

# **Salsa and Everyday Life: Music and Community**

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2010

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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## **Abstract**

# **Salsa and Everyday Life: Music and Community**

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Salsa is a musical form integrated into the fabric of Puerto Rican communities throughout the NY-NJ areas and beyond. I examine the production of Salsa in Newark NJ by working-class Puerto Ricans and other Latinos and the ways in which it affects the lives of the performers and the community itself. I explicitly look at the local level of salsa, the unknown performers for whom salsa is a way of life. Music is a significant feature of Puerto Rican and Latin American communities and a marker of their ethnicity nearly as strong as the Spanish language. I examine the history of salsa and how it has been connected to the rise in stature of Puerto Ricans on the mainland United States. Using music as a window into the local community, I am able to examine a variety of issues: the usage of music as work; the networks developed by the musicians and how they relate to more general networks of bonding between the men who play salsa; how salsa integrates multiple age groups while restricting the interaction of different racial groups; how salsa and other musical activities can provide assistance in social mobility; and how gendered issues act out in the context of salsa including ways in which the men who perform salsa may be using it to redefine machismo in a positive manner. I explore the social interaction among musicians through their rehearsals and performance. The musicians act as cultural reproducers for their local communities and are able to perpetuate characteristics that define

what it means to be Puerto Rican. However, the reproduction of culture at the local level is a collective act where the audience participates in determining what aspects of Latino culture are reinforced. The research ends with an examination of how Puerto Ricans and Salsa are represented in the larger music industry and the contradictions that occur between the local and (inter)national production and promotion of music.

Dedicated to the Memory of my Grandfather, Nicholas Siebert  
And to the memory of Mr. Don Hunt

With special thanks to Ida Susser, Ellen DeRiso, Louise Lennihan, Jane Shneider, Patricia D Mathews-Salazar, Marc Edelman, Gerald Creed, Don Robotham and June Nash at the CUNY Graduate Center; to Brian Ferguson, Dawn Wilson, Clay Hartjen Anne Marie Cantwell and Janet Siskind at Rutgers University-Newark; to Chico Mendoza, Rufus Reid, Harold Mabern and the late Martin Krivin at William Paterson University; to Arlene Davila and Robin Nagle at NYU; to my friends Allen, Jose Louis, Jésus, Alex, Raphael, David, Ritchie, Rob, Harold, Tom and Vyky; to my sister Stephanie; to my dad, Bob, and his wife Bonnie; and to my mom, Mary Ann, and her husband Michael.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

One of the single most distinguishing characteristics of the Latino population in the United States is music. Migrants from Latin America have traveled with their musical tradition, and music has thrived in the leisure and symbolic spaces of Latino communities. Music is an ethnic identifier for Latinos on a par with the Spanish language. This well of popular culture is not dominated by white or black America in production or consumption. It creates a cultural frame of reference in which white and black America is rarely fluent. Salsa is also a multi-million dollar industry, active locally, nationally, and globally.

Music, an underused tool in anthropology, is embedded in the many cultures we as anthropologists study, but the integration of music into people's daily lives has been difficult to assess<sup>1</sup>. Few studies capture the essence and realities of music and musical activity. A dilemma exists in using music as a means to understand culture. Our basic ethnographic methods dictate that we speak the language of our informants, but musicians always speak two languages: one with words and another with music. If a person spends time studying the history of a music or how to play an instrument or a style, one has spent time learning to converse in music. This is not participant-observation of how music is integrated into people's daily lives because people cannot live that daily life until they know the music. This process of learning may provide excellent research and add to the musicological literature in a significant way, but it is limiting in an anthropological sense, in an ethnographic sense. I came to anthropology as a well-trained and

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<sup>1</sup> Two exceptional ethnographies that do exam how music integrates into people's daily lives are *Real Country* by Aaron Fox (2004) and *Wake the Town and Tell the People* by Norman C. Stolzoff (2000).

experienced musician. Anthropology did not bring me to music; music brought me to anthropology. My research begins with taking for granted the fact that I can play. Learning to play was not a process that started when the research began, but my skill did grow during my investigation.

Having crossed the barrier of learning to be fluent in music many years ago, I will explore some questions that most anthropologists cannot. What may we learn about a population by examining how the production of popular culture intersects the lives of the people? What can the musical genre known as Salsa tell us about working-class Puerto Ricans? What does the complex marketplace of Latin popular music reveal about Latinos in the United States? These are the broadest questions I ask.

This is a study of local performance networks of Salsa in Newark, New Jersey, in the near-by town of Belleville, NJ, and in Hudson County, NJ. These places are close to New York City and consequently the musicians I worked with have networks that extend into city. I document the various places where Salsa intersects people's daily lives and examine how Salsa shapes these lives. This research documents a working-class population through its expressive culture. A number of issues, therefore, must be considered.

### **Why Study Salsa at the Local Level?**

Numerous books and papers have been written on Salsa. Many are history books aimed primarily at a general audience. Some are ethnomusicological works on Caribbean music in New York (Manuel, 1995), while others are studies that textually analyze salsa lyrics (Aparicio 1998). Some studies examine various recording companies, even local recording industries (Waxer 2002). Research, focusing on Salsa in Colombia (Roman-Velazquez, 2002) and Japan

(Hosokawa, 2002), examines this genre as a worldwide phenomenon. All of these studies tend to focus on well-known performers and compositions. But such well-known performers and pieces are exceptions: the extremely talented and/or the lucky ones.

In 1968 sociologist Frank Kofsky described the political-economic structure built around the performance of jazz music. In this work, he devised a scheme representing the levels in which different musicians influenced the performance of Jazz: 1) famous musicians who influenced the performance of Jazz directly<sup>2</sup>; 2) famous musicians who did not influence how jazz was performed<sup>3</sup>; and 3) the “rank and file,” the unknowns, who imitated the first level and who in turn spread the performance styles of jazz and reproduced the cultural elements imparted by jazz throughout networks at the local level (Kofsky, 1968, pp. 18-22). Salsa, too, follows this schema as, I suspect, do most forms of popular music.

Through my years as a jazz musician and *salsero*<sup>4</sup>, I have noticed something that Kofsky omits: The unknowns will significantly outnumber those who become famous. In their role as “rank and file,” the unknowns actually do more to reproduce cultural practices embedded in performance than the famous. By engaging in the local production of Salsa and experiencing how Salsa intersects the daily lives of musicians without the privilege of fame we see how the rank and file defines Salsa.

Salsa is something beyond the readily accessible representations and institutions of

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2 By Kofsky’s account, these musicians are nearly all African-American. This long list includes names such as Coltrane, Parker, Davis, Gillespie, Monk, Blakey, Armstrong, and Fitzgerald. The list of white exceptions—Bill Evans, Charlie Haden, Lenny Tristano—is relatively short.

3 These performers are overwhelmingly white: Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller, and Phil Woods. Their “whiteness” is not a statement on their abilities or quality.

4 Refer to the glossary for a definition of all musical and Latin terms. These terms will be italicized the first time they are used.

Latinos. Telemundo or Univision, the two most prominent Spanish language television stations in the United States, does not define Salsa. It is not RMM or Fania, two of the best-known recording labels of Salsa, or the mansions and fluid capital of the successful. Salsa is also urban, working class, and Latino. Its most prominent performers and consumers are overwhelmingly Puerto Rican. Salsa is nightclubs that smell of cigarettes and beer. It is performances that may begin at midnight and end at four in the morning. It is long hours of rehearsal and hanging out. Salsa is men who play music because they love it and who struggle to earn enough money to survive in the highly complicated world within and surrounding New York City. It is the women who both support these men and consume the music as an affirmation of their own identity. Salsa is also men and women who simply like to dance.

The objective of studying Salsa in Essex County, NJ, in Newark and nearby Belleville, and in Hudson County, NJ, is simple: to study popular culture from the bottom up. While this approach is commonplace in many ethnographic studies, it is absent from the anthropological discourse on music.

### **Salsa as Work**

In order to consider Salsa as a window into the lives of urban Latinos, we must first move away from the idea that Salsa is simply entertainment or that it is text contained solely on CDs, record albums, and printed lyric sheets. Admittedly, the latter perspective is much less dismissive than the former, but both miss a crucial element of Salsa: The performance of Salsa is an employment opportunity. Salsa is a source of work in the urban job market. To view Salsa as nothing more than entertainment undermines the income generated from Salsa and consequently devalues the labor involved in its production. To view Salsa as a text also undervalues the labor

dedicated to creating this music. Beyond this, it also strips Salsa of its integration into people's daily lives. The production of Salsa facilitates other kinds of non-musical relationships among its performers and supporters. The work that Salsa provides can mediate and help redefine potentially detrimental cultural habits, such as *machismo*.

To understand how Salsa interacts with daily life, I consider Salsa as work in the sense that it is a profession providing both a wage and a source of identity. It is a prestigious job potentially elevating the local status of any particular performer beyond that of his class position or ethnic standing. The income generated from Salsa can be used in a variety of ways, and I examine these within the context of my research. Few salseros among the rank and file, however, derive their income solely from the performance of Salsa. The income is secondary and supplemental but essential.

The income generated from the performance of Salsa makes it an aspect of the informal economy. The income is generated outside the realm of any regulating institution and is largely "cash only." Some salseros use their money to support leisure behaviors such as drinking and drug use. Others circulate the money further into the informal economy to use the cash to pay for car repairs or construction on their homes. However, while the income is generated within the informal economy, it may then be transferred to the formal economy. The supplemental money earned through performance sometimes buys groceries or pays an insurance bill.

Many of the musicians with whom I have worked are working-class, as are the neighborhoods in which they live. The Salsero is more likely to be a cook, day laborer, fireman, truck driver, or schoolteachers than a lawyer, doctor, or college professor. Some musicians in my research are the sons of doctors and lawyers. However, these more professional jobs were held in

Latin America and not in the United States, illuminating the working class nature of Salsa in the US.

In this research, I explored the various kinds of employment the musicians found in conjunction with their work as salsa musicians. Their jobs tended to be mundane and diverse. Salseros are classically working-class. One profession, however, appears more often than others: education. In my study, many of the men work as music educators; others work as elementary schoolteachers. While teaching provides ample and predictable days off which accommodate a performance schedule, the skills that the men develop as entertainers also tend to make them better teachers. These schoolteachers come from working-class backgrounds, but they themselves have entered the middle class through their musical skills. These men often engage in the reproduction of Puerto Rican and Latino culture for localized audiences in the evening, while these same men teach children during the day.

In the following pages I examine the idea of class mobility among salsa musicians. In chapter 7, we see educators have obtained a college education and thus gain status beyond those without degrees. This immediately assists in their class mobility. Mobility is also achieved through consumption, with home ownership outside of Newark as a strong marker of this mobility. An unexpected finding I encountered was that the musicians with families—wives and children—show a greater propensity for social mobility than those without families. It appears as if the men without families are not as motivated to improve the quality of their day jobs because they are not as responsible for providing for a family. While often still needing to hold a day job, the men without families make due without higher paying jobs and the responsibility that comes with them. The lack of a demanding day job and even of a family, however, makes these

musicians available for more performances at the local level, which inspires their hopes of developing careers to national and international levels.

In order to understand Salsa as work, I examine where Salsa is performed. Salseros operate within a variety of performance spaces. I detail these at length in my research. Performance is essential to maintain organized salsa bands. Some of these performance spaces are typical weddings, clubs, and dances while others are more specialized. It is here that work of performance intersects with the reproduction of culture and ethnic identity.

One interesting aspect of Salsa is its use in political functions. Politicians use Salsa as a campaign tool and to generate associations of themselves with the people in the local neighborhood. Salsa can also be used to rally support for a community issue. Salsa reinforces the Latin-ness of a political issue or politician by its performance at an event related to either.

Another important aspect of performance discussed in chapter 9 is how the musicians and the audience interact. Performance is where the actual experience of Salsa occurs for non-musicians. The audience places requirements on the band that affect how the cultural meanings are reproduced. A feedback loop occurs between band and audience. This aids in the recreation of Salsa from performance to performance. The feedback will also affect how other ethnically defined forms of Latin popular music appear alongside Salsa. In turn, this says much about how different Latin ethnicities are able to share space with each other.

### **Ethnic Identity**

As we will see, Salsa is not simply “Latin music.” Its ethnicity is often more specific. It is strongly associated with two Latino ethnicities in the general New York City area: Puerto Ricans and Cubans. Salsa is in direct continuity with musical traditions derived from both

Puerto Rico and Cuba throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I briefly explore this continuity, its history and development, in my first chapter. Cubans held a more prominent role in popular culture than Puerto Ricans prior to the Cuban Revolution in 1959, and some argue that Salsa is far more Cuban than it is Puerto Rican. In its folkloric roots, Salsa may be more a Cuban music, but Puerto Ricans have developed and produced Salsa far more than any other Latino group. While many other Latinos and non-Latinos consume Salsa, Puerto Ricans have provided Salsa with its strongest and most continuous support both as musicians and audience.

