with other Latino business leaders. Eventually, we agreed on a compromise; we would engage with firms and make them pay a special sponsorship rate to go toward a "legal services fund" that would help fund the LAC's legal services department.

At the 2011 Cinco de Mayo Fanta Festival, Adriana and I entered into another conversation about the social implications of corporate sponsorship as we sat and watched festival attendees walk past the Coalition tent. A large number of the families attending had one or several members who appeared visibly overweight or even obese. Across the grounds, the "Coca-Cola Fun Zone" featured booths with video games, basketball hoops, a soccer shooting competition, a NASCAR racecar, a mechanical bull, and other kid-friendly activities. While the beverage company was encouraging physical activity and participation in sports, it was also branding its name (and partnerships with soccer, basketball, and NASCAR) in the minds and practices of Latino children. Soda consumption is rampant throughout Latin America; thus it is no wonder that Latino immigrants continue to be regular consumers of soft drinks in the United

States. What Adriana and I noticed was a striking gender difference, between relatively trim, fit-looking men in their twenties and thirties, and their wives and children, who were noticeably more overweight. While some of this weight difference could be attributable to the physical aftereffects of childbirth, Adriana relayed her impression that women felt pressure to stay at home because of their legal status, while men worked in physically taxing jobs that kept them fit. Another contributing factor to this gender weight disparity might be participation in sports; on weekends when walking through neighborhood parks, I often noticed men playing soccer, while women looked after young children as they sat watching the matches. Recent studies show statewide obesity rates of around 26 percent and overweight and obese rates of 64 percent for Latino adults in North Carolina (Trust for America's Health 2011, NCSCHS 2010). According to a study by the North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics (2010), "Hispanics were more likely than whites not to get the recommended level of physical activity or not to engage in any leisure time activity. Hispanics were also less likely to consume the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables each day. A slightly higher percentage of Hispanic adults were overweight or obese, compared to white adults" (p.5).

The Latin American Coalition, and other non-profits engaged in similar campaigns to raise funds for operational and programmatic expenses, must walk a fine line to coax corporate donations while not abandoning its mission to serve the Latino community. While they dubbed this relationship a "partnership," that name hides many of the conflicting interests and uneven power relationships between corporations and non-profits. Corporate sponsorships for festivals do not take shape overnight; a lot of social capital is needed to bring them to fruition. Executive directors must network at parties and events; non-profit staff must present a package and, as stated above, convince corporate representatives of the efficacy of their participation. While for

a corporation pulling out of a sponsorship might just be part of cutting a budget or a department's reorganization, for a non-profit like the Coalition, a loss of just \$10,000 can mean the cutting of an entire service program or the elimination of a part-time staffer. As Tony constantly remarked to me during the festival planning process, he felt uncomfortable asking for sponsorships because it felt like begging for money. For someone who came from Venezuela and built a middle-class life in the United States, this was troubling for him, no matter how much I tried to console him by commenting on how the sponsorship was small change compared to how much the sponsors stood to profit from a loyal consumer base.

The relationship between the LAC and Latino businesses was conflicted as well. One staff member at the non-profit left after several years working there to work for the Latino media conglomerate that owned several local radio stations and newspapers, in addition to other media outlets in nearby cities. In summer 2010, Tony was hired by the same media company to organize several concerts, so outside of his job at the LAC he spent several weekends and nights working to make some extra money. But Tony expressed frustration at the shoestring budget and lack of attention to details (like a good sound system and promotional materials) from the company's employees. In spring 2011, he declined an offer for a similar event that they wanted him to plan.

Carnaval Carolina

Another event held in summer 2010, the Carnaval Carolina, operates on a more profit-driven model for organizing a Latino festival, which presented challenges for many musicians. Celebrating its thirteenth year, Carnaval Carolina took place at the Metrolina Expo, a large fairground with warehouses and an open blacktop-paved staging area. This festival claims to be the South's largest Latin festival, and features numerous *regional mexicano* groups, both local

and from Mexico and the US Southwest, playing on two stages, food and craft vendors, corporate sponsors, carnival rides, and a BMX bike stunt demonstration course. Alex Ruiz, the festival's organizer, is a local radio personality and singer of *regional mexicano* style music. He promotes several other events throughout the year, including concerts and a beauty pageant, *La Chica Carolina*. Newspapers often profile Ruiz as Charlotte's biggest Latino celebrity, and at these events he somehow manages to entice minor celebrities from Spanish-language television to make an appearance and take photos with him on stage.

However, negative preconceptions of Carnaval Carolina and Alex Ruiz had already been planted in my mind by conversations with several Charlotte musicians and music promoters. One musician relayed a story of a past Carnival Carolina where Ruiz had neglected to reserve port-a-johns- so that 50,000 attendees ended up going in the bushes. Other musicians questioned his musical talent, remarking that his relative (and limited) success as a singer was only due to the platform his radio show gave him to a wide audience (where he could self-promote his latest single). A concert promoter complained that Ruiz had hired him to organize a concert and as they discussed the specifics of the event, Ruiz asked him what sound company and what promotional contacts he was going to use. A few weeks later, after Ruiz would not return his calls, the promoter realized Ruiz had stolen his professional contacts and never really wanted to hire him to organize the concert. Other musicians warned me that Ruiz often promised blockbuster concerts with numerous, well-known bands playing back to back, but when the show started only one or two groups would show up.

Hoping these tales would be proven wrong, I entered Carnaval Carolina with some trepidation on a muggy June day. People milled about the spacious festival grounds, many searching for a bit of shade from the punishing sun and roasting pavement. Three stages were set

up: two main stages were right next to each other- the idea being that while one band was performing another could be setting up next door, while the third (smaller) stage was across the grounds and faced the other two. The two main stages had catwalks that ran out into the crowd, with stanchions and intimidating security personnel keeping open a gap between the crowd and stage. The multiple stages created a problem for the enterprising ethnographer (and other music lovers with short attention spans) trying to hear as many bands as possible. After a few hours, the main stage got so crowded that I had to squeeze my way through the crowd to get a good view of both the stage and audience around me, but then I would have to find my way back out again to reach the opposite stage- needless to say I missed a lot and dreamed of finding funding for a research assistant.

The smaller third stage presented local bands, including some that I knew, and provided a more intimate interaction between audience and band, so for several sets I concentrated my attention there. In the crowd by the sound board, I found Gonzalo- his bands, Banda TecnoCaliente and DS The Evolution, were both performing that day. He was excited to present *banda* and *música latina urbana* to the mostly Mexican crowd, and see how they interacted with his artists. But the third stage had a problem; facing the main stages with larger speakers, the music routinely got drowned out. I found this frustrating, and eventually abandoned ship to join the burgeoning crowd at the main stages.

A traditional *banda* was performing on the right hand stage, with acoustic instruments and several vocalists. When they finished, DJ's from a local radio station, who were emcees at the event, came on stage and started telling jokes. They sprayed a water hose into the crowd to help relieve the intense heat. People used other strategies to stay cool: umbrellas to block the sun,

fans, and munching on watermelon given away by a supermarket chain. Then it was time for the next group to perform, Raleigh, NC's Rey Norteño. I wrote in my blog about their set:

“The musicians were not pleased when, two songs into their set, the radio DJs rudely cut them off and started talking to the audience. I could tell from my spot next to the stage that the lead singer was pissed, and the band kept playing, until the organizer cut their mics. As someone told me after the event, the first song was spent trying to get the sound right, and just when musicians were getting into a groove in the second song, they were cut off.”

So after two songs, Rey Norteño left the stage. In their place, radio DJs switched gears:

“...the switch was not from band to band, but from band to a string of celebrity appearances and proclamations from government officials and sponsors. I was treated to a 30 minute performance by La Chilindrina. If you don't know who that is, she is an adult who dresses up like a child, with pigtails and nerd glasses, and talks in an annoying high-pitched voice on a daytime television show. Her "jokes" weren't funny, and after a few minutes the whole act seemed a little insulting to the audience's intelligence. Not very many people were laughing, even those who could hear the poor sound quality coming from her faulty wireless microphone. By the end, the audience, and especially the young men in the area near me, started calling for MUSIC!”

“But the organizer decided one celebrity should be topped by another. Carmen Salinas, a *telenovela* star and singer, came to the stage. Proclamations by city and state officials followed. They let so many media on stage that the cameras surrounded the diminutive actress, and the crowd couldn't see her to take pictures. So folks started throwing water bottles at the cameramen and shouting for them to get down. Finally Señora Salinas took the mic, told the cameramen to get out of the way and then turned around to tell the politicians they should take heed not to pass a law similar to Arizona's harsh immigration policy in North Carolina and moreover, that they should get rid of the 287(g) program. This lady had spunk!”
(Sam's Sounds, 6/29/2010)

At a festival purported to feature back-to-back music, over an hour of the evening was dedicated to celebrity appearances. While a few of the attendees seemed genuinely excited to see “La Chilindrina” on stage, many were quickly bored, in particular a peanut gallery of young men behind me. Carmen Salinas' appearance created an interesting dynamic in the crowd. Many were star-struck and rushed forward to take photographs of her. But blocked by the throng of onstage photographers, the crowd grew frustrated and expressed their discontent by throwing empty plastic bottles and directing obscenities at the media. Salinas finally noticed and defused the situation by getting the photographers to step back. She then spoke very forcefully to the

politicians, who had just made cheery but empty proclamations about the festival and her appearance, and the crowd cheered her willingness to challenge (the multicultural representatives of) state authority onstage.

From there, the musical sets went downhill. Alex Ruiz performed a set where he prefaced his first song by saying he was hoarse from announcing so many celebrities and would only sing a couple of numbers. He proceeded, with a raspy voice, to sing a full set. He was accompanied on stage with his band and three bikini-clad dancers who gyrated and pranced around the catwalk. During another band's performance, high winds ripped the ropes holding a sponsor's advertising banner and it fell behind the stage.

In the days following Carnaval Carolina, I caught up with several musicians who had performed at the festival. As with every concert, there were little backstage dramas that, in this case, I was not privy to witness. Several musicians complained that the festival had not provided backstage refreshments for the performers; they had to go out into the festival and purchase water after their set in 95 degree heat. Gonzalo volunteered to drive back home and pick up a set of conga drums after the headlining band showed up expecting congas to be provided and they were not. Other musicians complained about the meager pay; Ruiz gave them no pay or only offered a small honorarium in exchange for promising a large crowd that did not materialize at the third stage. Some artists were given VIP passes; yet the VIP area turned out to be a warehouse behind the stage with no air conditioning and no privacy to change into street clothes.

Musicians' Training and Ethics

As we have seen, musicians occupy a tenuous position, as leaders of their musical communities, but also as contingent labor. The festival brings this contradiction to the surface, the status of musicians is put on display and they are expected to "bring in" a certain amount of

their musical community as festival-goers and to translate their repertoire to a festival audience in order to make a successful event. But backstage (and sometimes onstage), they receive variable treatment, sometimes being feted as VIPs, other times suffering disregard and disrespect. Festival organizers construct a festival with many moving parts, including the musicians' labor costs which they try to reduce to a minimum, either because of the constraints of non-profit funding streams or to maximize profit. Festivals allow musicians to build social capital: through their exposure to larger audiences, through connections they make with visiting musicians, and through the interactions with fellow local musicians backstage. In essence, the festival becomes a major point of training and socialization where musicians develop their professional personae and negotiate relationships with each other.

Juxtaposing the Festival Latinoamericano, Carnaval Carolina, and other festivals and concerts highlights a central concern for many working musicians- their treatment on the job site. Talking with musicians, the conversation often turned to what constitutes the proper conditions and respect for their artistry during a performance, backstage, and in the lead up to a show. I also observed instances of what I thought constituted fair or unfair treatment of musicians by concert organizers and would ask musicians what they thought about certain situations. These conversations were an important method that musicians used to compile an unwritten list of standards and notions of respect that, rather than being passed down from elite mores, was constructed from the intellectual work that musicians undertake as part of their musical communities. Musicians' assessments of stage situations resulted from the culture of their musical community and their dialogic relationship with their audience members. Just as many musicians' experiences interacting with working-class immigrants during performances, in their neighborhoods, or at their day jobs tempered their performances, these experiences also

influenced the positions musicians took in relation to festival organizers, who they viewed as belonging to a different class, or at least traveling in elite circles.

Musicians appreciated honesty, and were quick to acknowledge that concert promoters often work on shoestring budgets and that they, as performers, are not big name acts attracting a large audience. But musicians were also damning in their criticism of concert organizers who just could seem to “get it right,” whether in terms of the quality of sound equipment or providing a few snacks back stage before the show. After a bad experience, some musicians vowed never to work with a certain promoter again; others did not have that luxury and continued to take any gig they could get, even if they were quick to protest onstage, like Rey Norteño, if they felt they were being cheated. Promoters gained reputations, like Alex Ruiz for being shady, or Tony Arreaza for being upstanding, through their actions and as musicians shared stories backstage.