Salsa musicians and dancers are from a variety of ethnicities at the local level: Cubans, Panamanians, Colombians, and Peruvians all perform Salsa. White and black Anglophone Americans perform Salsa. Salsa will not be the primary music at a specifically Mexican or Colombian event, although it may be the primary music at a specifically Cuban event. These Cuban-community events are limited to the geographic areas of Miami in Florida and Hudson County in NJ. More than likely, a Cuban event in Hudson County will involve Salsa or salsa-like music such as *Timba* from Cuba. However, Salsa is associated most with Puerto Ricans.

Salsa as an expression of Puerto Rican ethnicity is a theme woven throughout my research. Its contested role as a Cuban music is a secondary theme as well. In this research, I focus primarily on two Puerto Rican bandleaders and their overlapping networks in and around Newark, NJ. I also include another “sometimes bandleader” of Cuban ethnicity from North Bergen in Hudson County. While my focus is on the networks in Newark, the Cuban musicians in Hudson County provide a source of competing views on Salsa and Latin popular culture.

The geographic demography of Latinos in New Jersey often illuminates the ethnic segregation of various Latino groups. Some neighborhoods are more Dominican or Colombian

than Puerto Rican, and there one will find more venues for *Merengue* or *Cumbia*—popular music from the Dominican Republic and Colombia respectively—than those for Salsa. Often there will be overlap in neighborhoods. Currently most Latino neighborhoods throughout New Jersey are experiencing a rise in Mexican immigrants and consequently a rise in venues for Mexican music.

Salsa music and its performance have a direct role in the everyday reproduction of Puerto Rican and Latino culture as well as ethnic identity. To explore this idea, I examine the aspects of rehearsing Salsa and of actually performing it. Most bands tend to rehearse far more than they perform. They do this until they gain enough performance opportunities to make frequent rehearsing redundant. In rehearsal, decisions are made as to precisely what salsa songs are selected and how they are performed. As the rank-and-file's role is to spread the work of the innovators and the cultural codes contained within the music, these practices are refined and disseminated through rehearsal and performance. Choices, however, are made about performance in the rehearsal and, consequently, these decisions affect *how* and *what* aspects of “Puerto Rican-ness” and “Latino-ness” are passed on to the audience.

### **Gender, Family, and Kinship**

Another major theme in my research concerns the ways in which Salsa is gendered. The performers are overwhelmingly men. Women are largely absent from the networks of performers for a variety of reasons. There are social norms that frown upon the same familiar interactions between unrelated men and women that we find common among unrelated men. The absence of women from the networks also stems from the ways in which teenage women are dissuaded from hanging around with groups of teenage men—specifically the kinds of activities teenage musicians engage in when learning to play. Therefore, young women do not get the opportunity

early in life to establish many fictive kin relationships with other musicians, who are the basis for any performer's musical networks.

Women performers often have more limited roles than men. Women are more likely to be singers than trombone players. Another role, which objectifies the women, is dancing alongside the band. However, women are able to take on a variety of different roles in the production of Salsa and are involved significantly in the journalistic roles surrounding the music, writing for magazines, and working in forms of promotion and in management.

Salsa is a source of work that exists in public space. Performance of Salsa, therefore, allows men to dominate public space and engage in work activities not readily open to women. Performance becomes a way for men to express themselves and to remain the dominant gender. In this way, they may act out machismo in a manner which is potentially unthreatening to women.

Machismo is more than simply the domination of women by men; rather, it is a man's display of power and authority over other men. Dominating women is the traditional way of expressing this ideal. Performance of Salsa allows men to display their musical skill and to embrace the prestige that comes from performing. With this latent role as a cultural reproducer, male prestige is further enhanced and respected. The performers are authorities on cultural knowledge that has direct ties to Puerto Rico or Cuba or elsewhere in Latin America. This is cultural knowledge usually unknown—or poorly known—to non-Latinos.

Within the context of a performance group, the men tend to treat one another as equals. Certainly some men are more experienced or skilled than others in a group. In this situation, the men are more likely to help one another rather than try and flaunt their advanced skill or

knowledge. This camaraderie generates feelings of fictive kinship among the men. Networks emerge that cross generational lines, and the men eventually create something of a support network for each other where advice can be given to younger men from the older generation and vice versa.

Musicians are organized into networks that revolve either around these feelings of fictive kin or around professional arrangements guided by contractual obligations. An important aspect of Salsa is how these networks form and whom they exclude. Absent from most familial networks are women and African-Americans. This has gendered and racial consequences.

Gender does not exist in isolation. Gender is embedded in family life and it is in families that gender practices are reinforced and passed down from one generation to the next. The family is often the strongest motivating force in the salsero's drive towards social mobility. My research explores how family affects the salseros' individual lives and their general attitudes towards women. It also examines how the salseros' lives affect their families and relationships. Performance and its role in acting out a redefined machismo mediate feelings of helplessness and anomie that working-class men may encounter. Playing Salsa is a means by which the men are able to validate their lives.

### **Methodology**

My main method of research was participant-observation as I rehearsed and worked with salsa bands. I informed the band members of my research and then continued to act like a pianist in a salsa band. I was a salsero for my research.

I actively rehearsed and performed with two bandleaders: Juan Pedro and David. The two bands provided a steady flow of different musicians needed to attend rehearsals or to

participate in performances. With a third bandleader—Miguel—I spent time discussing our experiences in the 1990s performing Salsa together. Overlap existed among the musicians in these bands as it was common for musicians to work with multiple bandleaders. Many performers who had worked with Juan Pedro also worked with Miguel.

Participating in salsa bands went beyond rehearsing and performing. It also meant becoming a part of the bandleaders' everyday life. Together, we shared the ordinary activities of friends and family: eating and drinking, celebrating success and supporting people through difficult times. The bonds of friendship existed prior to my research with the bandleaders, but I began to participate in the deeper connections came later through the research.

The bandleaders provided access to three different networks of musicians although overlap in these networks occurred. In total, I spoke to 67 musicians from three networks. In many cases, the interviewing was informal. We had conversations during rehearsals and performances and during the time spent simply hanging out. The bandleaders themselves were subject to frequent interviews and members of Miguel's network, in particular, were interviewed in order to clarify events and stories I had heard prior to the research.

Most musicians would themselves instigate conversations with me about how to play Salsa. They would tell me which pianists I should model myself after, or they would tell me stories from the history of Salsa. I did not engage in actively studying how to play Salsa with anyone. While I told people I was writing about the lives of Puerto Ricans in Newark through Salsa, this often seemed to be interpreted as if I were writing a history book on Salsa. Ethnography was a more foreign concept, while a book about music made more sense to musicians. However, the discussions of how to play salsa and the history of the music told to me

by the musicians illuminated an interesting take on the development of salsa. The informal oral history of salsa emphasizes performers and patterns not always recognized with equal weight in salsa's official documented history. This oral history is reflected in my own historical description of salsa in chapter two.

My association with Puerto Ricans and Latin music began when I was quite young. Growing up as a child in suburban New Jersey, my best friend's family was from Puerto Rico and Spain. I first experienced becoming fictive kin to Latinos when I was five years old. Later in life, in my early twenties when I was a music student in the Jazz Studies program at William Paterson University in Wayne, NJ, I took lessons in how to play Latin piano from the legendary composer, arranger, and pianist, Chico Mendoza. I was a member of the school's "Latin Jazz Ensemble" and we won awards and competitions and were given the opportunity for some high profile performances including one at the now defunct "Village Gate" in Manhattan. I began playing Salsa, Cumbia and Merengue professionally in 1990 when I was twenty-three. When I began my doctoral research at the CUNY graduate center, I continued to play Latin Jazz frequently and became a regular performer with percussionist Raphael Cruz. I appeared on Raphael's 2005 Grammy nominated CD, "Be-Bop Timba," which included a composition I wrote. My musical career brought me to my research with a skill set that allowed me to bypass the process of learning to play Salsa.

Finally, in order to keep up in conversations with the performers and to better understand the context of my research, I listened to music and I read the many history books on Salsa. The norm for musicians is to refer to past recordings and performers in conversations. The onus was on me to be familiar with the recordings of Héctor Lavoe, Willie Colón, Tito Rodriguez, Marc

Anthony, and others.

## Organization

Beginning with a brief review of the history of Salsa, I explore how the music became identified almost exclusively with Puerto Ricans. I place Salsa in continuity with several trends in Latin popular music that begin early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I also use this chapter to discuss changes in the Latin American population of the United States and how it affects Salsa and Latin popular music. Like playing Salsa, this was not a new experience for me, but became more in depth during my investigation.

Chapters three through six deal with the everyday aspects of the lives of the salseros. Chapter three describes the neighborhoods where I conduct my research and the three bandleaders my research mainly involves: Juan Pedro, Miguel and David. Chapter four engages the political economy of Salsa and discusses how it fits into the salseros' individual economic situations and into the local informal economy. Chapter five explores the kinds of networks that organize the salseros. This allows for exploration into the relationships between the men and the ways in which some are excluded from the networks of Salsa. Chapter six examines family relationships and some gender issues. Chapter seven engages a discussion of social mobility and relates this process to the issues of family.

Chapters eight and nine work together to discuss the presentation of Salsa. Chapter eight engages the idea of rehearsing Salsa while chapter nine deals with its actual performance. These chapters are important for the discussion of the reproduction of Puerto Rican culture. Chapter eight also further engages relationships between the men while chapter nine involves the relationship between the performers and the audience.

Finally I engage the current status of the music industry and its reproduction of Latino culture. Salsa has waned in popularity in the music industry, but it continues to thrive at the local level. Ethnic issues emerge here as the Latin music industry has moved from New York City to Miami, which has the symbolic effect of moving Salsa from the hands of Puerto Ricans (in New York) to the hands of Cubans (in Miami). This idea is a reflection of the musicians on the ground. However, the move has reawakened old debate: Is Salsa Puerto Rican or Cuban? Or is it simply from New York City?

## **Chapter 2**

### **What is Salsa?**

What is Salsa? Salsa is a post-World War II genre of popular music contemporaneous with Rock and Roll, Hip-Hop, Country Western, and virtually any other type of contemporary popular music. Like the other genres, Salsa has its roots in traditions that pre-date World War II. This music is also a form of Puerto Rican and Latino expressive culture. It is Puerto Rican in the same way that Hip-Hop is African-American: Both are closely associated with these respective groups but are in no way limited to them. Salsa may be more Cuban than Puerto Rican in its folkloric roots. As we shall see, the performers of Salsa are overwhelmingly Puerto Rican and not Cuban. The audience that most significantly supports Salsa is Puerto Rican, at least among working-class Latinos and at the local level.

A major portion of the musicological history of Salsa can be traced back to peoples of the African Diaspora; nevertheless, Salsa follows a branch different from other modern genres of popular music. We can trace a musical history of Hip-Hop or Rock and Roll to the American Jazz musical tradition, but these musical styles are clearly separate from their ancestor. Salsa is more stable in its musical continuity and perhaps it's better to consider Salsa historically in comparison to Jazz than to Hip-Hop. When Jazz first emerged, so did Latin popular music in the United States. While Jazz eventually diverged from dance music, *Rhumba* and *Mambo*—early forms of Latin popular music prominent in New York City, Puerto Rico, and Cuba—developed through the generations to become Salsa. Salsa never ceased to be dance music and never lost local community support. Trends in Latin popular music change through time. Unlike much North American popular music, rhythms and styles in Latin music tend to be added to popular music repertoire, not to replace older styles. Salsa is in many ways the modern version of older musical styles and, therefore, has remained as a dance music and relevant to the majority of its supporters through the decades. Even though Latin music has now entered the great concert halls with Jazz, Salsa remains the Puerto Rican dance music. Jazz has not remained a working-class African-American dance music.

One reason for the loss of the local level of support for Jazz is that the African-American community had been larger than Latinos in the US for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This has allowed for more regional variation of musical forms. African-American music is sung in English, not Spanish, so it is consumed at a much higher rate and by a wider variety of groups, some of whom have claimed African-American music and reinterpreted it, while others have contributed to it. Time and changing tastes, therefore, have eroded working-class support for Jazz.

Salsa has not been reinterpreted to the same extent as Jazz, R&B, or Blues. Salsa is a current reinterpretation of the same rhythmic approaches as older Puerto Rican and Cuban music, which, in turn, makes Salsa's musical lineage complex. Within this lineage, we can begin to understand where Salsa comes from and why it has survived for so long.

In this opening chapter, I want to explore three issues. First, I want to provide the historical musicological context of the emergence of Salsa. Second, I want to explore how Salsa emerged in association with Puerto Ricans. The role of Cubans in Latin popular music and the role of pan-Latinoism or *Latinidad* are connected to this association. And third, I want to review the top tier of Salsa performers who influence how the music is played. There are several books on the history of Latin music available (Boggs, 1992; Fernández, 2002; Gerald, 1998 ; Leymarie, 2002; Roberts, 1979; Steward, 1999), but this chapter does not revisit all of this history. My research is a study focusing neither on the history of Salsa nor its development; rather this study uses Salsa as a vehicle to examine Puerto Rican communities in northern New Jersey. However, I present a limited history to contextualize the ethnographic information that follows this chapter. The history presented here is limited.

Any discussion of Salsa immediately raises the question: Is Salsa Cuban or Puerto Rican music? One may be inclined to say that it is both. One also may be inclined to say that it is pan-Latino music. It is also Cuban. It is also Puerto Rican. These statements, however, ignore Salsa's American-Jewish connections. Likewise, there are Japanese salsa bands, an extensive Salsa industry in Colombia, African groups who play Salsa, and internationally famous salsa stars from the Dominican Republic and Panama. Trying to define Salsa ethnically is much like peeling an onion. Layers upon layers can be removed, but in the end you wind up with nothing of

significance.

Salsa did not really exist before 1966 when Fania Records released recordings that would be known as Salsa. Apparently, the word comes into common usage in the 1970s, though it certainly appears in songs in the 1930s and 1950s (Salazar, 2002, pp. 255-259). As Max Salazar has suggested, “Salsa” is similar in use to the word *azucar* (meaning “sugar” and implying “sweet”) in a musical context (2002, p.256): A word musicians shout out when something musical sounds particularly good to them. To the ears and in most of the history books, Salsa begins in 1966 with Fania Records, and the first major wave of its popularity began in the 1970s.

When Salsa hit its first peak in the early 1970s, many of its successes and innovations came from Fania Records, a record label based in New York City. Mostly Puerto Ricans from New York performed this music. A number of my Cuban informants have stated that Salsa is simply an older style of Cuban music known as *Son*. Although this is debated academically, Susan Steward (1999, p.24) and Jorge Duany (2002, pp.80-83) suggest that Salsa is derived from *Son*, while ethnomusicologist Marisol Berrios-Miranda clearly describes how Salsa qualifies as its own unique genre (2002, pp.23-45). Salsa does not emerge until after the establishment of the US embargo on Cuba, which effectively cuts off the frequent transfer of information between Cuba and the United States for two or more decades. This fact is often lost in the discourse surrounding Salsa. As stated before, the majority of the performers of Salsa have been Puerto Rican, but there have been notable exceptions. The audience that has provided the greatest and longest lasting support for Salsa has been the Puerto Rican community both on the Island and in the United States. Here, too, there are many exceptions. In the United States, the Puerto Rican community has principally been found in the New York City area.

As a living art form, salsa is supported by multiple generations who continuously produce new salsa recordings and who consume Salsa along with other forms of Latin popular music. Its contested identity in some ways has a stronger relationship to the intra-Latino identity politics of the late 1990s and early 2000s than to situations experienced in 1966 or 1973. The claims to ethnic ownership of Salsa sometimes have to do with class issues. Salsa has not lost the support among the Puerto Rican working class, and it remains vital today<sup>5</sup>.

But where does Salsa come from? And how did it come to gain its strong association with Puerto Ricans and New York City? The best way to answer these questions is by looking at the Puerto Rican, Cuban, and general Latino community of the greater New York City area. This is where my narrative begins.

### **Latin Popular Music in New York City**

The Spanish-American War, or The Spanish-American-Cuban War as it is sometimes called, in 1898 essentially gave the United States de facto authority over Puerto Rico and significant political-economic influence over Cuba (Pérez, 1986; Ruiz, 1968, pp.23-25). This event was the first great flexing of US muscle claimed in the Monroe Doctrine<sup>6</sup>. Once Puerto Rico was established as a commonwealth of the United States in 1917, Puerto Ricans became citizens of the United States. Due to their proximity to the United States and the relative ease of migration between the US and the Caribbean, both Cubans and Puerto Ricans began moving to the United States. Cubans had been in New York for quite some time, even Jose Marti, poet, writer, and

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5 In contrast, American Jazz has largely lost its working-class African-American support. Consequently, it has become much more of a museum music with frequent performances at venues like Lincoln Center. While jazz musicians, such as Wynton Marsalis, continue to write and perform new music, few innovations in Jazz occur and its meaning as a source of identity has fallen to the wayside. Even the current jazz innovators such as Casandra Wilson, Steve Coleman, and Kenny Werner perform for middle-class audiences and often in concert halls. The “chitlin’ circuit” is gone.

6 First established on December 2, 1823, the Monroe doctrine declared that the European powers were not to further colonize the Americas. Any attempt would be viewed as an act of aggression against the United States.

leader of the Cuban Independence Movement, lived here in exile in the 1880s. Cubans also moved into Miami in small numbers, but the early migrants to Miami were wealthier Cubans establishing US-based businesses to work in conjunction with their Cuban-based offices (Portes & Stepick, 1993, pp.93-96). As Cuban and Puerto Rican migrants often came to the US for employment' the industrial Northeast of the United States provided more potential work than the resort areas of Miami.

In the earliest decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Cuban and Puerto Rican populations were relatively small. Nevertheless radio was promoting, changing, and creating a body of popular culture through music that was both a source of ethnic identity and a means of connection to home countries and islands for workers far from their families. As Ruth Glasser documented, numerous songs emerged in the 1930s that celebrated Puerto Rico, such as *Preciosa*, which became an anthem of longing for the home island. The bands performing these songs in New York City were actually comprised of both Cubans and Puerto Ricans. The sharing of music between Puerto Ricans and Cubans began a long time ago and was in no way limited to Puerto Ricans learning to play Cuban music (Glasser, 1995, pp.76-78,86,94-96).

At the same time, developments in Cuba were occurring in which the Afro-Cuban population assumed a more prominent role in the generation of music. Cuba had a strong musical tradition dating into the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Cuban composers of classical music, like Brazilian and Argentine composers, produced a large body of work that required local orchestras. Afro-Cubans were fully involved in performing legitimate music by the 1830s (Moore, 1997, pp.18-20). Those who gained the technical proficiency to play in an orchestral setting were more likely than their European counterparts to be exposed to Afro-Cuban folkloric practices celebrating

drumming. This rhythmic complexity influenced Puerto Rican music, which had developed its own African-derived, folkloric practices, known as *Plena* and *Bomba*.

The African influence on popular music is a major historical piece in the development of popular music throughout the Americas. During the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, French tourists visiting Rio de Janeiro celebrated the performances of Afro-Brazilians, leading to the development of the modern *Samba* (Vianna, 1999, pp.67-76). The family of one of the two original jazz innovators, Jelly Roll Morton<sup>7</sup>, came from Haiti<sup>8</sup>. The development of popular music in the Americas parallels the acceptance of Afro-American and African diasporic cultural practices and their influence.

The influence of the Latin American musical ideas was spread through the new mass media of the time. In the early years of mass radio, US audiences consumed all sorts of Latin music: Carmen Miranda, Xavier Cugat, Mario Bauza, and Machito. American composers looked to the Latin nations as a source of folkloric inspiration. During the 1930s, the focus was on the perceived centers of music in Latin America: Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, and Cuba<sup>9</sup>. These areas were distinct, but as a result of early forms of marketing and labeling, Puerto Rican music was subsumed into the Cuban traditions. By the 1940s, Cuban music became fashionable in popular music and Anglo stars, such as Glenn Miller, Harry James, and Benny Goodman, began performing Cuban influenced compositions.

The influence of music from the Spanish Caribbean on American Jazz was pronounced as

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<sup>7</sup> The other is Louis Armstrong, of course.

<sup>8</sup> The Haitian influence on the emergence of Jazz is an under-investigated area of research.

<sup>9</sup> Roberts details the Tango craze in the US during the 1920s (44-60)..

well. Duke Ellington wrote a number of compositions around Latin rhythms, and some of the early members of his band were Puerto Rican (Juan Tzol), not Cuban. The innovators of the bebop styles, Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, had both performed in jazz orchestras intent on playing the Latin music of Bauza and Machito. When Dizzy Gillespie started his own orchestra in the late 1940s, he included the Cuban percussionist Chano Pozzo and wrote songs around Cuban rhythmic styles, such as the well-known compositions “Manteca” and “A Night in Tunisia” (Roberts, 1979, pp.139-140).

In the 1950s, Cuban music reached the forefront of popular music and popular culture. The Jewish resort area of the Catskill Mountains in New York State frequently brought in mambo groups to perform<sup>10</sup>. Now with a steady source of relatively lucrative work, the mambo groups were not limited to Cuban bands. Just as in the 1930s, although the bands were labeled as Cuban, the performers might have been Puerto Rican, even Anglo-Americans, and/or often Jewish.

Moreover, faces of Latinos appeared on television: the Cuban gardener on Father Knows Best and, of course, one of the most celebrated television stars, Desi Arnez on I Love Lucy. On the program, Arnez often performed with his orchestra. The Mambo and *Boleros* he played were simply the popular music of the time. “Cuban” became synonymous for “Latino” in the United States, largely because of hearing the music. Identified as “Cuban,” “Spanish,” or “Latin” (Roberts, 1979, p.91), Cuban music assumed a prominent role in several Broadway shows. Guys and Dolls features a scene where the main characters fly down to Cuba so that, on a bet, the male

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<sup>10</sup> This is poorly documented in the maligned, though sometimes celebrated, movie, Dirty Dancing. The movie tried to tell the story of the mambo groups in the Catskills. The film was maligned because the main character, a dance instructor, was played by Anglo-American Patrick Swaze, not by a Latino.

lead can woo the female lead. Cuba also provided several resort areas that were accessible from the United States where people could hear the music in its “authentic” setting. While the Cubans never emerged as a large population in the United States, the Puerto Rican population grew to over a million.

Prior to the 1957 production of West Side Story, there were few references to Puerto Ricans in popular culture. The references to the Spanish Caribbean were Cuban. Nevertheless as new music was being made in Cuba, the same was going on in Puerto Rico. The similar colonial histories and the large, African-descended populations helped to maintain similarities in the popular culture of the two islands. Mambo might have been created in Cuba, but Puerto Ricans made it their own music. While the USA and Cuba were on friendly terms through the 1940s and the better part of the 1950s, it was still easier for Puerto Ricans to come to the United States, because they were American citizens. Between 1940 and 1960, one million Puerto Ricans came to the mainland US (Rodriguez 1989:3-4), while Cubans did not immigrate in significant numbers until after Castro seized power in 1959.

After 1959, Cubans fell out of favor with the American public. “Ricky,” Desi Arnez from *I Love Lucy*, was referred to as Cuban less and less, only to have his specific ethnicity subsumed into “Latino” by the ending of the show in 1960<sup>11</sup>. Appearing before the Cuban Revolution, Leonard Bernstein’s *West Side Story* told a different tale: Urban Latinos in New York were not Cuban but Puerto Rican. The change was fast and by the early 1960s, the face of Latinos in the northeastern United States became Puerto Rican, not Cuban.

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<sup>11</sup> The *I Love Lucy* show first appeared on October 15, 1951, and went off the air on May 6, 1957. The characters continued in *The Lucy-Desi Comedy Hour*, which produced eleven episodes between November 6, 1957 and April 1, 1960. The characters actually do travel to Havana in 1957.

## Latin Popular Music After the Cuban Revolution

By the early 1960s, the glamour of all things Cuban had passed, but a new form of identity was surfacing. Puerto Ricans and other Latinos began to recognize their shared experience growing up in the urban United States (Manuel, 1995, p.162). There was a new generation of Latinos and Puerto Ricans, many of whom were born in or experienced their formative years in the States. This younger generation of Latino musicians was as accustomed to “urban street life” as they were to traditional Latino culture. The disruption caused by the closing of the doors to Cuba created opportunities for new approaches to music.

As a result, the prominence of *charanga* and *pachanga*<sup>12</sup> bands emerged with sounds similar to both Mambo and Salsa. *Rhumba*, *Cha Cha*, and *Son* are words describing specific rhythms. Charanga is defined more through its instrumentation. Having smaller groups than the big bands of the 1940s and 50s, the charanga groups included violin in their instrumentation (Roberts, 1979, p.163). With this style, we get early influential groups led by Charlie Palmieri and, soon after, by his brother Eddie. These charanga groups were playing mambo rhythms and songs from Puerto Rico. The music was no longer defined in Cuban terms. Rumor has it that when legendary Eddie Palmieri recorded an album called *Mozambique*, his record company asked him to stop recording communist music. Mozambique is a rhythm from Cuba and Palmieri built his recording around this rhythm. Palmieri had gone against the common practice and labeled the music as Cuban.

Since the generation of Puerto Ricans of the late 1950s and 1960s has come of age in the United States, a direct connection to urban life exists (Flores, 2000, p.86). The mixture of North

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<sup>12</sup> Pachanga is less defined than Charanga. Largely, it is Charanga played the way Johnny Pacheco chose to play it.

American urban street life and traditional Latino practices led to new approaches including the music known as *Boogaloo*. The younger Latino musicians in the 1960s were often well acquainted with African-American culture and music. The white flight from the urban areas of the USA did not leave only the African-American community in the cities; it also left the growing Puerto Rican and other Latino populations there as well. Social contact between African-American and Latinos in some areas was commonplace. As African-American music began to grow into the mainstream, the younger Puerto Rican musicians consumed this music with their own.