While some of the differences between the Festival Latinoamericano and Carnaval Carolina can be attributed to the different organizing priorities of a non-profit versus for-profit festival, another festival, Carlotan Rock, provides a counterexample of a for-profit event that musicians cite as being run ethically. Carlotan Rock was an annual one-day music festival that featured local *rock en español* groups and bands from nearby cities that ran from 2003-2008. According to musicians, Tony and the other organizers of Carlotan Rock (Juan Miguel & Herman Marin) fostered a sense of community and investment in the future of newly-formed groups like Bakalao Stars and Dorian Gris, while celebrating more established groups like La Rúa. Carlotan Rock, both the festival and the concerts they promoted with international acts, also gave local groups a chance to develop professionally: by performing on a big stage with proper sound equipment, through backstage networking with famous rock groups from Latin America, and by providing a model of how to put together a well-produced show.

Do musicians' stances constitute a body of ideas that compiled together act as a moral compass or form a basis for training in professional behavior? I think the evidence makes a strong case for musicians constructing and expressing a local culture that accompanies the music-making process. Latina/o musicians share a common structural position, as contingent labor that is replaceable yet tied to their strong social bonds with their fans (see chapter 3). They have limited formal power in negotiating their working conditions, besides using their ability to bring out a group of fans. Musicians agree to perform with a handshake deal, or by contracting out one performance at a time. These informal labor agreements make musicians very suspicious of and vulnerable to shifting conditions- say a promoter backing out of a show, not providing equipment, or skimping on food- which might signal a reduction in their monetary or other compensation for performing. However, Charlotte's Latino musicians do not have a musicians' union where they could complain about working conditions or seek recourse for lost pay; North Carolina is a right-to-work state where unionization is weak and there are very few full time musicians in the community.

Instead, musicians coalesce into informal networks of friends and collaborators who share information about working conditions and potential gigs. These networks serve as the forum where musicians debate personal behavior and the relative success or failure of concerts and festivals. For example, after almost every major Latin music concert in Charlotte, musicians and other prominent cultural brokers would stop by Tony's office at the Latin American Coalition (or call on the phone) to discuss the audience turnout, the level of excitement and musical competence of the performance, and, if conditions were imperfect, to complain about their treatment. These sessions act as a sort of training where musicians develop professional standards. Stories about promoters and venues would take on a life of their own, sometimes

accurate, sometimes reflecting the biases of the narrator, as they were retold from person to person. Whether gripe session or comedy hour, these conversations helped build solidarity among musicians. Often, musicians were friendly with other musicians in their musical community, for example, Intown musicians who practiced in the same space, but surprisingly these bonds extended between musical communities. Feelings of mutual respect sprung from realizations of musicians' similar positions and problems. Much of this solidarity occurred behind the scenes, even as bands strove to assert the uniqueness of their sound and differentiate themselves from other, competing groups- for example, TecnoCaliente's professionalism or Bakalao Stars' jamming sound and energy.

Where does musicians' sense of ethics come from? In interviews and conversations, many musicians pointed to early training in Latin America as being a major factor in their professionalization and sense of fair treatment. Although one should not neglect the diversity of situations across Latin America, performing popular music in Latin America was/is a profession often relegated to ethnic or racial minorities or working-class groups, who, excluded from other educational and professional opportunities, found stable employment and a modicum of status above that of mere peasant or domestic service labor. For example, the predominance of Afro-Cuban musicians in popular ensembles of the 1940s and 1950s confronted the racial segregation in the island's high society enclaves (Sublette 2004, de la Fuente 2001). While in the United States, a DIY (do it yourself), cult of youth ethos prevails in popular music, in many places in Latin America young musicians still practice a period of apprenticeship under the tutelage of older, more experienced musicians, whether in formal schools, like the *mariachi* institute in Mexico D.F. (Casa de la Música Mexicana), or by joining a *banda*, *orquesta*, or *conjunto* as a junior member. For example, saxophone player Oscar recalled the intense training he received

attending a music school in Monterrey as a teenager, including learning various regional Mexican styles. Although now he plays a more Jazz-infused style, this training prepared him to play with numerous bands playing different styles of music. Latino immigrants bring the apprenticeship idea with them to Charlotte. Helder, trained at a conservatory in Mexico City, ended up starting a salsa band in Charlotte, Orquesta Mayor, which he continues to manage. In an interview in Spanish with Helder, he recalled the genesis of the group:

SB: “Tell me a little about how you met the members of your band?”

Helder: “Ok, when I arrived in Charlotte, North Carolina, I realized that there wasn’t an *orquesta de salsa*,⁸⁵ on top of that a musical *orquesta* that could play here, so because I’m a professional musician, having studied at the Escuela Libre de Música de Mexico (Mexican Free School of Music), then I started to look for musicians and organized them and what came out of it was an *orquesta*, what it is now, the end result, no? So Orquesta Mayor started working...”

SB: “There wasn’t another *orquesta* here, at that time?”

H: “If there was, then it did not have the same, the same- I don’t know- ‘musicalization.’⁸⁶ There were no more than five, six musicians, or at most seven (in a group). We are twelve, eleven- it’s a real *orquesta*!”

SB: “A big *orquesta*, with all the instruments you need to be a complete *orquesta*. And when did the group start playing together?”

H: “We started in 2006, it was in April, the 28th.”

SB: “You remember the exact date!”

H: “Yes, I have it all up here!” [points to his head].
(Interview with author, 6/25/2010) [translation by author]

Helder is a highly trained musician who saw an opportunity in the lack of a full salsa *orquesta* in Charlotte to start his own group that reflects his high standards of musicality. He is a

⁸⁵ An *orquesta* is a specific musical term in Spanish that means a full band with proper instrumentation for the musical genre- salsa or Tejano- being played. I have avoided translating the term as *orchestra* because of the terms association with classical music. An *orquesta de salsa* features 2-3 vocalists, and may include trumpets, trombones, timbales, congas, bongos, clave, piano, bass, and other instruments.

⁸⁶ Helder used the Spanish term “musicalización.”

serious musician who demands professionalism of the bands' members, including the use of sheet music and proper instrumentation for their covers of classic salsa songs. His dedication is even evident in his recollection of when the group started; he can recall the exact date of Orquesta Mayor's first rehearsal.



Figure 28: Orquesta Mayor backstage before a concert

Another aspect of the professionalization of musicians in Latin America involves the experience they receive as performers in music venues there, often at a young age. Social class tempers this early experience. Carlos and his friends jammed on expensive equipment in his middle-class Ecuadorian family's home and went on escapades to hear punk rockers in Guayaquil clubs. On the other hand, Brazilian musician Reinaldo started playing his guitar in bars in his hometown as a teenager. During an interview conducted in English, Reinaldo described his formative years:

SB: "When did you start learning music, and learning how to play guitar, to sing?"

Reinaldo: "Thirteen, when I started guitar, I was thirteen."

SB: “And did you take lessons, go to school?”

R: “No I didn’t.”

SB: “Or just learn by yourself?”

R: “Yeah...actually it was very fun[ny], because I quit, even the school, ‘cause I couldn’t learn anymore in the school.”

SB: “So you dropped out?”

R: “Yeah. I just wanted 100 percent [to play] the music.”

SB: “Wow!”

R: “It’s like...you don’t understand, I passed 24 hours playing the guitar, until...(laughs).”

SB: “And would you just play at home, or...would you go out? When did you start playing with other musicians, in a band?”

R: “Actually it was at this bar. I played...worked in there and they had this open mike, but the musicians [playing] in there had breaks, and in the breaks sometimes they would put somebody to play, so that was the opportunity.”

SB: During the breaks?

R: “Yeah, during the breaks, I played for my first time, and then, this bar hired me for just playing the breaks, because the breaks were huge, because the guys- it’s insane, you have to play like four hours, five hours, so then the guys played for two hours, and then he got a break for forty minutes, so that’s a terrible business for the bar.”

SB: “Yeah they want to keep the music going...”

R: “So what they do, they hire me, they fired me in my position I was in, and hire me for covering just the breaks. That was awesome too, because I was making more money then.”

SB: “And your parents were okay with you going to...bars?”

R: “They don’t care, they were like, ‘go ahead and do what you want.’ That was cool. And then when I was seventeen, around seventeen, I was already playing in bars professionally.”

SB: “So you kept doing that. How old are you now?”

R: Thirty-three, I'll be thirty-three."

SB: "So for like 10-15 years you were playing in bars? In your hometown, or did you move to...?"

R: "In my hometown I performed for about 7 years, so and then 8 years in another, Uberlândia, it's a country city. It's like the same size as Charlotte, it's a country city."

SB: "A medium sized city?"

R: "Yeah, medium-sized, but actually I was not just performing there, but around in other states, because that city is very close to Sao Paulo, everybody goes to [Sao Paulo]."
(Interview with author, 6/16/2010)

Reinaldo's class background, as a son of working-class family in a city in central Brazil, influenced how he became involved in playing music. When Reinaldo made the decision to start seriously playing guitar at thirteen, he dropped out of school and dedicated himself full time to the musical profession. His parents supported his decision; already working in a bar as a busboy, he could now make more money filling in during the regular musicians' set breaks. The money he made went towards making him self sufficient and supporting his family. My amazement that he dropped out of school at a young age points to the negative perceptions Americans have about dropouts and the association with diminished life chances; however, Reinaldo saw his choice as an opportunity for which he worked extremely hard ("100 percent, 24 hours a day") to perfect his craft. He continued playing in bars and small clubs for 15 years, moving up the music world from his hometown to a regional city Uberlândia to touring around São Paulo. Eventually, he met an American woman visiting Brazil, they fell in love and got married, and Reinaldo decided to move with her to Charlotte. After 15 straight years of performing almost nightly, Reinaldo took a four month hiatus before starting to perform Brazilian music in Charlotte.

Reinaldo's musical training and expertise is astounding. During interviews and conversations, we spent hours discussing Brazilian music, but also jazz, blues, rock and other

genres. Other Latin musicians in Charlotte often comment on his skill as a guitarist. I witnessed his prowess during performances with his band, SoulBrazil, which involved covers of Brazilian classics, but with extended jazz-like improvisation, and on several occasions when other Latin groups, such as Ultimanota, would invite Reinaldo to join them onstage for a song. This skillfulness can be attributed to the 15-year stretch he spent performing in Brazil, but also the dedication with which he trained for his profession.

Reinaldo's professionalism and its relation to his ethical outlook come through in another segment of the same interview. As we discussed his experience playing at a recent festival in Virginia Beach, VA, he relayed a story about one of the musicians in his band, SoulBrazil, who had double-booked gigs for that weekend. Whereas the musician wanted to cancel the beach festival because he had another job paying more that day, Reinaldo as band leader put his foot down and refused to cancel their performance. Reinaldo explained his decision:

Reinaldo: "We treat the situation like this, even if I make a thousand in another place, if I have already booked it, if I can change that's fine, I'll call him and say, 'Man, can I change for one day before?' If it's not, then fine, I don't care I will [play]."

SB: "Yeah, you don't want to burn bridges, because that festival is every year, so if you don't play this year, you might not get it next year or the year after, if they want to bring you back."

R: "Yeah, definitely. No, we don't work like this."
(Interview with author, 6/16/2010)

Reinaldo's statement, "we don't work like this," is a clear expression of his values as a professional musician; he is reliable and always completes booked performances, even if a more lucrative gig comes up later. At stake is his reputation as a musician. His band ended up playing the Virginia Beach festival on a Saturday afternoon, even though they had to turn around and head back to Charlotte for a performance later that night.

However, some musicians received much of their socialization as musicians after they arrived in Charlotte. They moved to Charlotte as teenagers along with their families, growing up playing Latin music in an American setting. These musicians' experience reveals a constant tension between embracing American norms and retaining the professional characteristics of Latin American musicians, many of whom are their peers. For example, Bakalao Stars are 1.5 generation musicians who lack much of the apprenticeship professionalization of Latin American musicians, but they compensate by stressing the familial aspect of their band and the seriousness of attendance at their Thursday jam/practice sessions. Other young musicians have been taken under the wing of more experienced performers who train them in ethical, upstanding behavior. For instance, Gonzalo, who sees the two young men of DS The Evolution as not just musicians to promote but also his wards, stresses their moral character, especially as they embarked on a spring 2011 tour. While they may shake their hips and sing suggestive lyrics to women in the crowd, Gonzalo is quick to check any behavior he sees as unprofessional (drug, alcohol use) and to stress the difference between their style of *música latina urbana* and the negative reputation he associates with *reggaetón*.

Conclusion

How does a band performing at a festival result in the development of folk ideas and practices around ethics? The main reason is that festivals, even more than concerts in clubs or bars, brings to a head the conflicting class loyalties of members of the "Latino" community and the festival itself becomes a stage where diverse notions of *latinidad* are negotiated and debated. Local musicians, even if they hail from different musical communities, experience similar treatment by organizers at a festival. As they recollect after performances, they rely on shared experiences to begin a process of reckoning- how things went, who slighted whom, what could

have been done better. During this process, they bring a strong identification with their fans' class and ethnic positionality as marginalized groups in Charlotte and many see parallels to the ways they are treated as working musicians. For the musicians, festivals become not just an opportunity to perform in front of their musical community, but also to share their music with members of other musical communities and network with fellow musicians.