Juan Flores documents the boogaloo movement well. Boogaloo included compositions that were minor “crossover” hits<sup>13</sup> (2000, pp. 79-112). “El Watusi” and “Tequila” are among the well-known boogaloo hits, but there were many others, including recordings by Eddie Palmeri (“Azucar”), Joe Cuba (“Bang Bang”) and Pete Rodriguez (“I Like It Like That”). Some of the boogaloo movement included Latino musicians recording African-American compositions, notably with Mongo Santamaria and his recording of the Herbie Hancock song “Watermelon Man.” “Bang Bang” and “Watermelon Man” are still played by DJs in some African-American jazz clubs. “I like It Like That” was re-recorded in the 1990s. It is a well-known song from the Latin Pop Explosion and is still used in commercials in 2005 and 2006. Ray Baretto compositions within this style are sources for hip-hop sampling, so are the Herbie Hancock compositions like “Cantaloupe Island,” which might be called Boogaloo in reverse: an African-American musician playing the style, incorporating Latin elements. It should come as no surprise that the period of greatest crossover, the Latin Pop Explosion of the late 1990s, embraced

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<sup>13</sup> A crossover hit is a hit song that appeals to more than one marketing group. In my context, it would be a song that appeals to the Latino community and the Black community and/or the Anglo-American community.

Boogaloo, the earlier crossover success.

Reactions to Boogaloo were mixed among Latino musicians at the time. Many hated it (Roberts, 1979, p.168; Flores, 2000, pp.107-108). The reasons for disliking this music seemed to be based around the idea that it wasn't purely Latin. Songs were often in English rather than in Spanish. Johnny Pacheco, the Dominican-born flautist and founder of Fania records, is rumored to have said that the piano was uninteresting, with the playing of the same part repeatedly.

Contemporary musicians reference Charanga more. Charanga bands still exist. Eddie Palmieri frequently has at least one violin player in his band. Boogaloo bands do not exist today, but I have seen and performed with salsa bands that include “To be with You”—one of the well-loved boogaloo hits (Flores, 2000, p.89)—in their repertoire<sup>14</sup>. Charanga bands, however, are generally larger than boogaloo bands, and a larger band means more musicians to pay. Thus, these bands are economically impractical or at least difficult to maintain.

Roberts describes the ways in which Latin music and Jazz interact throughout the 1960s (1979, pp.160-165). Until the great change in Jazz to embrace electronic instruments, many jazz musicians recorded numerous Latin-influenced compositions. Nearly every Blue Note recording from the 1960s included a Latin-influenced tune. Some of these were *Bossa nova* influenced but most were a mixture of Bossa and Boogaloo. As my former piano teacher, Jazz pianist and educator Harold Mabern, once told a class in the late 1980s: “Give Alfred Lion<sup>15</sup> something he could shake his ass to, and he'd let you record anything else you wanted.” The jazz influence is

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<sup>14</sup> I have also seen and performed with Latin jazz groups that include Boogaloo in their repertoire. My own experience has been that these have been predominantly non-Latino groups, but this was not a focus of study during my research.

<sup>15</sup> Alfred Lion was the head of Blue Note Records from its inception in 1939 until his death in 1987.

very important to the development of Salsa. While George Shearing and Cal Tjader were playing jazz compositions frequently called Mambo, Tjader's 1964 "Soul Sauce" was an early reference to "Salsa." These musicians are not Latinos playing Jazz; instead, they are African-Americans and Anglo-Americans. However, some of the younger Latino musicians who were playing Boogaloo and listening to Motown were also listening to Jazz.

### **Fania and the Golden age of Salsa**

One of the challenges for Latino popular music at this time was securing an outlet for recordings. In the 1950s, RCA records had operations headquartered in Cuba; it closed down these offices after 1959 (Manuel, 1991, p.160). Many independent record labels appeared in the 1960s to record and promote Latin music, but none really had the influence or the capital to influence any particular trends. Willie Bobo, Mongo Santamaria, Tito Puente, La Lupe, Ray Barretto, and Eddie Palmieri were all recording on the labels that distributed jazz recordings (Riverside and Prestige, for example) or on small labels specializing in Latin music (Tico). Other recording labels appeared and disappeared quickly. Johnny Pacheco started his own record company in 1964 to promote his music and that of his friends. Even though this record label was problematic during its history, it would go on to change Latin popular music internationally in the coming years. This was Fania Records.

Johnny Pacheco started Fania Records in 1964, and he sold recordings out of the trunk of his car. Both Pacheco and an Italian-American lawyer by the name of Jerry Masucci ran the label. People claim—disputed by Max Salazar as noted above—that by 1966 Pacheco and Masucci had chosen a word to market their music: "Salsa." No music formally known as Salsa had existed before 1966. The music was not a dramatic departure from Charanga or Mambo. A

listener in 2006 hearing Charlie Palmieri recordings from 1961 might want to refer to that music as Salsa, but the referent was not used until later in the decade.

In the earliest years of Fania, the label was recording New York Latin bands. Mostly musicians of Puerto Rican ancestry who either were born or had come of age in the United States led or were featured in the majority of these bands. Among them was the famed Willie Colón. Colón's collaboration with legendary singer Héctor Lavoe truly set the parameters for defining Salsa (Fernández, 2002, p.118). This included the use of the *conjunto* style. Conjunto bands featured two trumpets and usually a trombone. There were no violins, as in Charanga, and there was no saxophone section as in the larger groups from the 40s and 50s. While the saxophone would certainly re-emerge in Salsa, the violin would not, unless it was a string section on a ballad or a synthesizer in the 1980s and beyond.

Salsa is hybrid music. It drew from African-American music, taking on jazz harmonies, and including improvised solos played in a jazz-influenced manner. Although individual rhythms were no longer identified, much of the percussion played Cuban rhythms. The majority of the performers and audience was Puerto Rican.

Salsa became a standardized rhythmic approach where the percussion often played the same type of rhythm behind every song. The percussionists, however, still varied the rhythms within the structure that had become standardized. The use of timbales, congas, and bongos became standard. In Salsa, a lead singer, a *sonero*, became commonplace and was accompanied by two or three backup singers who sang *chorro*--meaning "chorus," better translated as "backup." The sonero sang the melody of the song, but eventually the composition would enter a section where the chorro singers sang a phrase repetitively. The sonero improvised melodies

and lyrics over these repeated phrases. In fact, this recreates the call and response musical activity associated with African-derived music.

The meaning of words changed as well, specifically with the words Mambo and Chorro. There is often a section of the song where the singers stop singing and the horns play a new melody, sometimes over new harmonies, not heard earlier in the same composition. This instrumental section of the composition is referred to as “The Mambo”; here Mambo no longer refers to a rhythm or dance. The improvised vocal section described previously is now known as “The Chorro.”

All of these changes occurred on Fania Records and were spearheaded by Willie Colón, Héctor Lavoe, Johnny Pacheco, Larry Harlow, Ray Baretto, Celia Cruz, Tito Puente, Tito Rodriguez, and many other giants of Latin popular music. Fania created a group in which all of their stars participated: The Fania All-Stars. The popularity of Salsa in New York City was so great that by 1973, The Fania All-Stars sold out performances at Yankee Stadium in the Bronx. Fania Records through the first half of the 1970s dominated the industry so much that it controlled 80% of the market (Manuel, 1991, p.165). Other labels came and went. Some claimed to be more innovative and creative than Fania, but the record company’s success put the other labels out of business or Fania bought them out.

During this early creatively and financially successful period, the lyrical text often described urban life in New York City. Willie Colón frequently displayed himself as a kind of gangster. For instance, one album cover portrayed him as being on trial; another had him storing his trombone in a machine gun case. Salsa was an expression of the urban life experienced by so many Puerto Ricans in the United States.

## Spanish Harlem Renaissance

Salsa emerged at a time when the creative output of the Nuyoricans, Puerto Ricans in New York, began to increase and the representation of Latinos in American media became significantly Puerto Rican. There was a rise in Puerto Rican national awareness in New York City and other urban areas in the United States. In fact, Salsa emerged as the idea of Nuyorican<sup>16</sup> identity arises.

The late 1960s was certainly a politically tumultuous time. Nationwide, the political movements for Civil Rights shifted in the African-American community to the Black Power movement. It centered on celebrating African-American identity and on raising political consciousness. The leaders of this movement included the members of Black Panther Party who, contrary to much of the public propaganda, focused on helping the African-American community through breakfast and lunch programs for children, cleaning up neighborhoods, and “policing” the police (Seale, 1996, p.72). This was inspirational to groups of young Puerto Ricans in the United States.

Historian Jeffrey Ogbar has pointed out the influence of the Black Panther Party on its Puerto Rican equivalent, the Young Lords, in establishing an organization dedicated to a movement of Puerto Rican nationalism in the United States (2006, p.149). The Young Lords Party in Spanish Harlem was an offshoot of the Chicago-based Young Lords Organization of the late 1960s. Pablo Guzman, one of the original members of the YLO in New York, referred to the Black Panthers as “...the only model {of revolutionary nationalism} we had...in this country...”

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<sup>16</sup> I once spoke to the poet and co-founder of the Nuyorican Poets Café, Miguel Algarin, who coined the term “Nuyorican.” He claims to be its originator. He recalled reading reviews of his work where critics referred to him as “Neo-Rican” and “New York-Rican” and it seemed logical to him to combine the words to create “Nuyorican.”

(qtd.in Ogbar, 2006, p.151).

The many initiatives of the Young Lords included: (1) the cleaning up of garbage in the streets of El Barrio, (2) organizing free breakfast and lead poisoning detecting programs, (3) taking over a church and renaming it “The People’s Church” for refusing to house these neighborhood programs, (4) demanding open admissions to the City’s colleges, (5) and the publishing of Palante!, a bilingual militant newspaper (Young Lords Party and Michael Abramson, 1971). In the early 70s, the Young Lords in Newark, New Jersey, worked for the unification of Newark, a committee led by poet, playwright, and activist Amiri Baraka. The Young Lords, like the other radical groups of the era, empowered people to have more community control of police, initiated political reform, and politically mobilized the poor and working-class people (Ogbar, 2006, p.158). The Party kept the historic discourse of Puerto Rican nationalism alive as political expression (2006:165).

This nationalist discourse found its way into artistic activity. Willie Colón has referred to his Salsa as an “act of civil disobedience” (“The Music Was Like an Act of Civil Disobedience”). Larry Harlow took the well-known “rock opera,” *Tommy*, by the rock band known as “The Who” and retold the tale as Salsa and in Spanish. Puerto Rican-centric magazines focusing on Salsa were published during this time. An explosion of expressive culture erupted with Puerto Rican nationalism throughout the New York and New Jersey area.

This artistic activity was not limited to music. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, numerous Puerto Rican poets and writers—Jesús Colón, Giannina Braschi, Piri Thomas, Pedro Pietri, Miguel Piñero, and Miguel Algarín—emerge prior to or with the establishment of the Nuyorican Poets Café in Manhattan’s Lower East Side. These writers dealt with issues of

Latino/Puerto Rican identity in New York and the USA. They included themes of family, urban street life, and rediscovering the Spanish language. In some writings, there is a celebration of Spanish Harlem, the neighborhood east of Harlem in Manhattan, also known as East Harlem or El Barrio. East Harlem has been home to a variety of working-class communities over the decades and rarely has it ever been exclusively Latin or Puerto Rican (Sherman, 2006, pp.1-20). In the early 1970s, however, it was significantly Puerto Rican. The creative output that coincides with this time period has given East Harlem a significantly Latin identity in the collective memory of New York Puerto Ricans (Dávila, 2004, p.5). Nevertheless, Puerto Ricans were not limited to this one neighborhood. As documented by Jagna Scharff in her ethnography *King Kong on Fourth Street* (1998), Manhattan's Lower East Side, like the Bronx, was highly populated by Puerto Ricans around this time. During this period, other Latino groups were not so prominent in the Northeast; therefore, in the 1960s and 1970s the identity of Latinos was shaped primarily by the Puerto Rican experience.

Puerto Ricans began to dominate the representations of Latinos on television. An interesting phenomenon on television in the 1970s occurs with numerous situational comedies exploring urban life and the lives of urban minorities. These programs tried to challenge stereotypes and separate from "Amos and Andy" styled representations. Some were successful and some were not. Puerto Rican characters were featured in co-starring roles on *Barney Miller* and *Sanford and Son* (played by Gregory Sierra in both programs). *Welcome Back Kotter* gave a starring role to Robert Hegyes (actually of Hungarian-Italian descent) as Juan Epstein, a half Puerto Rican and half Jewish character. *Sesame Street* added Latino characters in the 1970s with actors Sonia Manzano and Emilio Delgado. Freddie Prinze rose to international fame playing an

ambiguously Latin character. While Prinze himself was half Puerto Rican, it is unclear if the character he played on *Chico and the Man* was Mexican or Puerto Rican. Even Archie Bunker was forced to express his bigoted disdain for Puerto Ricans on *All in the Family*. In one episode, Archie Bunker is trapped in an elevator with a Puerto Rican couple and a black man, played by the celebrated stage and television actor, Roscoe Lee Brown. While the premise seems at first to display Archie's prejudice for anyone non-white, he finds himself bonding with the black man based on class. Brown's character feels superior to the Puerto Ricans. Having far more education, Brown's character eventually reveals his social superiority to Archie. Curiously, the other urban sitcom of the era, *Good Times*, never really explored the African-American and Latino/Puerto Rican connection. Perhaps this had to do with the show's dedication to exploring black issues while John Amos was still on the program. Unfortunately, the show declined into black stereotypes and buffoonery after he left to portray Kunta Kinte on *Roots*.