At the festival, organizers and musicians play by different sets of rules. The dominance of corporate *latinidad* channels certain preconceived and “acceptable” notions of being Latino to the forefront, often at the expense of other, less marketable folk traditions or even cutting-edge creative endeavors. Organizers must perform roles that adhere to the constraints of corporate *latinidad*: limited budgets, cult of celebrity, product placements, and limited political activism (see chapter 5). They must follow these rules even if, like Tony, they show some concern for the low pay of local musicians. Festival-goers at times play along as dutiful consumers, but also find ways to resist the assault of consumerism. Musicians have their own set of standards, which, under the yoke of corporate *latinidad*, often leads to conflicts and dissatisfaction. At times, musicians engage in small acts of resistance. Some vote with their feet, by refusing to work with unscrupulous organizers. Others, like Rey Norteño express their discontent while on stage. Still others engage in backstage antics. For example, at one festival, to make up for their low pay, members of a local rock band stashed numerous cans of beer in their backpacks from the coolers that had been provided as refreshments for the headliners.

During conversations with musicians, the richness and depth of their intellectual engagement with the meaning of festivals was most apparent when talking about music. Many spoke of juggling the novelty of playing music for a new audience with the familiarity of performing for their musical community, both in attendance at a festival. Musicians take

seriously the challenge of presenting their talent and ideas on a larger stage. Brazilian musician Reinaldo explained how he makes an effort to replace songs in his repertoire annually. That way, if he plays a festival two years in a row, the audience does not hear the same set as the year before. While he keeps a few Brazilian standards, like “Garota de Ipanema” and “Mas Que Nada,” he always comes up with a variety of new songs to cover. Dominican promoter Gonzalo stresses to his artists to give an energetic show and to not venture too far away from road-tested crowd pleasers. For example, DS The Evolution performs- “*lo que la calle quiere*” (what the street wants)- by staying true to their urban, Afro-Caribbean roots.

Latino residents in Charlotte attending festivals also negotiate the meaning of *latinidad*. Festival-going is a cultural practice that originates in Latin America, in village celebrations, rodeos, or outdoor music concerts, but certain behaviors are learned (or reinforced) by immigrants as they acculturate to American and Latino life in the United States. Radio listeners are encouraged to attend festivals by radio DJs hyping the event and giving on-air updates from a mobile transmission vehicle (usually a brightly painted Hummer SUV) at the event. Members of a certain community, whether by national origin or musical affiliation to a band performing there, may attend, especially if they have gone in years past. Friends and family attend together, particularly if a child is performing in a *ballet folklórico* on stage. And passers-by can wander in upon hearing the music or noticing the crowd. In some ways, these events reconstruct communal ties that mimic small-town or neighborhood Latin America, whether it’s elderly men playing dominoes, women gossiping, or adolescents flirting in a town square. There are community leaders who play a prominent role in organizing the event and who are recognized and saluted by the emcees onstage. Most often, speeches, announcements, and conversations, are conducted in Spanish- though a range of dialects from across Latin America interspersed borrowed words

from English. At festivals, attendees are encouraged to consume: corporate sponsors give away free samples of their products; food and craft vendors form a phalanx of enticing stalls that festival-goers pass through on their way to listen to music; banners, inflatable signs, and company representatives advertise brands to the audience. Festival-goers dress in outfits that openly mark their identity as belonging to a nation, state, ethnicity, or class. For example, many Puerto Ricans dressed with bandanas or t-shirts with the Puerto Rican flag prominently displayed. Mexican immigrant men dressed in cowboy boots, button down shirts, and wide-brimmed hats that sometimes had the name of the province they hailed from sewn on the hat band. These differences showed the diversity of the audience, but also connections as Latinos from different backgrounds danced to the same music or engaged in similar consumption practices. The festival represents both a holdover of practices from Latin America but also proof of an ongoing process of acculturation to American culture.

Chapter 8: Local Power Brokers and Global Connections

“*Mi Primer Millón*”

At the 2009 Festival Latinoamericano, Colombian singer Jorge Villamizar was one of the featured performers. He sang an acoustic set, including several songs from his former group Bacilos. One song, “*Mi Primer Millón*” (2002) roused the crowd who sang along to the performance. The chorus of the song outlines the aspirations of a struggling musician:

*Yo solo quiero pegar en la radio,
para ganar mi primer millón,
para comprarte una casa grande,
en donde quepa tu corazón.*

I only want a hit on the radio
to earn my first million
to buy you a house big enough
to fit your heart.

*Yo solo quiero que la gente cante,
por todos lados esta canción,
desde San Juan hasta Barranquilla
desde Sevilla hasta Nueva York.*

I only want people everywhere
to sing this song
from San Juan to Barranquilla
from Seville to New York.

Looking back at Villamizar’s performance, which was one of the first I observed in Charlotte, the song resonates as a symbol of how musicians conceive and aspire to insert themselves in global networks of musical production and socialization while attempting to retain ties to local audiences and community. “*Mi Primer Millón*” is a metaphor that works on several levels: it demonstrates the musical aspirations of its singer; it connects the singer to his audience (the people singing the song) who share his class aspirations; and it ties together the various locales of *latinidad* that are mentioned in its chorus (other choros mention Panama, Guayaquil, Santo Domingo, and Tijuana). However, there is also a bittersweet and humorous irony to the song and its lyrics, which accompany a cheerful and upbeat melody with rhythmic elements of *cumbia* and *salsa*, because the song elides the hardship and struggle, the dashed hopes and deferred dreams that both musicians and immigrant laborers face as they pursue life in the

United States. According to the song's lyrics, being released from debt and penny-pinching occurs through a miraculous release where the band says "*dejémoslo todo y vámanos para Miami* (let's leave everything and go to Miami)." A rise to fame occurs as the band arrives in Miami and promptly calls Emilio Estefan, a famous Cuban-American record producer and husband of Gloria Estefan. As the lyrics tell, "*yo tengo un amigo, amigo de un amigo, con línea directa al cielo de tantas estrellas* (I've got a friend, a friend of a friend, with a direct line to the heavens with many stars)." This poetic description of social networking shows how important it is to know somebody in the music business, as a way to get a foot in the door, a recording contract, and promotion of the band. The irony is that Bacilos' and Villamizar's career trajectory, despite having a hit with this song, did not follow the path projected in "*Mi Primer Millón*;" instead the song reads as commentary on the hypocrisy and structural constraints of the music industry.

This chapter analyzes the connections between local musical expressions and global and transnational networks of music. Some Charlotte musicians tour and travel in order to "jump scales" and present their music to a wider audience. While the Latin music industry neglects Charlotte in its estimation of what constitutes marketable Latin music, Charlotte musicians are proceeding with strategies to distribute their music through websites and touring and to insert themselves in global networks of music-making. The question of access is political, and I argue that local musicians draw on the agency they form through making music in Charlotte's Latin music scene to challenge the chauvinism and disregard of the larger Latin music industry towards their music; the result is projects, like audio recordings and a documentary, that bypass traditional channels and rely on personal relationships with famous musicians who have visited Charlotte and admired local musical communities there.

Jumping Scales

Local power brokers often play an important role in connecting musicians to opportunities where they can perform outside of Charlotte, build social ties with famous, internationally-touring musicians, and transform their image through a process of professionalization (of image, sound, and recordings). As Villamizar sings in “Mi Primer Millón,” aspiring musicians attempt to “jump scales” (Smith 1992) between their local musical community in Charlotte and other local and transnational musical communities elsewhere, including centers of Latin musical production, namely New York, Miami, and Los Angeles.

What makes a hit song? This has become a more complicated question in the age of Youtube singing sensations, pop idol television shows, internet radio, and dying record and book stores. The hegemonic influence of long-standing production centers (Stokes 2004) should not be underestimated, as influential tastemakers and corporate structures often determine which artists gain prominence while precluding others from similar opportunities. However, as has been documented (Knopper 2009, Kot 2009), the advent of MP3 downloads on the internet, social networking websites where bands can link directly with fans worldwide, and the rise (or reprise) of small, independent record labels have severely eroded the power of major record labels as tastemakers in the music industry. Instead of the broadly popular artists of decades past (think Elvis, the Beatles, Michael Jackson, and Madonna), popular music has splintered into microgenres and record labels have a harder time generating hit songs than they did in the eras of Motown, disco, stadium rock, or boy bands. Yet, as I will show, the lure of these musical centers and the concurrent denigration of peripheral places like Charlotte continues. Charlotte’s musicians, thus, face many challenges as they attempt to navigate the muddy and tumultuous waters of fame. Many are prone to count “success” as something that only corresponds to mass

record sales, something that is increasingly unlikely in a changing global music market. Instead, bands are increasingly turning to live performances and royalties from music placement in commercials, television shows, and movies as primary sources of income to replace record sales. Narratives of travel, of “leaving everything and going to Miami” or New York, still create a mystique of touring for some musicians, while others reject this idea⁽¹⁾ for alternative visions of building “success.” Yet, in some ways, Charlotte’s Latino musicians are better positioned to connect with well-known musicians from Latin America than their counterparts elsewhere; as famous touring groups journey through Charlotte, local bands open for them and forge relationships through backstage conversations and lending musical instruments for performances. These bonds result in collaborations in the recording studio, access to music industry connections, and even life-long friendships. In the following sections, I will document how musicians attempt to “jump scales” through their music-making, briefly outline the structural constraints of the Latin music industry, analyze how musicians narrate the touring experience, how they conceive ideas of “success,” and forge connections with more famous artists.

Many, though not all, Latino musicians in Charlotte aspire to bring their music to a wider audience. This can mean several things, from crossing over to a non-Latino audience to touring in Latin music clubs around the US South, from getting a single played on Spanish-language radio or television to getting a recording contract and invitations to music festivals in Latin America and New York. But the strategies that musicians pursue to achieve, or attempt to achieve, these goals all entail one thing, an understanding of how scales- global, local, regional, international, transnational- mediate musical expression and musicians’ lives. While musicians might not use the technical terms of geographers, they are well aware of the structural constraints and connective opportunities that processes of globalization entail. Musicians follow closely the

realignments and restructuring of the global music industry, developments that encapsulate broader struggles between multinational corporations and the rights of ordinary citizens, over the commons and intellectual property (Demers & Coombe 2006), and cultural chauvinism by elites towards the poor, unauthorized migrants, and the global South in general. But as I will document below, some musicians are quite resourceful and savvy in marketing their music as desirable cultural expressions that fit well with current conceptions of what global Latino culture is. Some musicians are able to find audiences outside of Charlotte, or to involve themselves in other aspects of Latino cultural production (film, photography, concert promotion) through connections of cultural capital in the centers of global *latinidad*.

When I asked Gonzalo, Banda TecnoCaliente's manager and promoter, about the challenges of touring with a band, he pointed to one key factor that holds bands back from leaving their local community. Many groups, he stated, have "*un miedo de inversión*" (fear of investment/exchange), a reasonable hesitancy that comes from knowing the financial risks and making a rational decision not to travel. According to Gonzalo, bands must overcome this fear and have "faith" in their future in order to tour. Touring and other practices that help musicians jump scales (marketing, social networking, recording) require an investment of money, time, and emotional effort with little guarantee of success. In TecnoCaliente's case, this investment includes a tour bus, matching uniforms for band members, instruments and equipment, studio time to record songs, and the time that each member must dedicate to rehearsal, travel, and performances. It is this personal investment of time that is perhaps the most costly; TecnoCaliente's members have dedicated themselves fully to seeking broader success, foregoing income and free time they could have had if they chose to stay a part-time band. Other groups speak of the importance of timing. For example, rock band La Rúa's run at fame happened when

all the group's members were "young" (in their twenties), unmarried, and without careers or children; they lacked fear about the financial losses they might incur through touring. The turning point in the group's trajectory came when members realized that taking that next step meant a further investment of time and money at a time when their life circumstances were changing through marriage, childbirth, and the need for job stability.

Other groups, as I have outlined earlier (Chapter 4), do not hold ambitions of fame; for them a move to jump scales entails separation from the musical community that supports and inspires their musical expression. These groups (Bakalao Stars and Dorian Gris) engage in practices where investment is made in the musical community, rather than in outward attempts to jump scales. For example, Bakalao Stars uses a large lineup of musicians to achieve its "jam-band" sound at concerts, which is costly because they have to spend a lot of time rehearsing and pay all the musicians. At times, they held concerts frequently, within weeks of a previous show. These practices provide fodder for those who criticize Bakalao Stars as lacking ambition and not marketing their music correctly, but they would and have argued that their local audience and the communal experience at live shows and rehearsals is more important than "making it big." For these musicians, the monetary profits they lose by staying home are offset by the local cultural capital they build within the musical community. However, this does not mean that these groups are not linked to global musical trends or do not try to connect to internationally-known Latin musicians. As opening acts for touring Latin American bands, Bakalao Stars and Dorian Gris both have tried to connect their local musical community and its practices and ideas with the music of more-famous bands.