While Puerto Ricans gained greater representation on television and Salsa and Puerto Rican national awareness were thriving, Latino representation was limited to comedy. There were no dramatic roles for Latinos during this period. No Latino lawyers or doctors existed on television but that would come in the 1980s. There were no dramas portraying the struggles of urban American Puerto Rican youth, as in films such as *Cooley High* for African-Americans. Occasionally Latinos might be criminals on police shows or in films. They shared these roles with African-Americans, who had encountered this type of stereotyping for generations.

Puerto Ricans, more than other Latino ethnic groups, have often been associated with African-Americans as a result of their sharing of neighborhoods in the urban Northeast and their similar class positions in the United States (Flores, 2000, p.162). The representation of Puerto

Ricans with African-Americans on television served to reinforce this idea, no doubt in negative ways. This affected Salsa, but not significantly until the de facto demise of Fania.

### **Pan-Latinoism and Salsa**

Intertwined with street realities and growing concerns of representation, Salsa broadened its perspective as the 1970s progressed. Salsa became an international phenomenon. An industry around Salsa surfaced in Colombia (Waxer, 2002). Salsa bands emerged in Europe (Roman-Valazquez, 2002, pp.259-288) and eventually in Japan in the 1980s (Hosokawa, 2002 pp.289-312). Salsa, though, was never exclusively Puerto Rican. The simple fact of Pacheco's Dominican heritage and Masucci's Italian-American background attests to this. Larry Harlow is American and Jewish. In fact, the Jewish connection maintained itself from the 1950s, when mambo bands found extensive work opportunities in the resorts of the Catskills in New York State. Several horn players in local, national, and international Salsa bands were Jewish musicians and often were Italian-Americans or Anglo-American as well. Celia Cruz was Cuban, so were a number of performers. And, a young man who started off singing Chorro was from Panama: Ruben Blades. Reuben Blades is a complicated figure in Salsa. The academic analysis of Salsa pays major attention to him (Manuel, 1995, pp.74-75&79-83), but he is often a minor in the history books on Salsa (Fernández, 2002; Gerald, 1998; Leymarie, 2002; Roberts, 1979; Steward,1999). When recording for Fania, Blades attempted innovative approaches to Salsa (see his recordings, Siembra and Maestra Vida). He created one of Salsa's biggest hits, "Pedro Navaja." Blades broadened the political discourse in Salsa by criticizing the imperialism of the United States and celebrating pan-Latinoism. When Blades finally became one of the soneros with the Fania All-Stars, the group traveled to Havana. This was a monumental event

reconnecting Salsa with Cuba in 1978, for the first time since the early 1960s. Stories are told among musicians on how the Cuban community of Miami issued death threats to the Fania All-Stars and to Blades because of their pro-Castro or at least their Castro-tolerant stance.

According to Manuel, Salsa began to change because it was too Caribbean and too percussion based (1991, pp.169-170), but it is clear that the music was also becoming too political. Fania sought to rein Salsa in, to make it more appealing to a pan-Latino audience and to a larger market. This became more complicated in the early 1980s when Coca-Cola purchased a number of the Latino radio stations and chose to play music that was less percussive (Manuel, 1991, p.171). This decision was made for the same reasons that Fania wanted the music to be less “hard.” The Spanish Caribbean market both in the US and in the Caribbean itself was large; Latin America, even larger.

El Gran Combo and La Sonora Ponceña are often missing from the common narrative of the history of Salsa. El Gran Combo<sup>17</sup> began recording in 1963 and La Sonora Ponceña in 1954. Both of these groups were based in Puerto Rico, not in New York City. Their compositions did not engage a discourse on urban street life, but rather on typical subjects of love and romance. La Sonora Ponceña occasionally included a few compositions celebrating Afro-Cuban themes from Santería and Espiritismo<sup>18</sup>. These groups did not have mass success in the United States during the 1970s and they did not record on Fania Records. As loved and valued as the works of Willie Colón, Héctor Lavoe, and Ruben Blades are for many salsa musicians in the 1990s and 2000s, the main groups that individuals seek to emulate are La Sonora Ponceña and El Gran Combo.

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<sup>17</sup> Sometimes referred to as *El Gran Combo de Puerto Rico*.

<sup>18</sup> Afro-Catholic syncretic religions. Santería features Orishas while Espiritismo largely does not.

How—or rather why—this happens is perhaps the academically unacknowledged piece of Salsa’s history.

### 1980s

Salsa in the US began to fade in popularity in the 1980s. Scandals rocked Fania, where Masucci was accused of embezzling large amounts of money<sup>19</sup>. The radio stations were now playing more ballads and softer recordings. The great Héctor Lavoe battling drug abuse made a series of recordings far below the quality of his 1970s work. More Salsa was being released in English. Something new was beginning to dominate the airwaves: Merengue.

The 1980s are a peculiar time in Salsa. The older Salsa, the Fania Salsa, was referred to as *Salsa Dura* (Hard Salsa). *Salsa Romantica* (Romantic Salsa) evolved, though this distinction was rarely heard from my informants. A number of Salsa bands now came from outside New York City. In the 1980s, some of the biggest Salsa bands came directly from Puerto Rico. The local Salsa bands of the 1990s and 2000s were far less likely to play compositions from the Fania All-Stars but rather compositions of El Gran Combo. El Gran Combo and La Sonora Ponceña kept it Salsa alive for many people.

The 1980s saw major changes in the Latino population. The Dominican population had grown to become a full-fledged community dominant in neighborhoods such as Washington Heights in New York City. The Colombian population was growing significantly. Peruvian, Bolivian, Ecuadorian migration began to increase while the Mexican population in the Northeast of the US also grew<sup>20</sup>. The Dominicans wanted to hear Merengue. The Colombians favored

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<sup>19</sup> Max Salazar has commented that Masucci’s only crime was to earn a tremendous amount of money.

<sup>20</sup> Mexican Americans have always been the most populous Latin American group in the United States, but their numbers in cities like New York have not equaled that of Puerto Ricans.

Cumbia even though an integration of Colombian and some Puerto Rican Salsa existed at times. In part, there was now another new generation of Puerto Ricans in the Northeast who enjoyed the R&B of the time and eventually the music of Rap/HipHop.<sup>21</sup>

Salsa persisted but it was now one of many types of music. Several groups now performed the three main styles: Salsa, Cumbia and Merengue. Tito Nieves, El Gran Combo, Celia Cruz, Tito Puente persisted in their performance and recording of Salsa. Local stars appeared, such as Frankie Ruiz from the Bronx. As Latin popular music became more of a signifier of specific Latino identities, something began to happen in Salsa. As noted earlier, the Salsa bands from Puerto Rico, El Gran Combo and La Sonora Ponceña began to exemplify Salsa for a new generation of Puerto Ricans who were now growing up in an area filled with multiple Latinos. If Merengue was Dominican and Cumbia, Colombian and Central American, Salsa was now even more Puerto Rican. To define Salsa as New York or even Nuyorican meant it was pan-Latino because the demography of New York was such that it was multi-Latino.

*Latinidad* is a reality, an ideal, and a goal. While there is an African Diaspora in which people of African descent throughout the Western Hemisphere share a history of oppression and discrimination (Gilroy, 1993, pp.1-40), there is also a process in which Latinos throughout the Americas share a history of Spanish colonialism and United States' oppression and involvement. There are political issues affecting all Latinos in a similar way throughout the United States. However, as described by Juan Flores, Puerto Ricans are often an exception with regard to their place in the field of pan-Latinoism. Latinos have displayed a fierce loyalty and pride in their unique Latin heritage. Shops and restaurants often display the flag of their owner, letting the

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<sup>21</sup> Hip-hop emerges in the late 1970s with Grand Master Flash, though the word did not come into full usage until the early 1980s.

customers know if they are in an Ecuadorian, Colombian, or Chilean shop. The specific ethnic identity is maintained. There is the process in which non-Puerto Ricans distance themselves from Puerto Ricans. Of course, to many Latinos this is irrelevant; feelings of ethnic differentiation are not always so strong. Puerto Ricans, however, have a significantly different status than other Latino immigrants: Puerto Ricans are US citizens from birth and Puerto Rico remains in a colonial-like relationship with the United States. There is a historical association between Puerto Ricans and African-Americans. Although there are many similarities among Latino groups throughout the United States and in the greater New York City area, the individual ethnic groups proudly proclaim their personal ethnicity and they, according to some of my informants, do not let the Puerto Ricans forget that they are Puerto Ricans.

Within this sea of Latinos, Salsa's ethnicity becomes questionable. In order to maintain its Puerto Rican prominence, is it enough to recognize the Nuyoricans and other Latinos who played so much of the music in the 60s and 70s, especially when the radio stopped playing the recordings? El Gran Combo was not as hard-hitting as the Fania All-Stars and not as political, so they were aired on the radio. By refocusing Salsa to the Puerto Rican groups and away from Fania, performers and aficionados of Salsa were able to project a Puerto Rican ethnicity to the music in light of the clear ethnic origin of Merengue coming from the Dominican Republic and Cumbia coming from Colombia. Clara Rodriguez, in *Puerto Ricans: Born in the U.S.A.*, has noted that both on the mainland US and on the Island, the Puerto Ricans were dancing the same moves to the same new salsa songs. This unified the musical development of Puerto Ricans throughout the United States and its properties (1989, p.55).

By the 1980s, Spanish Harlem was not the cultural center it once was, if it ever truly was.

Undoubtedly, the Puerto Rican community has maintained a steady consumption of Salsa. Even in New York, Puerto Ricans innovate and lead Salsa performance. One businessman who had worked with Jerry Massucci in the 1970s started promoting and producing his own New York based acts. Ralph Mercado managed two different singers who had originally tried making it as performers of Hip-Hop/R&B and promoted and managed them as international successes as salsa singers and then to a short-lived crossover success: Marc Anthony and La India. The success of these two acts brought Salsa back to the forefront of the Latin music industry in the 1990s.

Another Latino community began to wield considerable political-economic influence in the United States at this time. The Cuban community centered in Miami had organized itself into a significant political force by 1985 (Portes&Stepick, 1993, p.37). Part of this force is the attempt to take control of what was once its strongest domain of influence: music. The re-emergence of Cuban influence, combined with the most successful New York acts like Marc Anthony, creates a new dilemma in Salsa and in Latin popular music. There is a major disconnect between the discourse provided by the music industry and Salsa at the local level<sup>22</sup>. This disconnect generates in part from the industry's inability to recognize the importance of El Gran Combo and La Sonora Ponceña and in part from the animosities between the Puerto Rican and Cuban community. The difficulty also stems from a misunderstanding of how Salsa is integrated into the Puerto Rican community throughout the New York and New Jersey area. Rather than detail the industry and top tier of performers, I suggest an exploration of the local level. To understand Salsa, one must listen to it, dance to it, and struggle to perform it.

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<sup>22</sup> And perhaps to the academic discourse on Salsa that favors Ruben Blades and the Fania All-Stars over Sonora Ponceña

### **Chapter 3**

#### **The Local Level**

#### **Salsa and the Changing Latino Community in New York and New Jersey**

To be a salsaero from Newark, or North Bergen, or the Bronx, or in communities scattered in and around New York City means that the performer has lived a predictable set of experiences containing unique personal and neighborhood characteristics. Place is important, but only to the extent that it reveals associations with particular class and ethnic experiences.

When considering salsa as a unit of study, it is important to understand the experience experience. Salsa and the other forms of Latino popular music that thrive in the United States reflect the daily routines of the Latino community. The music aids in producing this reality, which brings us back to place. It is misleading to think that Puerto Ricans and salsaeros exist solely in New York City or as the descendants of New York-based Puerto Ricans. A concentration of Latinos in New York City existed through the 1970s, but these Latino communities have branched out of New York into the nearby communities surrounding Newark, New Jersey—a mere fifteen miles from New York City—and into Hudson County, New Jersey, directly across the Hudson River from Manhattan. Since the 1980s, northern New Jersey has become home to a vast array of Latino ethnicities. There are Bolivian communities in Rutherford, New Jersey. Peruvians are so populous in and around Paterson that Peru has opened a consulate in the City of Paterson. Colombians and Dominicans live in communities throughout Bergen, Essex, Morris and Hudson counties. Mexicans have been entering northern New Jersey in great numbers over the last five years. Hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans live in the tri-state area, so does the largest community of Cubans outside of the Miami area. Virtually all

Latino ethnicities, including Brazilians and Haitians, are represented in northern New Jersey. (see Table 1)

Many well-known performers of Salsa who lived in New York City 25 years ago now live in these counties in New Jersey. Johnny Pacheco lives in North Bergen and Ray Baretto lived in Morris County until his death in early 2006. Performers describe “quality of life” as the reason for residing in New Jersey rather than in New York. These reasons include housing costs, better schools, and lower crime rates. Like many European ethnic groups in the past, a sign of social mobility is moving out of New York City into the suburbs of New Jersey or Long Island. The proximity of these regions to New York City allows known performers to maintain their networks in New York while living outside the City. In fact, as a result of the network style of organization prevalent among the salseros and the limited availability of work in any one neighborhood, musicians will perform anywhere within this region.