Latin Music Inc.

The commoditization of Latin music allows one to examine musicians' interactions with questions of scale. In particular, there are gatekeepers at different levels- local, regional, national, international- that provide and preclude opportunities for artists, "sounds," and ideas of popular music. This section will focus on two gatekeepers, a local/regional chain of Spanish-language radio stations and newspapers, and the internationally-influential Latin Alternative Music Conference in New York City, which have both played roles in influencing how Charlotte's musicians market their music while also limiting their ability to find "success."

Norsan Multimedia operates out of a large glass office tower on the Eastside of Charlotte, where it houses several radio stations, including two FM stations that broadcast in Spanish, La Raza- which features mostly *regional mexicano* music- and Latina FM- which plays mostly *música tropical*. The company is part of a larger corporate enterprise, the Norsan Group, which has headquarters in suburban Atlanta and owns a chain of restaurants, twelve "Hispanic-targeted" radio stations, the Charlotte newspaper HolaNoticias, and a nightlife website, DescubreCharlotte.com. Begun by Norberto Sanchez, a Mexican immigrant, in 1987, the company has consolidated what were once local media businesses- radio stations, websites, and newspapers - into a regional, corporate-run network of companies.

La Raza and Latina FM exert great influence in the Latino community in Charlotte, as does a rival station, El Poder FM. On a typical weekday morning, the radio's DJs might promote an upcoming concert by playing songs by the marquee group, or by giving away tickets on air. In between songs, DJs might talk about important issues- say an upcoming visit by the Mexican national soccer team to play a friendly match at Bank of America Stadium, or details about a rally for immigration reform at a city park. Sometimes the conversations are serious, as when a

caller tells the story of her husband detained and deported by police, but other times the patter is lighthearted, as when one of the on-air personalities, La Puchis (a gay man who pretends to be a woman on-air), makes tongue-in-cheek comments laced with sexual innuendo. During other slots, and on the company's AM station, more involved conversations revolve around local politics, health issues, and legal advice.

For local musicians and promoters, the radio stations represent a key entry point for promoting and marketing their music. Often musicians would attempt to contact and befriend prominent DJs and the station manager, who decide to some extent what music to play on air, in order to get a new single played. In most cases, local groups were not successful in this endeavor; the radio preferred to feature internationally-known acts over local talent. The radio stations are also major players in the festivals and concerts featuring Latin music around Charlotte. For example, La Raza/Latina FM put on several festivals throughout the year, including a day-long show celebrating Mexican Independence Day. They partner with the Latin American Coalition to organize the Cinco de Mayo Fanta Festival, providing advertising and promotion in exchange for the Coalition's organization and logistical work. The radio station manager helps connect organizers with well-known outside artists to bring in, and the regional network of Norsan adds an incentive for touring groups because they often play a set in Charlotte and then drive to perform a set in Atlanta at a similar festival held the same day and organized by a sister station. As described earlier (chapter 7), the radio stations impose a heavy footprint at festivals, with DJs shaping the flow of a band's performances, lots of banners, free promotional material, and other advertising, and mobile broadcasting from a Hummer SUV plastered with the station's logo. This promotional vehicle also parks outside of concerts that are sponsored and promoted by La Raza/Latina FM, drawing latecomers to a show and facilitating a larger turnout.

The relationship between DJs and local musicians is unequal and paternalistic. DJs seem to view themselves as better known than musicians and more attuned to the tastes of fans, which to some extent is a legitimate claim since DJs have daily contact through radio broadcasts with certain slices of the Latin musical communities who are avid radio listeners. The paternalism comes through in the interactions between DJs and musicians, on and off stage, where DJs are aware of their power as gatekeepers that can keep a band from performing an extra song at a festival or getting airplay. DJs often view local musicians as lacking polish and professionalism, interchangeable, and dependent on the radio's ability to manufacture an audience. On the other hand, musicians often criticized radio DJs for acting aloof and not seriously considering their music, especially if it was too "traditional" or too "innovative" and did not fit the current standard of the genre. Again, with festival line-ups there is a structural inequality that favors well-known international bands over local talent; through their treatment and position on the schedule, local bands are well aware that the deck is stacked against them. But they try to build personal friendships with radio DJs, handing the station manager their latest demo, or talking with them backstage, because they know that increased radio airplay and participation in festivals is a tried and true way to jump scales.

The collaboration between the radio stations and other concert organizers is a symbiotic yet antagonistic relationship. For example, the radio stations and the Latin American Coalition work closely in organizing the Cinco de Mayo Fanta Festival and have advertising exchanges for other events like the Festival Latinoamericano. While the radio often pushes for artists that are in their playlist, these choices do not always jibe with what organizers consider cost-effective, cover enough genre diversity, or to have an interesting "sound." In the end, it is the main sponsoring advertisers' vision of what the festival is about that wins out. Thus Coca-Cola's idea

of a well-produced Fanta Festival includes music appropriate for families (without cursing or violent lyrics) and that conveys *mexicanidad* that is being celebrated on Cinco de Mayo.⁸⁷ For the Latin American Festival, the vision put forth by organizers to represent the diversity of Latin American culture through music can sometimes clash with the radio's desire to label artists' music as belonging to rigid genre categories. For example, during a radio interview on Latina FM the morning before the 2010 Festival Latinoamericano, Miami-based group Elastic Bond attempted to explain their music to a DJ who seemed flummoxed that she could not place their music into ready-made categories of *salsa*, *merengue*, or *bachata*. Their music drew on tropical influences, but also included electronica and funk elements, which the DJ overlooked as she tried to classify them in a style that fit the station's catalogue. After all, the band was from Miami, how could their music not be simply *música tropical*? With promoters organizing concerts at local clubs, radio stations would promote concerts that easily fit the idea of commoditized genre, for example, heavily promoting touring stars like *regional mexicano* group Los Tucanes de Tijuana or *salsa* singer Victor Manuelle. But just as often, they ignored concerts by groups that undermined their vision of genre- say the acoustic, marching-band style of Durham's Banda Los Guanajuatenses, or a performance in Charlotte by Venezuelan rock group Los Amigos Invisibles.

In July 2010, visiting New York for the first time in several months and at the urging of several Intown musicians from Charlotte, I attended the annual Latin Alternative Music Conference (LAMC). The four-day conference hosts panels with influential people in the Latin music industry during the day in a Midtown hotel, then at night invited bands play concerts at downtown clubs and at Central Park Summerstage. "Latin Alternative" has become the preferred music industry term to replace *rock en español*, acknowledging that not all Latin artists

⁸⁷ Cinco de Mayo is a manufactured holiday tradition that has less significance in Mexico than the 16th of September, Mexican Independence day.

sing in Spanish and that the genre has evolved to include electronica, rap, and other musical forms from across Latin America and the world. However, “Latin Alternative” remains a nebulous term and many panelists at the 2010 conference wondered aloud about its salience. For Latin rock musicians from Charlotte, the LAMC appeared as the center of the industry world. In the past, members of La Rúa and other bands had traveled to the conference in an attempt to promote their music. It was an opportunity to talk directly with concert promoters, label executives, and music journalists- any of whom could be the key to getting a break. But they also recounted the experience of being in New York promoting their band, doubling up in an expensive hotel room, enjoying the concerts, and sampling the free liquor provided by the conference’s sponsors at receptions. Knowing I was from New York and might be considering visiting soon, they encouraged me to go to the LAMC and experience how the music industry worked in this center of Latin musical production.

The most striking thing revealed to me was the structural constraints that Latin bands from Charlotte face when trying to promote their music at the LAMC. Several musicians confided that they had attempted to get their band to be one of the groups selected for the conference’s showcases of performers, but became discouraged when they encountered the conference’s requirements for selection. When bands apply for inclusion, the conference sets up a link from the band’s website or e-mail that tracks how many conference attendees sign up to attend the conference on the band’s recommendation. According to musicians who had attempted to get their band a spot at the conference, the bands with the most fans who sign up to attend and pay the (\$99) registration fee are selected for the concerts. This selection process favors bands from New York, but also bands with fans with means and free time to spend a week in New York. Many of the bands selected are artists signed to National Records, a label that is

one of the main sponsors of the conference. Of the featured artists that headlined shows at the LAMC, all were signed to National Records. Although I was not privy to the selection process, what goes on behind the scenes and how final decisions are made, the final results show a cultural chauvinism that favors cities that are centers of Latin rock musical production, perceived cosmopolitanism, and with large Latin music listening markets while disregarding lesser-known, peripheral places. Featured bands hailed from New York, Barcelona, Mexico City, and Los Angeles. Up-and-coming groups were from Buenos Aires, Tijuana, Miami, and Madrid.

In addition to bands, the LAMC featured several panels with music industry representatives, journalists, and concert organizers. These panels led to some interesting exchanges, particularly between hopeful musicians trying to promote their bands and people in positions of power in the industry. A common theme in the panels was the structural problems within the music industry, with labels becoming less profitable with the transition to downloaded digital music. Many panelists stressed that bands should look to touring and frequent performances and marketing their music in commercials, television shows, and online as primary sources of revenue, rather than relying on the album release as a way to make it as a band. Concert organizers stressed the tight budgets and sheer volume of musicians that contact them for inclusion in a line-up for a festival or concert season. As a graduate student, I was struck by the similarity of panelists' advice to struggling musicians- to "hang in there," and stay "true to yourself" and eventually "things will work out." For a musician traveling hundreds of miles and paying exorbitant New York hotel rates to hand deliver a demo CD to a label representative, the truism that "No" just means "not now" must have seemed like an empty statement. The disjuncture between the dreams and aspirations of struggling musicians and the stark realism of the panelists became more striking as the conference wore on. One panel made it clear that they

do not listen to demo CDs anymore, so musicians shouldn't bother handing them a demo after a show, because they only listen to MP3s online. But then a panel of concert organizers concluded that they do not have time to open all the e-mails they receive from bands, and it is better if they get a recommendation through someone else, say a mention in a prominent blog or a colleague's recommendation. To get a foot in the door, you need a foot in the door. Rumlblings erupted from the audience made up of many musicians who had banked on using the conference to get a break. One Colombian musician confronted the panel, asking why they could not bother to listen to a demo, especially since musicians spend so much time and effort working on it. He concluded that there was a basic lack of respect for the months and years that musicians spend working on their music, since panelists could not be bothered to spend a few minutes opening an e-mail and pushing play, or dropping a CD into their stereo. One panelist responded that she discovers great new music all the time at conferences and festivals like the LAMC, overlooking the selective nature of who gets included and who gets overlooked in this type of event.

The influence of Norsan in Charlotte and the LAMC and National Records for the global "Latin Alternative" scene points to the growing concentration of ownership of parts of the Latin music industry that are profitable. This can be seen in the consolidation of local media, for example, two Charlotte Spanish-language newspapers- Qué Pasa and Mi Gente- merged in 2011, or in the growing influence of online sites like Amazon.com and iTunes to dictate the terms of music download pricing and promotion. This power affects musical production and consumption and helps determine who gets recognized as prominent and "successful" artists. As Ragland (2009) notes, the Latin music industry has typically treated *regional mexicano* with distance and exclusion because of its association with working-class immigrant culture. In promotion and awards, such as the Latin Grammys, the industry has favored Latin pop, rock and

Caribbean genres that fall within what they view as the mainstream of Latin music. Whatever the genre, Latina/o musicians from Charlotte must face the fact that the city is not widely seen as a place of Latin musical production.

The Tour

For many musicians, the experience of traveling with a band is one of the most important moments in their professional development. On tour, they gain knowledge of the music scenes in different places, meet musicians from other bands, and learn how to present their music in varied formats. When musicians tour, they are extending a tradition that goes back to the mid-twentieth century, when Mexican musicians toured the southwestern United States on the “Taco Circuit” (Ragland 2009), and African-American musicians traveled on the “Chitlin’ Circuit” (Lauterbach 2011). Touring also connects to the working-class Mexican and Caribbean concept of traveling for work (Ragland 2009, Freeman 2000, Smith 2005). The tour can consist of a short weekend trip to a nearby city, say Atlanta or Virginia Beach, or a more extended jaunt of several weeks across the country or even overseas. The shorter trips were more common during the time I spent in Charlotte and these tours around the region built upon an emerging network of Latin clubs and festivals in Southern cities and towns that cater to immigrants. The support of local radio stations, particularly for *regional mexicano* groups, to promote shows is essential to bands touring through Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia because they provide bands with an already-cultivated fan base and potential radio airplay. But the most important asset on tour is a network of locally-connected fellow musicians and concert organizers that can ease the process of traveling. Charlotte musicians often acted as these local guides when touring musicians arrived in Charlotte, lending bands equipment, giving directions over the phone when someone got lost on the freeway, pointing the way to a cheap, all-night

diner, helping promote a show by drawing on their musical community. In return, when Charlotte-based musicians traveled, fellow musicians elsewhere would lend their local expertise.

During interviews and conversations with musicians, narratives of the tour emerged that stressed both the upside and difficulties of traveling with a band. The tour is both hard work and the good life. Musicians recounted driving long distances, eating bad food, getting cheated out of paychecks by unsavory club owners, and sleeping in crowded hotel rooms. But they also remembered bonding with fellow band members, partying backstage, finding enthusiastic new audiences, and being part of “something big,” whether it was a major festival or opening for a famous artist. A major part of this experience involves overcoming a fear of losing money by assuming an attitude of positive thinking. In practice, this strategy becomes affect, an optimism that weighs the losses of touring (a night or two lost on the road, money spent) against the potential gains of fame and selling a musical product. Comparing bands, Gonzalo observes that Banda TecnoCaliente is able to overcome this fear, while other bands, some of which are just as talented, are not and thus remain mere “local” groups that do not travel widely. In his eyes, and the view of other promoters, these local bands are much less likely to find commercial success.

The touring affect, as an emotive positionality, becomes a way for musicians to justify, and perhaps obscure, the degraded material conditions in which their creative work takes place. While the labor regime of the local club or festival is exploitative (see chapters 4 and 7), it is also a familiar interaction; by leaving Charlotte musicians enter into a less familiar and more uncertain world where the risks and rewards are greater. As lesser-known bands, they are rarely extended the courtesies (really part of the pay package) of hotel, transportation, or meals paid for by the concert promoter that more famous groups sometimes receive. Instead, they are expected to book a hotel, or drive through the night to get back home, while often receiving the same low

pay as in Charlotte. In this context, musicians stressed the need to “think positive,” spoke of “faith,” “dedication,” and “persistence” that accompany a total investment (both physically and emotionally) in the future of the band.

Camaraderie established through joking, sharing food and drink, and impassioned debates about music, sports and women becomes a path to hetero-normative intimacy that helps male musicians endure long drives and cramped quarters. For example, when I accompanied Ultimanota on a weekend journey to Virginia Beach to play the Hardee’s Latin Fest, five of us squeezed into an SUV loaded with musical equipment and luggage. On the ride north, we killed time by listening to music, telling jokes, and passing around snacks. Looking for a cheap place to eat, we found an all-you-can-eat buffet and filled up on barbecue and fried food. Arriving the night before their performance, we listened to bands playing at the festival and wandered the boardwalk. Finding a liquor store and supermarket, we bought a bottle of scotch and food for the next day and headed back to the hotel. At the hotel, we visited another band in their room and had a few drinks. The next day, the band hung out by the hotel pool in the morning, before heading over to the festival site to perform. After the performance in a backstage bathroom, as we finished off the scotch and band leader Tony counted out each member’s share of the pay, I took photographs as we joked about the scatological and sexual significance of getting paid in cash in a bathroom on the Virginia Beach boardwalk. This high point of camaraderie lasted just a few hours. On the drive back to Charlotte, weariness set in and an argument started between two band members about scheduling future gigs.



Figure 29: Ultimanota jokes after performing at Virginia Beach

For some bands, touring also provides an opportunity to forge ties with musicians from other bands, sometimes connecting with members of more famous groups as they tour together. For example, one of the highlights of La Rúa's experience touring was when they spent several weeks traveling throughout the South with Venezuelan rock group Los Amigos Invisibles. Band members formed lifelong bonds that they have continued to draw upon, even as La Rúa has ceased to exist. Band promoters attempt to utilize their connections within the music industry to help their bands during a tour. For example, Gonzalo organized a collaboration between Charlotte band DS The Evolution and Kinito Mendez, a *merengue* singer for whom he had previously worked as a manager. DS and Kinito recorded a song together and performed live together several times. Through these types of connections, musicians better the chances of success by linking their efforts to more established and experienced artists. These bonds form

around shared nationality (Kinito and Gonzalo are both Dominican), having shared stylistic and aesthetic philosophies, or belonging to the same generation (members of La Rúa and Los Amigos Invisibles came of age in Latin America in the 1980s). Even if the initial touring collaboration does not pan out, local musicians often continue cultivating personal friendships with fellow artists when they come through Charlotte to play at festivals or music venues. Local musicians might be asked to be the opening act at a concert for a well-known touring group, or they might reconnect by sneaking into the theater early to listen to a sound check, or chatting backstage after a show.

So, why tour? What makes touring worth the difficulty and risk for musicians? Of course, there is always the example of musicians who found fame through touring, perhaps signing a record contract or having a hit single. But during my time in Charlotte, no local band had met with this kind of success; La Rúa had approached renown a few years earlier when it toured and had a music video played on MTVLatino, DS The Evolution was perhaps starting to find it when they began a tour across the US and Latin America in spring 2011. Some musicians described wanderlust, a need to travel and play music in other cities. They described the excitement they felt when performing in the same festival lineup with famous bands, or playing in a music venue with historic importance. For example, La Rúa members recalled fondly the experience of performing at the Cat's Cradle in Carrboro, NC and the Orange Peel in Asheville, NC, both clubs that hosted important rock and rhythm & blues bands in decades past. For some musicians, touring acts as an escape from everyday life, from the problems of their day job, family responsibilities, or even secondary status in the Charlotte music scene. The members of Ultimanota treated their trip to Virginia Beach as a miniature vacation, a time to relax with

fellow band members, take a break from the world of children, and play and listen to music all weekend.

But touring can also be an opportunity to make a first impression on an audience, to test new material or reinterpret old songs in an atmosphere that does not have the same established connections with the musical community that exists in Charlotte. Sometimes this effort fails, but it can help bands find more confidence in the direction of their musical creativity. The Charlotte bands that played at the Hardee's Latin Fest in Virginia Beach were well received by the audience, and the festival's organizer invited them to return the next year. Tony, the leader of Ultimanota, used the festival as a chance to work out new ideas, including collaboration with members of SoulBrasil, who also traveled to Virginia Beach; the positive feedback he got from both musicians and audience members resulted in Reinaldo, the Brazilian guitarist of SoulBrasil, continuing to sit in with Ultimanota during performances in Charlotte. The new material that the band began to play around this time (in rehearsing for this festival and a few other concerts) eventually resulted in a change in instrumentation (adding timbales) and the addition of a new member of the group; experimentations during touring moved the group's sound forward for gigs they continued to play in Charlotte.

“Success”

What is “success?” Despite what self-help books advocate and musicians might wish, positive thinking does not lead directly to success (Ehrenreich 2010). Nor does cultivating the trappings of a “creative class” (Florida 2003) necessarily lead to an environment more favorable to musicians. As Thomas Frank explains in a recent critique of Florida's ideas, notions like the “Bohemian index” obscure the class differences between economic winners and losers in the post-industrial landscape (Frank 2011). For Latinos, the prospects are dim for economic

success- for example, from 2005 to 2009 median household net worth among Hispanics fell from \$18,359 to \$6,325, mainly as a result of the housing crisis (Kochar et al. 2011). While the household net worth for whites also fell during this period, what is significant is the “wealth gap” increased significantly between whites and other groups (Latinos and African-Americans) representing a bifurcated path that corresponds to the predatory lending practices of banks and mortgage companies who targeted black, Latino, and poor white communities for adjustable-rate mortgages and biased lending practices. Charlotte was an epicenter for these sorts of monetary dealings, and the cultural milieu benefitted from the heady days of a booming real estate market. But Latino musicians were largely excluded from direct access to “creative class” formation, instead they exist on the margins of Charlotte’s slice of bohemia. They understand the hard work and persistence, the social capital and connections that must be developed in order to achieve success which does not appear out of thin air.

The experience of touring is closely linked to musicians’ and audiences’ ideas about “success.” In previous chapters, we have seen the different aspirations of bands, some of whom seek out wider renown while others are content to play small concerts for their musical community. Musicians who go on the road certainly tie into global networks of musicians and music fans in order to make their touring work, but musicians who stay put in Charlotte also connect with these global networks, but in different ways. When Banda TecnoCaliente tours, they plug into a network of friendship established years earlier by Gonzalo, their promoter, and maintained over the last few years through “professional” conduct while touring (i.e., showing up on time, giving a strong performance, collaborating with other artists). While Bakalao Stars stays home in Charlotte, they still manage to open for big-name acts coming through the city and convince singers, like Locos por Juana’s Itagui, to lay down a track with them in the studio.

Both groups are successful, but at different goals- TecnoCaliente is getting their name out there by touring consistently, while Bakalao Stars continue to perform for enthusiastic and loyal fans at Intown clubs. The rate of profit is different for each band; Banda TecnoCaliente makes enough money to dedicate themselves almost full-time to being musicians, while Bakalao Stars often barely breaks even after performances.

Musicians rely upon webs of knowledge to achieve “success,” cultivating friendships by building acquaintances into relationships of mutual benefit where musicians share information and connections. Through friendships, musicians can share their deep knowledge of the style and distinctive properties of musical genre, even with musicians who do not belong to that particular musical community, in return for favors that benefit them later on. For example, Tony’s ability to organize a “successful” Cinco de Mayo Fanta Festival is a testament to his network of friends rather than his limited knowledge of *regional mexicano* music. During the planning stages of the Fanta Festival, Tony relies on the judgment of other musicians and cultural brokers to help discern the best artists. He calls in favors from earlier events, and promises the limited fringe benefits that are available to him as a non-profit events manager- VIP passes, stage time, t-shirts, backstage access- to entice unpaid labor out of friends who volunteer and are key to running the festival behind the scenes. This volunteer help might be as simple as lending a drum kit for the festival bands to use, or as taxing as distributing ice to beverage trucks on a hot, dusty day. Musicians often visit Tony in his office, dropping off their latest demo recording or trying to get booked in the next event. Rather than treating them as supplicants, he takes the time to discuss professional matters- how they are promoting their band, if they have a booking agent, where they recorded their music- in order to see if he can give them any advice and if they can collaborate in the future. Even if these sessions do not result in an immediate

hiring for the event on hand, often more fruitful results occur months later, when Tony connects the band with a promoter from another city who has called him looking for a good *regional mexicano* band.

Many musicians I spoke with in Charlotte equated “success” with fame and chart-topping status, listing best-selling artists as the most successful in their genre. However, there were caveats to this idea of “success,” the most vital being that musicians should always maintain connections with their audience. Charlotte musicians praised famous artists that cultivated an intimacy with audiences and treated fellow musicians with respect. They were also quick to criticize artists whom they perceived as aloof and out of touch. Although behavior varied between genres, there were particular activities that musicians and audience members saw as key in maintaining this connection. One, musicians should connect with audience members during performances. This could include verbal wordplay and casual conversations between songs, calling audience members (usually women) onstage to dance, or the musicians going out into the crowd during a song and asking audience members to sing along. Also musicians often would give away a few copies of their latest album during a show, creating excitement as fans rushed to the side of the stage where a band member or promoter was passing out CDs. Two, there should be opportunities for audience-musician interaction before and after shows. For example, at *regional mexicano* festivals and concerts, it is customary for fans to take photos with musicians from bands they like, posing in the areas aside or behind the stage. At times, bands would spend up to thirty minutes after a show taking pictures with fans (see Figure 20). Some bands would also set up tables where they sold CDs and t-shirts to fans. Three, famous musicians were expected to play the hits, songs that made them famous or that they are known for covering. Promoting a new album, or playing a few numbers that are in development is fine, but audiences

want to hear the standards. Musicians, heavily attuned to musician-audience interaction, also were sensitive to how visiting artists treated them during interactions backstage and sound checks before a show. Were they treated as fellow musicians with collegial conversation or local yokels who could not understand the refined sensibilities of a “major” artist? For musicians and others involved in the Latin music scene, these interactions became fodder for oft-told stories- the time someone lent his drum kit to Molotov or the day someone had lunch with Los Tigres del Norte- but also the beginnings of lifelong friendships and collaborations, a subject to which I now turn.

La Casa del Ritmo

In January 2011, I invited Juan Miguel Marín and his wife Catalina for dinner at my Manhattan apartment. Juan Miguel was the drummer for Charlotte rock band La Rúa, while Catalina, a professional photographer, had taken many pictures of bands performing in Charlotte. Juan Miguel had taken a job a year earlier in New York City as a graphic designer at an advertising agency, but he had just quit his job in order to dedicate himself full-time to a film project documenting the lives and music of Venezuelan band Los Amigos Invisibles. La Rúa had toured with Los Amigos Invisibles on a US tour and band members had become friends. A few days later, I received an email from Juan Miguel with a link to a website, Kickstarter, where he and Catalina had started a fund raising campaign to back the film project, entitled La Casa del Ritmo (the House of Rhythm). Kickstarter is an online platform that allows people to raise money for creative projects; donors pledge money through the site and the organizers of the project must reach a goal, in this case \$30,000, or the money is forfeited and donors are not charged. I pledged a small amount and was promised a DVD of the documentary and a t-shirt as a reward.