Since the late 1960s, a high concentration of Puerto Ricans in and around Newark, NJ, has existed while a high concentration of Cuban immigrants and their children have inhabited the towns of Hudson County, just north and east of Newark. Some families are socially mobile and have moved into the suburban towns relatively nearby these urban areas, but many have not. Furthermore, the concentration of Latinos in these areas has made the neighborhoods attractive to new Latino groups migrating into the region. The prevalence of Spanish language businesses and services has created vast areas where assimilation to the United States becomes easier without linguistic barriers, while at the same time these partially isolated regions have separated Latinos from English-only people. This, in essence, has created a region where some aspects of Latino culture have been able to thrive and to develop into their own unique identities.

I focus on Newark as a central place for Salsa. Lower echelon stars of Salsa live in and around Newark as do many musicians who play with these stars. Newark is home to a large

**Table 1: Latino Population of New Jersey 1960-2000**

	1960 <sup>1</sup>	1970 <sup>1</sup>	1980 <sup>2</sup>	1990 <sup>3</sup>	2000 <sup>4</sup>
Total Population	7,168,194	6,066,782	7,364,823	7,730,188	8,724,560
Latino Population	N/A	N/A	N/A	739,861	1,364,699
Puerto Rican	N/A	135,676 <sup>5</sup>	243,540	320,133	392,619
Cuban	7,852	71,233	80,860	85,378	73,024
Mexican	2,280	3,301	13,146	28,759	186,918
Other Americas <sup>6</sup>	20,399	54,867	N/A	N/A	N/A
Other Latino	N/A	N/A	154,337	305,591	712,058
Dominican (Dominican Republic)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	167,689
Costa Rica	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	17,873
Guatemala	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	37,654
Honduras	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	27,300
Nicaraguan	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	6,023
Panamanian	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	7,025
Salvadorian	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	47,166
Other Central American	N/A	N/A			3,150
Argentina	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	9,482
Bolivia	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3,847
Chile	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	9,538
Colombia	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	95,204
Ecuadorian	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	90,207
Paraguayan	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2,108
Peruvian	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	69,567
Uruguayan	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	14,756
Venezuela	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4,358
Other South American	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	6,158
Other Latino <sup>7</sup>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	93,033

<sup>1</sup>US Census 1970 Table 45: Social Characteristics by Race: 1970 and 1960

<sup>2</sup>US Census 1980 Table 16: Total Persons and Spanish Origin

<sup>3</sup>US Census 1990 P009: Hispanic Origin

<sup>4</sup>US Census 2000 B03001: Hispanic or Latino Origin by Specific Origin

<sup>5</sup>US Census 1970 Table 49: Ethnic Characteristics by Race, for Urban and Rural Residence

<sup>6</sup>Includes all of the Caribbean, including Francophone and Anglophone Islands and Belize

<sup>7</sup>Includes Spaniards and those who identify themselves primarily as Spanish-American

concentration of Puerto Ricans and one can find several bars and clubs that specialize in Salsa, whether it is live performance or simply jukeboxes that are filled with Salsa recordings. Puerto Ricans are the dominant Latino ethnicity in Newark and outnumber the other Latino groups. Many of these Puerto Ricans are either migrants from Puerto Rico or their children. They are not the children of New Yorkers and, consequently, a romanticized discourse around Spanish Harlem and the other prevalent New York Latino communities generally does not exist.

### **Newark and The North Ward**

Newark, like many large industrial cities in the United States, is organized into wards. These are political districts where each district has a specific councilman representing the interests of the ward. The majority of my research focuses on the North Ward. The area, a predominately Puerto Rican community, is a site for the authentic experience of Salsa. I will now describe this political-economic context.

In Newark, the North Ward is considered the Puerto Rican and/or Latino section. Newark's Central Ward is considered the African-American section. The East Ward, referred to formally as the "Ironbound" and informally as "Down Neck," is the city's well-known Portuguese section. Many people familiar with Newark will not recognize the Ironbound as the East Ward; therefore, I will refer to this neighborhood strictly as the Ironbound. While it is unusual for a Portuguese to live outside of the Ironbound and in a different section of Newark, it is quite common for an African-American or a Latino to live in any of the wards. However, stores catering specifically to a Latino clientele are found far more frequently in the North Ward

as well as churches that conduct services in Spanish. Churches catering to an African-American congregation tend to be found in the Central Ward. Portuguese businesses are uncommon outside of the Ironbound, and churches serving Portuguese parishioners are not found outside either.

There are other ethnic groups represented throughout Newark, including an expanding Muslim/Middle Eastern population, Indian immigrants, Haitians, and a growing West African community. However, none of these communities is populous enough to give any one ward an overall character in the same manner as in the African-American, Puerto Rican/Latino, and Portuguese wards. A generation or two in the past, the North Ward was largely Italian while the Central Ward was mainly Jewish<sup>23</sup>. The vast majority of these families moved out of Newark starting in the 1950s but accelerating in the late 1960s and 1970s.

This movement from the North Ward represents the well-documented “white flight” from the city. While there is a tendency to emphasize the Newark Riots of 1968 as a catalyst for the Italian community to leave Newark, the riots did not occur in the North Ward (Mumford, 2007, p.98). Riots, no doubt, mark a particular time when the World War II generation of Italian Americans began to move out into the other suburbs of New Jersey. Although there is a correlation with riots, it is not a cause and effect relation.

The ethnic composition is the most distinguishing characteristic of the North Ward. As stated earlier, the neighborhood is perceived of as the Puerto Rican/Latino section of Newark and this is supported by the numbers. In the North Ward, there are 80,114 people, including 48,011 of Newark’s 80,622 Latinos (US Census 2000, DP-1). This includes 26,891 of Newark’s 39,650 Puerto Ricans. Latinos constitute approximately 29.5% of Newark’s total population of 273,295

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<sup>23</sup> See Sherry Ortner (2003).

residents (DP-1). No single ethnicity is represented greater than the Puerto Ricans in the North Ward. While a bit more than half of Newark's Latinos live in the North Ward, slightly more than two of every three Puerto Ricans in Newark live there. Questioning the numbers, I suggest that the total figure of Latinos includes Newark's Brazilian population or a portion of the Brazilians at the very least<sup>24</sup>.

The "Latin-ness" of the North Ward is embedded into the fabric of the neighborhood. The corner delis carry Goya products, homemade Puerto Rican pastries, and other Latin American foods such as Cuban sandwiches. Puerto Rican, Dominican, Peruvian, Colombian, and Mexican flags hang from windows in homes and rearview mirrors in cars. Auto mechanic shops hang signs in Spanish and churches display bulletins in Spanish as well. Gypsy bus services cart people around and provide more routes than the standard New Jersey Transit bus services. Some of the buses play the Latin radio stations and some even show Latin music videos.

Gentrification is not occurring in the North Ward. The neighborhood lacks the financial industries, arts centers, tourist restaurants, and housing projects that are the features of gentrification<sup>25</sup>. The holdovers from the 1960's urban renewal projects in other wards in Newark are also absent. In fact, the vast majority of the housing available is pre-World War II. The built environment of Newark's North Ward has changed very little since World War II. Plans have come and gone for the construction of a major professional sports arena in Newark since the

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<sup>24</sup> As documented by Maxine Margolis, the Brazilian population in Newark and New York City has often struggled with stating their ethnicity on census information. Brazilians are not content with calling themselves "Hispanic" or "Other." This has been a point of contention for some time.

<sup>25</sup> These types of institutions are well represented in Newark's "Downtown" which straddles the Ironbound and the Central Ward.

mid-1990s. This arena would have been constructed on the borders between the Ironbound and the Central Ward, far from Newark's North Ward. However, changing political winds have apparently put plans for this arena on hold.

What is occurring in the North Ward is low wage earning and poverty. The median and mean incomes in the neighborhood are @\$30,000 and @\$33,000, respectively. This is a slightly higher median than Newark overall (\$26,913) but the North Ward is slightly lower than the overall mean (\$37,683). Forty percent of families live below the poverty line, whereas only 26.5% do so in Newark overall. In some census tracts in the neighborhood, more than 50% of families with children under five live in poverty (US Census). This varies between census tracts significantly, with some areas below Newark's overall average and some not. In no tract is there a poverty rate less than 15%. (US Census DP-3).

Unemployment is a statistical complexity for the North Ward in the years covered in this research. While unemployment statistics in 2000 for people under 25 were as high as 20% and as little as 5.5% for those older than 25, as much as 50% of males of any age are listed as "out of the labor force" in the 2000 Census (DP-3). The number is slightly higher for women. This displays dramatic underemployment, slightly higher than the overall averages for Newark where just over 36% of individuals between 25 and 59 are not in the labor force (DP-3).

The majority of the men are employed in traditionally working-class occupations. Over 50% of the men in the North Ward work in construction and transportation. Many of the women work in the service sector, health care, and childcare industries. There are limited industrial jobs, but some factories have remained in Newark. Other traditionally working-class opportunities have also persisted. There are many auto mechanics and auto parts stores. Opportunities in

trucking and transportation of goods exist. An extensive school system and numerous hospitals provide employment. In addition, Newark's more central location in New Jersey allows the North Ward's residents better access to other towns in New Jersey for jobs. However, this is complicated by the poor public transportation system in New Jersey that was constructed to transport people in and out of New York City primarily.

The 2000 Census identifies six percent of working people in Newark in education (DP-3). This is notable for my research, because many individuals I have spoken with work as music educators. This disproportionate representation of educators among salseros speaks to the uniqueness of the salsa performers. While deeply embedded in the North Ward and its Puerto Rican community, the musicians are slightly different from many of their neighbors. Activity in Salsa performance will not be reported in the census as it is largely part of the informal economy. Some people are professionals with salaries rather than hourly wages. Most with professional occupations leave Newark when they begin to earn significant money but they do not move far. Many have moved to Belleville, where the school systems are perceived of as providing a better quality of education and the streets are perceived of as being less dangerous.

The majority rents their homes, but the North Ward is not characterized by housing projects. The majority of housing units are single, double, and triple family homes. Many were built prior to World War II. These are frequently extended family households where parents live with adult children who themselves often have their own children. In the latter half of the 1990s, construction projects built dual family homes in the North Ward and made them available as low-income housing. This was in part a conscious effort by the city to create a low-income alternative to housing project apartment complexes. While these housing projects were an

attempt to curb urban violence, residents in these homes do not walk around their neighborhoods at night. Stories of violence, mugging, and robbery are frequently told among the North Ward's residents. Claims of street corner drug dealing and accusations of intentional police neglect accompany these stories.

After the 2002 mayoral elections, when the North Ward voted for the challenger, the incumbent, who had won re-election, intentionally ordered a major reduction in police patrols in the North Ward<sup>26</sup>. This accusation is rumored, not confirmed. I can, however, refer to police officers who patrol the North Ward, many of whom were North Ward residents as children and teenagers. They deny the accusation of neglect and instead focus their discourse on their identification with the North Ward's residents. This allows them to police the neighborhoods well. Regardless, the mother of one of my primary informants, a chronic smoker, refused to leave her home after dark for any reason, even if she ran out of cigarettes. Another informant, a body builder and aspiring professional wrestler, who is 6'5" and 250 pounds, was jumped and mugged in the North Ward in 2003.

When I first began spending time in this neighborhood in 1994, I was told to avoid certain areas. I identified a low-rise housing project where one could purchase heroin and two street corners where one could obtain crack cocaine. I can no longer identify these locations; however, places to purchase narcotics remain. Since I was already visible and known in the neighborhood when my research began, no one took it upon himself or herself to point out the drug corners to me. Since I had and have no interest in using heroin or cocaine, no one offered to tell me where to get the best product.

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<sup>26</sup> Some of this has been documented in the film, Street Fight, presented in 2005 on the PBS series POV. The film detailed the 2002 mayoral election in Newark and it won an academy award in 2006.

The North Ward is a place where people face challenges that are common in many urban areas throughout the United States: limited employment, crime, drugs, lack of recreational facilities, poor policing. However, similar to African-American urban communities, people can pursue the commodification of leisure activities (Kelly, 1997, pp.45-46). The most Latino and potentially highly lucrative and legal of these activities is music<sup>27</sup>.

A localized infrastructure to support Salsa exists in and around Newark. There are numerous opportunities for performance. Salsa is many things and one is a source of employment. For some it is a source of supplemental income that supports individuals and families in the face of low opportunity and high poverty. For others, it is a needed source of income for survival. For some, Salsa is a source of supplemental income that facilitates the movement of individuals from working to middle-class status. For others, it is a source of prestige in a world where urban Puerto Ricans are discriminated against, by both European-Americans and by more suburban and middle-class Latinos, not always non-Puerto Ricans. For many, Salsa is an encapsulated object of Puerto Rican culture that must be transferred from one generation to the next.