In an interview a few months later, Juan Miguel described how the idea for La Casa del Ritmo came about:

“La Casa del Ritmo was a song from a Venezuelan band called Daiquiri from a few years back, not a few years back, a while back, Daiquiri was hot in the mid 80s; and Los Amigos Invisibles, three of them- Cheo, Catire and Mauri- when they moved to New York they were roommates in this place in Brooklyn and they called their apartment La Casa del Ritmo...”

“I met the band on tour with La Rúa, that was the first contact with the band, and I became an immediate fan of their music and the way they were about their career and the hard work and the commitment with their fans and the way they treated people, so when I moved to New York I reached out to Catire, who’s the bass player, more on a personal level, like ‘hey, I’m in New York, let’s hang out.’ And we did, a few times we would hang out and after the last time we got together which was around May, they were going on tour to Europe, they were going to be away for like twenty days, so I knew that I wasn’t going to see him anytime soon, because I understand they go on tour and then it’s like they are in their own world, so I was like ‘let me know when you are back.’”

“Catalina and I went to Ecuador for a friend’s wedding and it was really funny, my cousin had asked me to find this bottle of rum that they sell at the Miami airport. So we were on our terminal waiting for our flight and we had stopped at a couple duty-frees and we didn’t find this rum bottle and because we had time before our flight took off, I started asking somebody in the airport if there was another duty free that I had missed and they said ‘yeah, you should go to that other terminal.’”

“So I got into Skytrain, the train that takes you to a different terminal, and as I get off the train on this other terminal, I bumped into Catire. He was either coming through Miami to go somewhere else and play or something. So it was very random, we just started talking, ‘blah, blah, blah.’ I had seen that they were going to play the Summerstage show (last year) in 2010. I was very frustrated at my job, I was an art director in advertising, I was looking desperately to get involved into a personal project and so I started talking to him, realized that they were going to play in Summerstage and I thought ‘maybe it would be cool to document that show and how you guys get to that show because you live here in New York.’ That was the original idea and during that conversation I realized they were going to celebrate twenty years together with the same lineup and it was immediate, I told him, first, I was blown away, I was never counting how long they had been together, and I think I immediately mentioned, ‘we should do something bigger.’ ‘We should tell your story, it’s amazing, I mean, I’m blown away,’ so that’s how everything started.”

(Interview with author, 7/18/2011)

Although Juan Miguel describes the friendships that had formed with Los Amigos Invisibles’ band members through touring with La Rúa and the closer relationship between he and Catire that began after Juan Miguel moved to New York, happenstance brought them together in the Miami airport in a situation that sparked the idea for La Casa del Ritmo. The

chance encounter occurred at a time when Juan Miguel was dissatisfied with his job and looking for a “personal project” that would be more fulfilling than advertising work and on the eve of an upcoming concert at Summerstage in New York’s Central Park where Los Amigos Invisibles would be the featured act. Before his eyes, the idea grew to include a bigger project of documenting the last twenty years of music-making by Los Amigos Invisibles and celebrating their story, their connection with fans, and their friendships with each other. La Casa del Ritmo appeared as a natural title, because it represented the Venezuelan roots of the band’s music and referenced the three band members living together in New York as they embarked on a tour-like endeavor to promote their music in a cultural center of Latin musical production. La Casa del Ritmo also references the way their songs often incorporate tropical rhythms, funk and disco beats, and Venezuelan colloquialisms into a genre that could loosely be called Latin rock or Latin Alternative.

Juan Miguel set up a three-person team, including Catalina and his friend, film director Javier Andrade, to oversee the project. They interviewed band members for a week in August 2010. Because of logistical difficulties, the team was unable to record audio and video footage at the Summerstage show. Instead, Los Amigos Invisibles booked a concert in a New York concert hall in February 2011 that was recorded with multiple cameras and audio feeds. The successful Kickstarter campaign allowed them to record and edit a high quality film released in March 2012. The Kickstarter campaign demonstrated several key aspects about Los Amigos Invisibles and their relationship with fans and fellow musicians. Many of the funders wrote enthusiastic messages on the Kickstarter page praising the band and Juan Miguel for organizing the campaign. Because the band is known for their riveting live performances, many expressed gratitude that the energy of a live show was going to be captured through a high-quality film

production. And because the Kickstarter campaign relied on word of mouth and connections made through internet social networking sites like Facebook, it was a testament to the power of friendships as a chain of people slowly found out about the project and made small donations to make it happen. As Juan Miguel predicted during our January dinner when he had only raised a few thousand dollars, in true Latino style, fans signed up late and came through at the last minute to exceed the goal of \$30,000 for the project.

The importance of friendship in the development of La Casa del Ritmo came through in Juan Miguel's comments about the making of the film:

“The content, the story they shared, I don't want to say that it's impossible that they would have told somebody else, a random producer or director the same story, I feel like that was something special about the project, that everyone was comfortable enough with me, with Catalina, with Javier. It's very strange, but Julio had met Javier at one point when Javier lived here in New York and had a band called Barra Libre. I don't think they were friends but Julio knew of Javier so even at that point when we first started, I guess there were no complete strangers to the mix, which at the end I feel it's very valuable for the project.”
(Interview with author, 7/18/2011)

La Casa del Ritmo has also been important for Juan Miguel's personal and professional development. The project also contains lessons for aspiring musicians and loyal fans about what collective music-making should look like. As he explains:

Juan Miguel: “We've managed to show the industry and fans that there are other ways to fund creative projects, especially music.”

“It's exciting. It's been an amazing experience, everything, like from the people that we have met through the process and things I've learned about myself and other things about filmmaking. I couldn't ask for anything more, I have a big responsibility about making justice, doing the best I can, because at the end this is their story, which I think it is incredible and very valuable and I wish I would have known a lot of those things at different times in my life, maybe when I was with La Rúa or even back with Las Raices...”

SB: “So you've learned stuff from...What it means to be in a band?”

JMM: “What decisions you maybe have to take, or the fears you need to let go and be committed to what you love. In that sense, I felt like those conversations I had for the documentary reinforced and gave me so much confidence in following my dreams and

what I love to do. Hopefully I still have some time, But to me, I feel like what they had to say, it's going to inspire a lot of people and of course, younger kids that are maybe just getting into music and being in a band, what they had to share is of a lot of value for musicians, not only for fans that already love them, much respect to them for sure.” (Interview with author 7/18/2011)

After organizing the successful Kickstarter campaign and filming the documentary, Juan Miguel was invited to participate on a panel at the 2011 Latin Alternative Music Conference. As he sat on the dais with music industry bigwigs, he felt humbled and amazed, since a few years earlier he had sat in the audience trying to promote La Rúa. He hoped that the story which he told to the audience would inspire them to follow their dreams and find a way to do what they love.

Conclusion

As Charlotte's Latino musicians tour, they engage in a process of “jumping scales” that connects them to global networks of music-making. Touring means taking great risk-in money, time, personal sacrifice- but also result in great reward- in friendships, professional advancement, and experience. Often, the process of “jumping scales” is mediated by local power brokers in the Latin music scene, as radio station managers, promoters, and concert organizers filter which bands get maximum exposure to the world beyond Charlotte's musical communities by acting as gatekeepers and sources of expertise and social capital for bands looking to take that next step towards touring. But occasionally, musicians are able to establish their own connections, whether backstage at a festival or by chance encounter in an airport that lead to opportunities for collaboration with international artists of greater renown.

The phenomenon of local musicians connecting with famous musicians from Latin America warrants further discussion. What does it mean when the periphery connects with the center, bypassing the many levels in between? David Coplan (2008) describes a parallel

situation in South Africa, where during the 1970s and 1980s, black South African musicians were able to forge personal and professional collaborative relationships with visiting European and US musicians. Musicians and musical forms that were relegated to second class status under apartheid were repackaged and repurposed, finding enthusiastic audiences through the brokerage of Western musicians active in the global anti-apartheid movement—for example, Paul Simon’s “Graceland” (1986). Another comparison that could be made involves Latin American non-governmental organization (NGO) workers. Although the world of NGOs is diverse (too diverse to go into here), many NGOs in Latin America have formed as grassroots community organizations and political movements seek paths to sustain their local work through ties to external sources of funding and expertise from international funding agencies (Edelman 2000, Tilley 2002, Hale 2002). The “NGO-ification” of grassroots organizations gives local activists new opportunities to travel to regional and international conferences and gatherings, where they connect to global networks of fellow NGO workers, funders, and “experts” (Susser 2011a). In effect, these NGO workers are “jumping scales” from the local context to a transnational network through the access, cultural capital, and relationships they harvest at these meetings. These are the “cosmopolitan” actors that Appadurai (1996) describes emerging out of global “ethnoscapes” and “mediascapes,” but mediated by the gate-keeping of local power brokers and the temporal and structural limitations of global networks (at least for the non-elite).

Becoming “cosmopolitan” for local actors is a process with uneven results; for Charlotte’s Latino musicians, some prove better than others at “jumping scales,” whether because of skill at forming collaborative relationships, ability to maintain connections over time, or being at the right place at the right time. The uneven success of touring musicians cannot be attributed to genre. Each genre (*regional mexicano*, *música tropical*, Latin rock) connects to its

own, somewhat separate global network within the music industry-networks that very clearly have centers of production and taste-making and peripheries that exist in an inferior, somewhat neglected, dialogic relationship with the center. Charlotte as a place of Latin music production and consumption must continually vie for the attention of the Latin music industry, as venues compete with other cities' theaters for tour dates by traveling artists, as festival organizers assemble money, local talent, and audiences to entice international artists to perform, and as radio stations count listeners and attempt to consolidate diverse local and regional audiences into something called the "Hispanic" or "Latino" market. Yet, I would argue that local musicians from the periphery have an easier time making connections with famous artists than their counterparts, struggling musicians in centers of Latino musical production like Miami, New York, or Los Angeles. Through easy access to backstage areas during festivals, need for opening acts at shows, and the small social circle of musicians in Charlotte, where musicians know each other across genre boundaries, Charlotte musicians may come into contact more often with famous musicians than in industry centers where these musicians are sequestered in guarded social settings (although this type of comparative study would require access and mobility that I do not possess). The pride with which Charlotte musicians speak of their brushes with fame while touring elsewhere and playing shows in Charlotte, not to mention the friendships that they have forged, demonstrate some benefit to "jumping scales" that make touring worthwhile, even if few of them have yet to earn their "*primer millón*."

Conclusion

I began this study by outlining the policies and political developments that have led to a climate of fear and hate aimed at immigrants in the United States, and in particular in Southern states such as North Carolina. I conclude by returning to this context and examining what is at stake in the struggle over immigration policy and how musicians and their audience position themselves in this struggle. In the face of intensive policing that disrupts people's lives and wrenches families' apart, attempts to form community and stake a claim to belonging to the city become all the more important. This conclusion reiterates how making music constitutes a form of political action and builds community through collaboration between and debates among musicians and audience members. I analyze what this research means for a conceptualization of the city as a center of music-making, for Southern literature, and for the future of Latino music in the US South.

Nationhood

First, what is at stake is a question of who belongs to the nation. The current legal and political climate places immigrants under a regime of militarization, racialization, and social segregation. As much as the US historical narrative celebrates a "nation of immigrants," the current political situation reminds us that who gets accepted into the nation has always been a fraught topic tied to how society constructs racial, ethnic and class boundaries (Jacobson 1998, Takaki 2000). The lives of immigrants should not be separated from the context of the often fraught situations in their homelands, situations that remind us of the long and continuing history of US imperialism in Latin America (Galeano 1997, McCullough 1978, Smith 2004, Leogrande 1998). The current "great wave" of immigrants faces a thirty-year ratcheting up of immigration enforcement that began with the militarization of the US-Mexico border and American inner cities to fight the "War on Drugs" and codification of "illegality" in immigration law starting

with the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) (Dunn 1996, De Genova 2002). This enforcement structure has been intensified by numerous increases in funding for border enforcement, the development of the 287(g) and Secure Communities programs, and increased surveillance of immigrant communities after 9/11. In Charlotte, these policies result in police checkpoints, families torn apart when fathers are deported, and residents afraid to venture out of their neighborhood at night.

The consequences of immigration policy include new forms of social and structural racism, expressed in the racialization of Latina/o immigrants. The correlation of Latina/o immigrants and what has been socially constructed as “illegal” behavior- crossing an international border to find work, operating a taco truck, driving without a license, public alcohol consumption, speaking Spanish- is increasingly codified into laws and policies that target “illegal” immigrants. Each new law further legitimizes the deportability and “illegality” of undocumented immigrants. Although anti-immigrant laws are often framed as non-discriminatory- the numbers of deported individuals tell a different story- overwhelmingly black and brown bodies being sent to Mexico, Central America, and the Dominican Republic.⁸⁸ A proposed new Georgia law (SB 458) would prohibit undocumented students from enrolling in public universities; proponents argue that the bill rights discrimination against citizen-students whose college slots are being taken by undocumented students. An Arizona law (HB 2281) that bans ethnic studies in schools posits that critical studies of race that teach students about past injustices are unnecessary in a post-racial society, ignoring the fact that terms like “illegal” and “Mexican” have become the new racial slurs.

⁸⁸ Immigration, Customs and Enforcement (ICE) deported 396,906 individuals in fiscal year 2011, the most to date (Deportation Nation 2011)

States' Rights

Second, because of the failure of the United States Congress to pass an updated immigration law, the struggle over immigration has centered on the local and state level where most new laws and policies have been implemented. What is taking shape is a battle over immigration politics that again tests the boundaries between federal and state authority. The series of local and state laws and policies that target immigrants were the result of activism by groups opposed to illegal immigration. These anti-immigrant groups face off against groups of Latino activists and their allies, who support comprehensive immigration reform at the federal level and oppose these state laws. Pro-immigrant activists have also promoted the idea of “sanctuary cities” where individuals would not be asked about their legal status by city officials nor turned over to federal immigration authorities and protested the enforcement practices of the 287(g) and Secure Communities programs. Activists on both sides frame their movements as struggles over rights to the public sphere, or what can be conceptualized as the “right to the city” (Lefebvre 1996, Harvey 1973). Anti-immigrant groups deploy the idea of freedom from “illegality” and the alleged illegal behavior of unauthorized migrants- from drug dealing, drunk driving, petty crime, violating housing codes to the simple fact of being “illegal.” They also frame their laws as the right of taxpayers and citizens to deal with government waste through denial of social services to undocumented immigrants. Immigration reform groups, on the other hand, frame their protests in the language of the Civil Rights movement and Chicano activism, stressing anti-discrimination and anti-racism, but also the basic humanity of immigrants, their contributions to society, and their desire to become “American.”

Ralph Ellison once wrote that American life since the abandonment of Reconstruction has been a reversal of Clausewitz’s dictum, and thus- “the continuation of the Civil War by

means other than arms. In this sense the conflict has not only gone unresolved, but the line between civil war and civil peace has become so blurred as to require of the sensitive man a questioning attitude toward every aspect of the nation's self-image" (Ellison 2003, p. 119). While Ellison was writing about the "guerrilla politics" of the South that resulted in Jim Crow, lynching, and race riots and how these phenomena colored his appreciation of Stephen Crane's fiction, his analysis can be extended to the Civil Rights movement and the current struggle over immigration. Some of the more successful moments of the Civil Rights movement occurred when activists challenged the boundaries between federal and state authority, pressuring the US government to overrule recalcitrant state and local government officials (Branch 1999, Caro 2002, Carmichael & Hamilton 1967). This resulted in court-ordered desegregation of schools (e.g., Little Rock, Charlotte, Ole Miss, University of Georgia), prosecution of violent acts, including killings of Civil Rights activists, and federal civil rights legislation (e.g., the Civil Rights Act, Voting Rights Act, Fair Housing Act), actions that helped turn the tide in the push to ensure basic civil rights for African-Americans. Some of these developments were long lasting, for example, the Voting Rights Act still directs how Southern states must apportion their legislative districts after each US Census. Others, such as school desegregation, were slowly undermined by the retrenchment of "guerrilla politics," first as white Southerners pulled their children out of public schools and then as they resisted a Carter Administration federal tax policy requiring private and religious schools to desegregate (Johnson 2010). More recently, Southern cities like Charlotte (once famed for its embrace of school desegregation) have all but abandoned school busing efforts in a turn to "neighborhood schools" that results in *de facto* re-segregation along racial and class lines (Smith 2010).

The long-standing tension between federalism and states' rights now centers on immigration. The new state laws are being challenged, in whole or in part, in federal courts, where supporters argue that these laws fill in the gaps of federal enforcement efforts, while opponents protest that the laws usurp federal authority on immigration enforcement granted in the US Constitution and violate federal civil rights' codes.

The Gray Dream

Third, the cultural effect of conflict over immigration policy has been what I call the graying of the immigrant dream. The inability of the immigration reform movement to achieve success, and in particular, the failure to get the US Congress to pass immigration reform legislation or the DREAM Act legalizing undocumented students, has sullied hopes that many immigrants held of becoming full-fledged members of US society and dampened the enthusiasm of the mass marches of 2006. The economic recession has further darkened the horizon for immigrant workers, affecting industries such as construction that employed an immigrant workforce, so much so that significant numbers of immigrants have returned to their home countries in the past four years. As I conducted this research, *El Sueño Gris* (The Gray Dream) became more than just a band's slogan; it came to represent how musicians and their audiences were persisting in attempting to create community despite a set of serious obstacles placed in their way. Musicians occupied a vulnerable position, stemming from their contingent labor conditions, their training and experiences growing up in Latin America, their often insecure legal status, and their daily interactions with policing in neighborhoods and job sites. Yet, in their way(s), musicians worked to build common cause with their audience through processes of music-making, practicing genre, and discussions about music. This dialectical process often involves synthesizing disparate elements- nationalities, class backgrounds, ages, and migration

experiences- into creative expression. Latin music in Charlotte is not just a collection of sounds, but a process of defining a way to live and see the world through music-making. The result has been the creation of group solidarity and agency in the face of oppressive anti-immigrant policies. I adapt E.P. Thompson's idea of a class "in itself" (Thompson 1963) as a way to analyze how musicians and audience recognize their common experience- as immigrants, as musically-inclined people, as speakers of a shared idiom- to form musical community.

Musical Community

This type of community does not just exist, but arises from a process of music-making in a hyper-local setting that at times jumps scales to engage with global musical networks. Rather than deploy "community" as a commonsense and general term, I have attempted to outline the social interactions, ideas, and attitudes that lead musicians and fans to envision themselves as belonging to a cohesive social group. Using community as an analytical and descriptive tool does the "sociological and ideological work" (Creed 2006) of allowing us to understand how Latino immigrants have picked up the pieces of a world that has been shattered by neoliberal economic restructuring and the 2008 recession, the upheaval of transnational migration, and the tightening of a regime of anti-immigrant surveillance and enforcement.

Musical community is a sense of belonging and shared affiliation around notions of class, ethnicity, language, style, and taste expressed through music and other creative cultural expressions. The personal relationships formed among musicians and between musicians and their fans support community formation and often act as a form of fictive kinship. These personal relationships become a prism through which musicians interpret the city, at times leading to memorable linkages, such as Juan Miguel's experience with La Rúa which he describes as "kind of like our first girlfriend" or Gonzalo's exhortation that Mexican immigrants

need to “invest in our city.” Musical community exists at the intersection of local and mass consumption, often serving as a point of mediation between locally produced, “grassroots” expressions of music and nationally and globally popular mass expressions of music. While each musical community centers on a particular band and its genre(s) of music and is situated in the segregated geography of the city, musicians often framed their music as representing Charlotte through their interpretations of the city and *latinidad*. Their experience with the city varies, in large part based on where they live and perform and how their band positions themselves in terms of labor conditions, politics, genre boundaries, and moral and ethical questions. Bars, clubs, restaurants and other music venues host performances by Latino musicians and become spaces where musicians and audiences feel comfortable engaging in musical conversations. Bands begin to belong at certain clubs- Dorian Gris at Skandalos on the Eastside, Orquesta Mayor at Cosmo’s Café downtown, Bakalao Stars at the Evening Muse in-town, Ultimanota at suburban A Piece of Havana- corresponding to how music-making fits the style and aesthetics of fans who live and go out in these neighborhoods.

The City

Too often in anthropology and urban studies, music and other cultural expressions are dismissed as trivial in analyses of contemporary urban life, or added in like spices to flavor a description of neighborhoods, social gatherings, or street life. I have argued instead that music is central in the lives of many Latino residents in Charlotte, vital to how community members present “Latino” culture to the world, and key to understanding how Latino immigrants are adapting to, adopting, and transforming Southern culture. This is best revealed through how musicians see the city of Charlotte and envision what type of city it will become. Promoter Gonzalo situates Charlotte as a city that has less racism and discrimination against Latino

immigrants than cities in neighboring states. He also sees a Charlotte that needs investment from its immigrant community as a way to repay and continue the support that city agencies and non-profits give through social safety net services. La Rúa drummer Juan Miguel sees Charlotte evolving and changing from “being a city that was not diverse to a really, really diverse and dynamic city” (Interview with Author 7/18/2011). This transition did not happen overnight and it involved growing pains and the hard work of people like him who acted as “mediators” and “ambassadors” representing Latino culture and convincing native-born Southerners to be open to new experiences with other cultures. Members of Bakalao Stars stress the importance of place and how location affects what type of crowd attends a show. Because of fears of deportation, potential fans from Charlotte’s Eastside who are undocumented will not travel to see the band in clubs in NoDa, an Intown neighborhood. Vice versa, when Bakalao Stars has played at Skandalos, an Eastside venue, their Intown crowd does not attend because they dislike the place and they are afraid of petty crime in what they see as a dangerous neighborhood. An Eastside band, like Dorian Gris, has experienced the same effect in the opposite direction, receiving negative feedback after playing in-town from fans that prefer they play at Skandalos (see Chapter 3). For musicians who come up against these barriers to audience mobility, the city is a fragmented landscape that highlights difference in status, class, race, and ethnicity through its residents’ ability to access neighborhoods and feel comfortable making music there.

You Can’t Go Home Again

Musicians interpret and imagine the Southern landscape through their music, which connects them to the long history of Southern literature. I refer to Southern literature in the widest sense, including fiction and non-fiction writing, storytelling, songs, and other expressions. But the essence of Southern literature is capturing the region’s oral storytelling traditions in text

and dealing with common themes that run throughout the canon- family and community ties, connections to the landscape, violence, Christian morality, the weight of history, racial and class distinctions and tensions, and, for lack of a better term, the gothic nature or “magical realism” of life in the South (Forrest 1988, Hoffman-Jeep 2005). For example, William Faulkner captured many of these themes in his fiction, constructing an imaginary place, Yoknapatawpha County, with an extensive genealogy of families and attention to local dialect and landscape. Zora Neale Hurston, in both her anthropological and fiction writings, documented the local specificity of African-American dialect, belief systems, and expressive culture. Flannery O’Connor dealt with questions of morality stemming from her Catholic upbringing, framing many of her stories around ideas of good and evil, tests of faith, and religious hypocrisy. Thomas Wolfe wrote semi-autobiographical fiction that detailed a sense of community and the changing personal relationships of a young man who has gone “up North” to be educated. What expresses the magical nature of the Southern landscape better than Robert Johnson singing about meeting the devil at the crossroads, Howlin’ Wolf howling about evil hanging around his door, or Hank Williams imagining the hidden longing of a wooden Indian named Kaw-Liga? The songs and stories of the South form a canon as powerful as its fiction.

How might we position Latino immigration in this context? For one, many of the themes present in Southern literature are relevant in an analysis of the lives of Latino immigrants in Charlotte. The title of Wolfe’s novel- *You can’t go home again* (2011) - takes on renewed significance if one considers how immigration laws and enforcement policies restrict migrants’ ability to return to the United States if they visit family in their home countries. In the decades before the 1996 Immigration Act (IIRIRA), many Mexican migrants, particularly farm workers, would cycle through the United States, working for nine to ten months a year and then returning

to Mexico for the winter season. The 1996 law includes stiff penalties for entering the United States as an unauthorized migrant, criminalizing labor migrations across the border that have been routine since the early 20th century. Penalties for repeat violations of the law include restrictions on a migrant's future ability to apply for citizenship, and when migrants are detained, they often face periods of imprisonment or deportation to remote outposts on the US-Mexico border. The effect of the 1996 law was that many undocumented immigrants, who in the past would have returned annually to Mexico, now remain for extended periods in the United States, setting down roots but unable to go home again.

Second, attention must be given to the long-standing, but often hidden connections between Southern and Latin American cultural expressions. As I previously stated, several scholars have been reconstructing the history of these musical connections (Roberts 1979, Sublette 2004, Brennan 2008). Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez credits reading Faulkner's work with inspiring him to become a writer; it is not coincidental that the magical realism of Macondo builds upon the techniques of and attention to local history that run through Faulkner's writing. Latino musicians in Charlotte are beginning to connect the dots between these two literary traditions, whether by linking musical *feeling* to the blues or writing down new stories of the Southern experience, like the immigrant love story in La Rúa's "El Chanchito." As musicians debate the morality and ethics of being a performer, form connections to a neighborhood's people and landscape, or construct musical genealogies of their influences, they are engaging with themes they hold in common with many Southerners. And as people of all political persuasions now argue, immigration is the flashpoint issue in the South, perhaps beginning to replace or give a new permutation to black-white racial tensions that have long dominated political calculations in the region. Latin music in Charlotte is but the first wave of

Latino storytelling about life in the South; what future stories will emerge from a dialect that includes Spanish with a Southern accent and Southern English with a Latin American accent?