### **Salsa in Newark**

In order to view Salsa through the eyes of those who live it every day, I have concentrated on three different networks of musicians. Performers are organized as networks, so are the audience and the aficionados. I will elaborate on the structure and the function of these

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<sup>27</sup> Sports play a similar role as music. However also absent from North Ward are freely available basketball courts. There are nearby baseball fields and one of the important community organizations is the Roberto Clemente Baseball League. There is very limited funding for extra-curricular sports, and baseball requires more equipment than basketball. In the 1970s, the North Ward sent teams to Little League World Series in two different years. Sports do not provide the same elusive and mostly unachievable promise to the Latino community that it does to the African-American community.

networks further in the next chapter; however, as an introduction, I will describe the focal points of the networks in which I have participated. These focal points are three different bandleaders. I consider them to be authentic salseros because of their life experiences.

### **Miguel (Michael) Rodriguez**

Miguel is a fairly typical local level bandleader. Born in 1961, he has lived most of his life in Newark's North Ward or in the surrounding towns. Miguel has been a friend of mine for quite some time. An aggressive and intelligent man, Miguel is distinguished by his girth. About five-foot-eight, he weighs approximately four hundred pounds. Most of his close friends call him Mike. While his father is from Puerto Rico, his mother was born in the United States and is of German ancestry. His given name is Michael, though he uses Miguel for professional reasons.

Miguel began playing trumpet in junior high school at age eleven. His first professional jobs were with merengue bands playing around Newark when he was a teenager. It is actually quite common among my informants who are over 35 years old to have begun their professional lives working with merengue bands. Originally this seemed unusual as Merengue is considered a Dominican popular music and my informants are overwhelmingly Puerto Rican. However, it makes sense when music is considered as a source of employment.

Miguel's professional life began around 1978, at which point Salsa dominated Latino popular music. However, migration from the Dominican Republic to the United States began to increase around this time. This created performance opportunities for bands playing merengue, but it is quite possible that musicians from the Dominican Republic were not as plentiful then as they would be in the later 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s. Consequently, bandleaders would have been pressed to find individuals to play in the bands. Bands who have difficulty filling their

positions are often the ones that hire younger men, giving them their first opportunities for professional performance. Therefore, a young musician—17-year-old Miguel in this case—might find employment performing the music that was available, not the music of his choice, Salsa. This dilemma—the need for musicians to fill roles in performance groups—is a central feature in the life of a bandleader and the maintenance of salsa networks.

Around age 21, Miguel tried forming his own band and was successful at getting some work in the early 1980s. A few years later, he joined a band managed by a friend's father and Miguel eventually took over the band. The band stopped performing around 1990, coinciding with the untimely death of his friend's father, but was re-formed in 1994. The group remained active until 1998, when during a performance at a local college the stage collapsed damaging Miguel's knee.

During 1999, Miguel had several orthopedic surgeries. As a result, the increased opportunities created by the “Latin Pop Explosion” of 1999 were unavailable to him. He has continued to perform, but after 2000, and especially after 9/11/01, the work for salsa bands decreased. Since this time, Miguel has been unable to consistently maintain a group. Two other factors have contributed to the decline of his band. First, much of his work had come through contacts he had with various Latino organizations in and around Newark, such as the Essex County Hispanic Policemen's Association. Two of his prime contacts retired around 1999 and new the leadership of the organizations desired new performers. Second, and more significantly, Miguel began to tire of the responsibilities of being a bandleader after his accident.

Miguel remains a known figure in Newark. He still maintains some of his contacts and occasionally contracts performances. His group has become a reference point for some

musicians. He represents a group that thrived locally for sometime and many musicians have passed through his group. When discussing past experiences, the musicians may refer to Miguel and the experiences they had with him. Musicians that met while playing with Miguel may use the experience to express feelings of fictive kin with each other, strengthening their bonds in new performance situations.

Miguel is like many musicians who perform at the local level: very talented and musically uneducated. He cannot read music but he can play trumpet and trombone. He can also sing and harmonize well. Talent is not an issue; developed skill is. There are multiple skills needed to fully practice the craft of music. A performer must be able to negotiate professional networks. These skills include the ability to read and write music. Writing arrangements—orchestrating a particular piece of music for a band of multiple players and instruments—is a complicated skill that comes with years of practice. This is crucial for expressing the music that one can imagine. Reading is essential for being able to walk into any performance situation and play whatever is required. Reading and writing for non-vocalists are essential for activity in professional networks, except for the rarely exceptional individual<sup>28</sup>. The lack of these skills has kept Miguel from participating in high-level professional networks as a horn player.

Singers are not as required to have these skills. Singers are able to survive and thrive on raw talent more than any other performer. Had Miguel been active as a singer when he was young—he was far more active as a horn player—perhaps he could have entered more

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<sup>28</sup> The music industry is filled with tales of the exceptional individual who cannot read or write music. There are certainly some extremely talented and successful people who fit into this category, but they are a significant minority. However, some players will use the existence of these individuals as an excuse not to struggle to learn to read and write music. This is far more likely to become a hindrance than a facilitator with regard to the individual's career in Salsa or Merengue or many other genres of music that do not rely significantly on electronics.

professional networks. At 45, leaders will not take him on as a singer with their touring band. This lifestyle, including the low wage, is not particularly appealing to an older person. It is not that forty-five-year olds do not sing in national Salsa bands; instead; older people who do so are experienced in their roles or networks. High-level networks have eluded Miguel throughout his life, as they elude most performers. Sometimes, one needs to be lucky to develop high-level networks and luck is elusive.

Miguel's group was mostly comprised of performers he had known for long periods of his life. The majority of the key players in Miguel's band either lived in the North Ward or grew up in the neighborhood and moved to nearby towns. The group featured his brother, Johnny, as one singer, and one of his childhood friends, Jesús, as another. The conga player, Carlos, had been associated with Jesús and Miguel since the mid 1980s. The different bass players that Miguel used had been friends of his in high school. I had a relationship with Carlos for four years before he introduced me to Miguel in 1994. While I was brought in as a needed pianist, I was presented as an old friend of one of Miguel's and Jesús' old friends. The fictive kin/familial relationships that are developed will be explored in Chapter Five.

Miguel has not really been able to move out of the urban working-class conditions in which he grew up. He is currently employed as a chef in a small restaurant near Newark. While today he lives a mile outside of the North Ward in a section of Bloomfield, NJ, his new neighborhood, while generally safer, does not differ significantly from his old block in Newark in terms of poverty and employment.

### **Juan Pedro Figuera**

Juan Pedro, 42 years old, grew up in Newark's North Ward and moved to the nearby

township of Belleville, NJ. I first met him in 1991 while playing with a band run by Bolivians and working out of Paterson. The band performed Salsa, Cumbia and Merengue working out of Paterson, NJ. Juan Pedro is a relatively new bandleader. His group formed in the spring of 2004 and the network around this group has been the primary focus of my research.

Juan Pedro began playing trumpet and French horn while in grammar school and picked up the guitar around age 10. His first professional experience was playing trumpet in merengue bands in the 1970s at age 14. He began playing the bass in high school. With bass players in high demand, Juan dedicated himself to performing on the bass while exploiting his multi-instrumental skills by studying music education in college. Married at age 17, Juan Pedro began teaching music in the Newark school system at age 23. During this time he performed extensively with salsa and merengue bands around Newark, NJ, and in New York City, which he has continued to do over the past twenty years.

Juan is unique. Twenty-five years ago his wife was going to return to her native Peru. So much in love, Juan planned on going to Peru to be with her. His father stepped in and suggested that if he loved this woman so much he should marry her and stay in the United States where he would probably have a better life and future. They have remained married for the last 25 years and have two daughters ages 21 and 23. Juan Pedro has thrived on the responsibilities of having a family.

Juan is skilled in ways that Miguel is not. He is a well-rounded musician who has spent long periods of time studying his craft and developing his skills. Primarily a bass player and guitarist, Juan Pedro is proficient on the French horn and trumpet and has basic skills on virtually all instruments. He can read music and has the ability to write arrangements. He has legitimate

conducting skills and is quite articulate about musical issues. This has allowed him to be an effective freelance performer. Juan has been performing with salsa/cumbia/merengue bands since the late 1970s, including time spent exclusively with merengue bands in his earliest years.

Interestingly, a band member who had known Juan for decades, and one who operates in higher professional networks than Juan or Miguel, commented to me that Juan as a bandleader does not really understand all the issues that face bands. When the two were younger, Juan devoted his energy to studying and then to teaching while the band member began performing professionally, including national and international touring with high profile acts. Essentially, his opinion was that Juan's performing experiences were not as vast as others. While I do not view this statement as entirely accurate—there has never been a period when Juan Pedro was not performing—it is true that Juan's networks have never included national/international touring. These opportunities have been available to Juan at times, but his commitments and responsibilities to his family, and the seriousness with which he approaches them, have prevented him from pursuing these endeavors. Providing for his family's needs could not be fulfilled by a three-month stint of touring throughout Colombia or Venezuela.

Both the consistent work of a music teacher and a freelance performer has provided Juan with a more middle-class income than someone like Miguel. Juan is an individual with one foot in the working-class neighborhood from where he came and another in the middle-class community in which he lives today. Juan takes the responsibility that comes with this seriously although he would not articulate it in this manner.

A very friendly and personable musician and community member, Juan has twice received citizenship awards from the Mayor's office in Newark. He has very successfully

negotiated the complex politics of the Newark school system and is a recognizable figure in Newark. He maintains relationships with former students and their parents, always expressing concern for people's overall well being. He is proud of the work he does with the teenagers of Newark and by all accounts he has been very successful in teaching them how to play music. I have heard his friends joke on several occasions that he should run for mayor of Newark. Juan, however, lacks any political aspirations and resists accepting offers to assume the higher paying position of vice-principal in one of Newark's schools. The extra demands placed on a vice-principal would hinder his musical activities.

I first met Juan Pedro more than a decade ago, but we began to become friends in 1996. At that time, he often commented to me that he wanted to open a music school for the kids of Newark and anyone else who wanted to learn. In 2001 he opened his "Figuera Academy," in partnership with his non-musician but music-loving brother. It is a private music school that essentially gives after-school instruction on all instruments and holds group lessons on Salsa and percussion. He featured bilingual instructors and by 2003 had two hundred students enrolled from all over northern New Jersey.

This school, which he refers to as "The Academy," has come to play a few roles for Juan. Aside from its primary role as a teaching studio, Juan has been able to use the space of the Academy to rehearse his own band. This band began performing in 2004 and through 2005 and has contracted only a few engagements. However, the band itself is dedicated to performing classic Salsa from the late 1970s and early 1980s and consistently rehearsed nearly every week through 2005.

A third use for the Academy is being explored. During the summer of 2004, I helped Juan

investigate what would be necessary to convert his teaching space into a recording studio. While this project is still being considered, financial issues have prevented Juan from following through on it. As with many Puerto Rican individuals in their 40s, Juan's parents have moved from New Jersey to Florida. The hurricanes that hit Florida in the late summer and early fall of 2004 caused damage to his parent's property. Juan allocated financial reserves that would have paid for recording equipment to the support of his parents for a time. The recording studio has been slow to emerge, but through the summer of 2005 Juan had taken further steps to make this a reality. He purchased the necessary equipment and organized his studio so that he was nearly ready to turn his rehearsal space into a recording studio. However, as the summer of 2006 approached, the studio was no closer to being a reality than it was at the end of summer 2005.

When Juan Pedro formed his group, he was able to draw upon extensive professional networks that had become familial. While maintaining informal relationships with the majority of his members, the instrumentalists have high levels of professional and formal experience. His percussionists have impressive résumés that include work with several high level performers such as Jimmy Bosche, Marc Anthony, and La India. His trombone player's résumé includes one-time membership in the Fania All-Stars and Chico O'Farill's Afro-Cuban All Stars. All of these men live in the same neighborhood as Juan Pedro, some "just around the corner"<sup>29</sup>. His other members include a saxophonist who has been a long time friend while two of the singers in the group are all younger men who had been Juan's former students. A third singer, also a former student and the youngest member of the group at age 22, won the talent contest at the Apollo Theater in New York City three times in 2002. At the end of 2004, he moved to Puerto Rico for

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<sup>29</sup> "Just around the corner" could mean five blocks away.

six months to work with producers who wanted to transform him into a star. He was replaced in Juan's band by a man in his 50s who used to perform with Héctor Lavoe and Willie Colón. Juan continually expressed concern over the younger singer, fearing that he would be devoured by the music industry, thus diminishing his chances for a successful life in the future.

### **David**

David is a slightly different figure than Juan Pedro and Miguel. He is Cuban, not Puerto Rican. David, 47 years old, was born in North Bergen in Hudson County, NJ, and has lived there most of his life except for residing in Miami for a brief time in the early 1980s. David did not begin playing the bass until he was 30. While he likes the older, 1970s-styled Salsa, he does not care very much for its current incarnations (a notion that is often shared by many Puerto Rican salseros and many non-Puerto Rican Latinos). David has always been far more attracted to playing Latin Rock and Roll, especially Carlos Santana's material, and to various forms of Cuban music. David, however, negotiates a world where Salsa is a frequent topic of discussion and he has performed with various salsa bands over the last 15. His role is less as a specific bandleader and more so as a person who gets gigs. David neither runs frequent rehearsals nor maintains a consistent group. Instead, he is more successful in talking club owners into hiring him; at which point, he rehearses a band. David is far more interested in performing Latin-influenced rock music. This interest has extended his connections to multiple performers of Salsa.