Music-making as politics

In this study, I documented how making music is a process that gives agency to Latina/o immigrants in Charlotte, NC and helps position them in the context of the “globalizing city” (Graves & Smith 2010, Smith & Furuseth 2006). The fate of current immigrant laborers, including “working musicians” who struggle with freelance and contingent work arrangements, should be understood in the context of a city and region that has long regimented labor under an uneven racial, gendered and class order and been tied into the volatile swings of the international market (whether it was cotton prices or mortgage derivatives). The layers of the “globalizing city” are evident in the landscape of Central Avenue, a thoroughfare that begins within shouting distance of Uptown skyscrapers, passes through gentrifying Intown neighborhoods, and ends up in the Latino immigrant Eastside. Charlotte’s Latin music scene engages with all three of these districts, but in ways that reveal the social segregation, class divisions, and genre boundaries of Latino musical production in the city. These divisions have roots in the histories of each musical genre in Latin America and in the life trajectories of immigrants of particular national origin, both in their home country and once in the United States.

As we have seen in Charlotte, making musical community is a fragile process; it requires hard work to make sure music venues feel like home, that they are welcoming to fellow fans of genres, and that opportunities open for connections to the Latin music industry (e.g., touring artists, radio DJs). It is also transitory; some musicians argued that the “height” of *rock en español* in the city had already passed and that I was viewing the dregs of a moment that began in the early 2000s. However, the persistence of musicians and musical community means that, in

a “musical city”⁸⁹,” music becomes inscribed in the landscape and ingrained in how people interact with one another. The Eastside, Intown, and Uptown musical districts are not natural geographic areas, but socially constructed in response to social networks, patterns of performance, fears of deportation because of immigration policing, and real estate trends. The “musical city” is a process that builds (and sometimes dismembers) the brick and mortar places, demographics, social relationships, consumption and production patterns, and popular practices that make music possible. Thus, the Latin music scene in Charlotte would not have been possible without an influx of Latino immigrants, bars and clubs, friendships established between musicians, learned leisure habits of dancing, drinking, listening to music, and “going out,” and a need to belong to a musically-framed community of peers. These factors delineate an Intown club as the best place to hear Bakalao Stars, an Uptown dance hall as the best place to dance *salsa*, or an Eastside park as the best place to organize a *regional mexicano* music festival.

Bourdieu (1984) made the point that artists, a group within which we can include musicians, have a unique vision of the relationship between money and time that causes them to exchange (or forego) money for time to spend on the creative process. In Chapter 4, I documented how different bands position their music-making on a spectrum that includes work, professionalism, play, and hobby. But no matter the outlook of the band, from Banda TecnoCaliente’s touring ambitions to Bakalao Stars jam-band stance, every musician stressed the sacrifices they make for music. The investment (of both time and money) that goes into creating a new song is not an empty gesture, but rather a role that musicians take on as creative leaders in their musical community. In my analysis, I underlined the labor power of musicians who work long hours and put in effort behind the scenes rehearsing, setting up and promoting so that a

⁸⁹ By “musical city” I refer to how the city becomes a site for music and shapes and directs how music-making occurs among its residents.

performance has that magical quality of musical spectacle. Often the extent of this labor remains hidden for the ordinary audience member, particularly if the genre and setting favor audience interaction that stresses celebration and enjoyment through dancing, drinking, and banter.⁹⁰ For example, when Ultimanota performs at a restaurant, the primary goal of the band is to perform in a manner that allows customers to enjoy their meal, to groove to familiar covers of songs, and to remember the evening as a pleasant experience. When musicians take requests, or, as Dorian Gris did, change the direction of their music based on audience feedback, they are acknowledging the importance of their fans. Although some musicians recognized the idea of playing music “for music’s sake,” every musician I spoke with regarded his or her relationship with the audience (and fellow musicians) as *the* reason behind continuing to create music. As creative leaders who produce and “discover” objects (to use Bourdieu’s terms), they feel a sense of mutual obligation and entanglement in a musical project with their audience.

In Chapter 5, I examined how musicians engage with (or chose not to engage with) political and social issues in their music and personal lives. The analysis revealed the relative lack of overt political activism among working musicians, mainly because musicians are acutely aware of their multiple vulnerabilities. While musicians were too busy or uninterested in engaging in overt political activism through protests and political parties, they did insert politics into their music-making, often by acting as “grassroots intellectuals” making conscious decisions about the direction of their music in relation to audiences and through discussions about aesthetics and morality (Susser 2011b). By creating a comfortable atmosphere where musical community can express itself- the “*circular colectivo*” described by Jacobo Strimling (2010)-

⁹⁰ One counterexample was the on-stage presentation of James Brown as “the hardest-working man in show business.”

musicians position themselves as political actors who lead the intellectual charge by encouraging a certain ethnic, class, and sonic identification.

Through genre (Chapter 6), this identification is paired with style of dress, speech, dance, and singing and marked in opposition to other genres or social classes. For example, Bachata Flow's New York fashions and R&B-infused playing style match its audience of established immigrants with affiliations to African-American popular culture, but DS The Evolution complicates this affiliation by making clear that they are not *reggaetoneros*, but play *música Latina urbana*. Bakalao Stars marks a generational divide by positioning their personalities as “*desorden contra la orden* (disorder against order)” and their mixture of pan-Caribbean musical styles. Some musicians stake claims of difference between their music and other genres, for example in rock musicians incomprehension of *regional mexicano*, while other musicians attempt to find common ground between genres- Leydy Bonilla pointing to the similarity between a *banda* beat and the pulse of *merengue*. Latino musicians also constantly evaluate their music in relation to non-Latin (for lack of a better term) genres. Tony expresses the importance of music with *feeling*, relating Latin music to the Southern blues idiom. Ultimanota has created a (Latin) American repertoire of US and Latin American pop songs with shared themes. Intown musicians fret over ways to cross over to rock audiences who frequent the same clubs they play in, just on different nights. Eastside community members fear traveling outside their neighborhood at night, worrying about police checkpoints and deportation. For them, crosstown music is a foreign, inaccessible world.

Musical taste is learned; Latino musicians and their audiences in Charlotte spend much time learning and relearning the elements of distinction that go into genre. Genre helps set down rules of performance that manifest during a show, but also creep into everyday life. Taste in music

helps mark a person's class origin and acts as a portfolio that displays the cultural capital he has built with others in the musical community. This is why musicians' meta-discourse about music represents a key element of their politics- talking about music is how they negotiate and comprehend the politics of everyday life. When a musician complains to a friend about the unfair treatment he received from a concert organizer, he is not just warning a fellow musician to watch out, but fleshing out a moral position about how professionals involved in the music scene should treat each other. If a percussionist, like Sindy Méndez, approaches learning a new timbale lick with care and dedication, recording another drummer's performance and then slowing it down to reconstitute all its relevant pieces, that is because he recognizes the importance of having proper respect for the music's origins, particularly the African-derived percussive elements that course throughout *salsa*. And if a musician covers a popular song in an original way- Leydy Bonilla opening with Lady Gaga's "Bad Romance," Los Mentirosos remaking "Ahora Te Puedes Marchar," or Ultimanota covering "El Cantante"- it is because she recognizes the power of familiar songs, but also the versatility of Latin music genres to encompass new takes on old standards. When audience members shout out requests during a concert or come up after a show and comment about the performance, they are asserting their right to direct the trajectory of a band. Some fans may be as knowledgeable and connected to global trends in popular culture as musicians, bringing in the latest recordings to listen to at a party or dressing in cutting-edge style. Audience participation teaches musicians as well; musicians pay attention to which songs move the crowd and which fall on deaf ears and then adjust accordingly.

My research on several Latino festivals (Chapter 7) gave a behind-the-scenes look at how Latino festivals are organized, how organizers market "Latino" culture, and the role of musicians

in these events. At festivals and other large concerts, a symbiotic relationship has formed between Latino musical communities and multicultural, progressive corporate Charlotte. In other words, it has become convenient for the corporate business community in Charlotte in their efforts to conceive of and market the city as a multicultural and “progressive” place to attach themselves through sponsorship to Latino musical communities who practice “authentic” representations of urban diversity. Musicians play an irreplaceable role in festivals as bearers of cultural capital and connectors to musical communities. They do the hard work of forming community around music-making in the local setting of the club, creating culturally “authentic” expressions that can then be inserted into a commodified festival presentation.

Yet, musicians’ labor at festivals, especially members of local bands, is seen by organizers as just another cost and as a series of interchangeable parts. Organizers legitimize the low pay musicians receive by highlighting the chance bands get to promote their music in front of a large audience with quality sound equipment and network with famous, visiting musicians. Musicians engage in heated intellectual debates about the “proper” way to organize festivals and treat performers, constructing social rules that guide their sense of ethics and their judgments about the “success” of an event- a judgment that often differs from the assessment of festival organizers. These ethical sensibilities stem from musicians’ training, whether in a music school or informal setting, and their relationships with fellow musicians and audience members that shape what constitutes “professional” behavior. By situating musicians’ labor in the nexus of cultural production and consumption practices associated with festivals, the analysis shows how “working musicians” face many of the same political and economic limitations that dull to gray the immigrant dream. Moreover, the internal divisions and structural constraints that festival

organizers face illustrate how difficult constructing an accurate vision of *latinidad* is, even on the scale of a single cultural event.

The “popular practice” (Fox 2004) of music making and expressing local musical culture that Charlotte’s Latino musicians and audience engage in differs from the fields of production and consumption produced by and mediated through the Latin music industry. Yet these two fields are not entirely separate: Charlotte musicians attempt to forge connections between local musical expressions and global and transnational networks of music-making (Chapter 8). Musicians put intellectual effort into assuming postures toward the global music industry, formatting their music, dress, and promotional materials to look and sound “professional” or through an attitude of nonchalance and disinterest in becoming “famous.” Some musicians and promoters have invested a considerable amount of time and money in convincing international artists to stop in Charlotte for a tour date, and some have benefited from their access to transnational networks within their genre(s). Others have toured and traveled in an attempt to gain the attention of the Latin music industry by breaking out of the geographic and social limitations of a local scene, widening their audience and perhaps “catching a break.” But in “jumping scales,” musicians acknowledge that the same types of relationships, with audience members, fellow musicians, and cultural brokers, must be formed outside of Charlotte in order to be successful; building social capital is a slow and painstaking process, especially when it takes place over great distances. Technology, particularly mobile phones, e-mail, and websites greatly aids these connections, but sometimes a chance encounter, like Juan Miguel running into a member of Los Amigos Invisibles in the Miami airport, is the spark that deepens these ties.

Musical City

Charlotte presents a site that can be used as an important case study of the issues around immigration, cities, and music. Although certainly not the only metropolitan area that can lay claim to being a “musical city” (Graf 2007, Waxer 2002, Berry et al. 1986), Charlotte presents an interesting case of a place where much of the mainstream, non-Latino population is largely unaware of how Latino musicians are forging a music scene across the urban landscape. This follows a trend of marginalized populations- Appalachian whites recording “hillbilly” records in the 1920s, African-American singers laying down gospel tracks in the 1970s, or Latino musicians singing in Spanish today- making music that through their very existence counter the master narrative of “progressive” industrialization and business boosterism put forth by city elites for over a century.

The “musical city” emerges out of a particular moment and landscape, for example, New Orleans jazz at the turn of the century arose out of the city’s location as a port, its racial gradation of neighborhoods, and its red-light district set aside for prostitution, drug use, and entertainment. All cities abound with sound; yet this does not make a city musical. Whether it is the roar of car traffic, the screech of subway trains, the music bumping from a passing car’s speakers, or the Muzak piped into a retail store, these soundscapes are more often regarded as noise and noisome by city dwellers. Music makes the “musical city” not just because it sounds pleasant- that is a subjective judgment that relates to fans of a particular type of music- but because of the community that forms around music-making. In Charlotte, a musical city formed around the wake of Latino immigration in the 1990s corresponding to the housing boom and following the geography of the city- where aging in-town and inner-ring suburban neighborhoods provided inexpensive housing and business opportunities for Latino residents.

The labor of “working musicians,” the politics inscribed in music-making, and negotiations of genre boundaries all facilitate the formation of musical community in Latino Charlotte.

The musical city, then, is a political place, defined by its geography of music-making and the social relationships that are embedded in musical community. Sometimes despite their best intentions, musicians are political actors who negotiate a field where they must position themselves as part of a community and in relation to others. In the Latin music scene in Charlotte, musicians are making popular music in the midst of immense political, economical, and social change and despite the indifference of the Latin music industry. Their popular practice will leave a legacy, in musical recordings, in musical communities, and in ways of thinking about the world. In their own way, they are demanding a “right to the city” and making spaces where music lives and thrives. Latino musical communities in Charlotte embody a *Carlotan* style and way of being that is uniquely Southern, local, and global at the same time.

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