As most musicians who know all of my informants might say, David's skill is less than Miguel's and considerably less than Juan Pedro's. He does not read or write music and is marginally skilled at playing a variety of Latin music styles. His repertoire of tunes is limited and

he learns new songs slowly. He cannot play multiple instruments. However, like Miguel, he has a strong command of the intangible aspect of music, called “feel” or “groove.” This intangible may be called “soul” or “swing” in different ethnic contexts. “Swing” can be a word used synonymously for “feel.” It is the process of playing music with subtle inflections, usually rhythmic in nature, appropriate to the particular style of music played. This is difficult to learn if one has not spent years listening to the particular genre of music. Non-Latinos are often accused of lacking this skill when they attempt to play Salsa, Son, or Mambo<sup>30</sup>. David is able to work because sometimes a less skilled performer who has the right “feel” will be more appealing to play with than one who is highly skilled but doesn’t quite have the right “feel.”

David’s networks include friends he has known for several years: Cubans, Puerto Ricans and Anglo-Americans. He has a knack for hanging out with musicians and has gotten to know many musicians active in the Cuban networks of performance. I met David in 1992, and he has been my entry point into the Cuban Community of Hudson County, NJ. This community often holds different points of views on the salsa industry and on Puerto Ricans. David and his network are included in this study to provide a view of different perspectives on Salsa that exists among varying Latinos. Also, David’s performance schedule has never been equal to Miguel’s or Juan Pedro’s and, therefore, provides a better view of part- time performers.

### **Conclusion**

These men and the places they frequent represent the focal points of my research. Their roles as bandleaders make them central figures in performance networks. Through Miguel, Juan Pedro, and David, I have been introduced to three overlapping networks. They are my entry

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<sup>30</sup> Or what non African-Americans are accused of lacking when they attempt to play Jazz. For those who are well versed in a particular genre, it is usually quite obvious whether an individual has the right “feel” or not.

points to the other performers in my study and my primary windows into the local Salsa and Latin music scenes.

Miguel, Juan, and David emerge from working-class Latino neighborhoods and deal with the everyday issues that this experience invites. They have directly experienced the structural segregation endemic to urban Latino neighborhoods, which has isolated these neighborhoods from the more middle-class Anglo-American neighborhoods dominating the majority of New Jersey to the west, south, and north of Newark. To the east of Newark is Hudson County, which demographically resembles Newark but with a much larger Cuban and Anglo-American population. To the east of Hudson County is the Hudson River and then Manhattan.

## Chapter 4 Who are the Salseros and What is the Local Economy of Salsa

Salsa, unlike many other styles of popular music, has retained its local level support. Multiple opportunities for the performance of Salsa exist in Newark, New York City, and anywhere there is an established Puerto Rican community. Understanding how Salsa intersects with communities is the beginning of understanding Salsa as work: A reserve labor force is ready to meet the employment opportunities of Salsa. Music is embedded in the local economy as a source of employment. It is also a service that can be purchased to enhance an event.

Although there are six major salsa clubs in New York City, this is far from the total number of performance spaces. Throughout New York and New Jersey, there are multiple bars and nightclubs that host salsa performances on a weekly basis. Most of these places do not advertise extensively and do not attract national acts. In addition to this, Salsa performances occur at multiple types of private events: weddings, christenings, Sweet 15 (*Quinceanera*) and 16 Parties, Mother's Day, and the very popular "party" given by an individual who charges both for admission at the door and for alcohol. Organizers of numerous block parties and street fairs hire salsa bands. Even though only the best known of performers will have access to concert halls, the opportunities for performances at the local level are many.

For an audience, the major salsa clubs, such as The Copacabana or Gonzales y Gonzales in New York City, attract more affluent Latinos as well as non-Latinos. The majority of the other performances do not attract non-Latinos<sup>31</sup>. The local performances often attract the local neighborhood residents. These performances are interpreted as exclusively Latino in their

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<sup>31</sup> It is impossible to make a blanket statement about weddings and other types of private affairs. Variation is the norm.

orientation: Latin patrons, Latin-American food, Spanish language domination, Latino music, performers, and dancers. The performance environment is more exclusively Latin than most Latin work sites and schools. Besides the home, the salsa performance—or some other performance of Latino popular music—is one of the main spaces where a Latino can be Latino. For this reason, the reproduction of identity occurs here. Few formal, exclusively Puerto Rican institutions exist between the communities in New York and New Jersey. Even the sites of religious functions must be shared with other ethnicities of the same faith. In the mainstream media, TV and Radio, Latinos are often homogenized (Dávila, 2001, pp.39-49) into one ethnic group. The local level performance, supported by the local, informal economy, allows for the continuation of Salsa and the cultural practices that occur with it. This facilitates the perpetuation of the cultural transmission and reproduction. This local intersection of economy and cultural production/reproduction helps to perpetuate salsa as a continuous viable source of employment and ethnic identity.

### **Who Plays Salsa?**

While my overall research has primarily focused on three networks, my informants constitute about seven local level networks and some of these musicians are connected to more professional national networks. My primary informants are from Newark and Hudson County, but I have collected data from other networks functioning in Manhattan, specifically Spanish/East Harlem, the South Bronx, and Brooklyn. While more than half of the performers I have spoken with are Puerto Rican, individuals of virtually any ethnicity engage in the performance of Salsa. This includes a large number of European-Americans (Anglos) and very few Cubans. Interestingly, there are no African-Americans active in the networks I have examined. In the past, a few African-Americans were active. There are particularities to the

networks of salsa performers that actually make it difficult for African-American performers to join the ranks of salseros. The networks will be the primary theme of the next chapter.

Of the individuals who figure in my research, there are 37 Puerto Ricans, eight Cubans, four Bolivians, two Columbians, two Hondurans, and one Peruvian, Dominican, and Ecuadorian. Carlos, the conga player, is an anomaly as his family is actually from Guyana. Yet, Carlos portrays himself as Puerto Rican or Latino. All except one of my Puerto Rican informants were born in the United States. My particular sample shows the near absence of Dominicans and a low number of Colombians. Dominicans and Colombians playing Salsa, however, are more common than my research suggests, and many of these two ethnicities are tangentially connected to the networks with which I am involved. Cubans are not the second most prominent ethnic group playing Salsa; white performers of European descent are. There are 12 Anglo performers who figure into my study and I frequently encounter other Anglo musicians who have spent time as salsa performers in my non-Latin musical activities.

Salsa pays modestly. A performer can expect anywhere from \$100-\$200 a performance with the lower end of the pay scale more probable. At best, most salseros can expect to earn \$2600 to \$5200 a year from performing. Even if the individual is lucky enough to earn \$150 a gig and is able to do two gigs a week, this is far from a living wage. Few musicians derive their wages strictly from performance. The vast majority maintains some sort of “day job,” their primary source of income.

Latino performers tend to fall into three categories. First, there are the men who have traditional working class jobs such as truck drivers, warehouse workers, and manual laborers. This is the most common category of day jobs. Miguel’s brother, Johnny, drives a truck. Raúl does construction, so do Pedro, the singer, Raúl, the bongo player, and Charles, the timbale

player. Even Peter, the conga player, will work from time to time in construction. Fernando makes tools. Carlos works at an auto plant. Cheo delivers auto parts. David delivers office supplies. All of this work is subject to periods of underemployment and rarely comes with health benefits. These jobs permit flexible schedules, allowing the musicians time to perform.

Second, there are the men who work as police officers, firemen, and security guards and in other civil service types of jobs. Jesús became a fireman only months before his 35<sup>th</sup> birthday. As he had told me, thirty-five was the cut-off age for hiring a rookie for the Newark Department. Paul, an Anglo salsero, worked as a private investigator for NJ Transit. Two of my informants are police officers. While the salaries for these jobs are more significant than those of an auto parts store worker, the wages are still limited in comparison to the more formally middle and upper-class occupations. These latter jobs interfere with performance schedules. The police officers find it difficult to continue their musical activities and often have to stop performing due to the demands of their job. Jesús has been able to trade shifts with other firemen so that he can perform, but most of his work comes through Miguel. Since Miguel now has significantly less work than he had in the past, the pressure on Jesús to perform is not as great anymore. He has not sought out a new band with which to play.

Thirdly, a space exists for skilled and trained musicians who prefer to make music—though not necessarily performance—their full time profession. Many salseros are music educators. In fact, no single profession is more represented in my research. Individuals dedicated to developing their skills as musicians may study music at the collegiate level. Apparently from a sense of practicality, these players earn degrees and certification as teachers. This in turns allows them to develop the skills to take advantage of other aspects of the salsa industry, such as writing arrangements and running rehearsals. Often, these activities will receive a nominal wage in

return. This wage, though, will be less than the fee for performing.

Juan Pedro, Frankie, Jose, Ramón, Steve, and Carl all work as music educators. Although Ricky, in Jersey City, and Jose, in West New York, work as public school teachers, they do not teach music. Others musicians tangentially involved with Juan Pedro also work as music educators in either the Newark School System or in one of the school systems in Hudson County. This work generally pays well. In fact, New Jersey continually ranks among the highest paying school districts in the United States. In 2004-05, New Jersey ranked third in the nation for its average teacher salary of \$56,635 with a starting salary of \$38,408 a year for a teacher with a bachelor's degree ("New Jersey Ranks"). This work in education also provides the performers with ample vacation time. They may dedicate this time to performing, rehearsing, networking, or working on their personal skills as musicians.

Even the musicians who derive their wages mostly from performing will often do some type of teaching. Peter works at Juan Pedro's studio four days a week teaching children to play percussion and leading the workshops for more advanced students. Like most musicians who earn the bulk of their incomes from performing, Peter needs to play a variety of styles of music in order to support himself. In 2005, his most frequent high paying work—work earning over \$300 a performance—came from performing percussion alongside a DJ, not a band. He is hired to supplement the DJ in order to provide a live performance element to the DJ's pre-recorded music. This is mostly done in the context of contemporary dance music in English, such as R&B, Hip-Hop, and other similar genres. This performance shift is a departure from past years when Peter performed mostly Salsa.

Ramón, probably the most successful salsero in my study, is one of the few people who can support himself almost exclusively through performing, and even he from time to time takes

a position teaching music in the Newark School System. At age 57, Ramón claimed to lack the patience to negotiate the politics involved in the school system, so he walked out of a full-time, tenured teaching job in the fall of 2003 because he didn't get along with his supervisor. Of all of my informants, only Ramón has enough performance opportunities to quit his day job and maintain a middle-class standard of living. And yet in the summer of 2005, Ramón secured himself another full-time teaching position in Newark. He said, "I have to. I can't quit anymore. I need eight more years in order to get my 25 years and my pension." Ramón's pension will include lifetime health insurance coverage.

The majority of musicians who seek to earn their incomes exclusively from performance are the Anglos. Non-Latinos have been involved with Salsa since its inception; hence, there is no novelty to an English speaking non-Latino playing the music. The most famous of non-Latinos in Salsa is the pianist Larry Harlow, sometimes referred to as "The Marvelous Jew." However many young musicians, often holding music degrees in jazz performance, play or have played in salsa bands, cumbia bands, and merengue groups. Most often they are horn players. These musicians play their instruments well and read music. Without affecting the overall "Latin-ness" of the group, the Anglos fill the needed slots a band may have if a trombone or sax player is difficult to find for a particular gig. At one point, Miguel had four Anglos in his group. People who saw the band frequently would tease him by calling the group "Miguel and the gringos" or "Miguel and the white guys."

These Anglo musicians often seek out salsa bands for performance experience. The music values real trumpets and saxophones, as opposed to electronic reproductions of these instruments. Therefore a trombone player feels more welcomed in this context. There also may be more work available for a trombone player performing salsa than for playing rock or dance

music. The trombone, notoriously, is the butt of many jokes in American music, but these jokes do not translate in a salsa context<sup>32</sup>.

Even though Anglos Paul and Mike, trumpet players in Miguel's band, play Salsa as an outlet from their own group that played 1940s American Big Band music, most Anglo performers are involved in a more complicated process. The salsa gigs are a steppingstone to other gigs and a source of networking, especially playing American weddings. Once the wedding work is secured, the players rarely return to Salsa. American weddings pay on average \$300 or more. Salsa at best pays half that. Fred, the trumpet player, would play more wedding gigs if he could get them, but his true love is playing *Be-Bop*. Lenny is one of the few Anglos who prefers work as a *salsero*. He is also one of the few Anglos who made the effort to become fluent in Spanish.

Few of the men participate in work in the service sector. Cheo, the conga player, does computer work, mostly data processing. Rikki works retail but will leave that work and become a schoolteacher once he finishes his undergraduate degree and obtains certification. Carlos, the bongo player, worked in an insurance company but lost his job after 9-11-01. His office was located in the World Trade Center. He too has now become an educator, teaching science in the Paterson School System. No other men in my study have engaged in service sector work. Women, however, frequently occupy this space. It is also rare for women to have roles in performance other than in traditional female roles.

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<sup>32</sup> One day with Ricky, Jesse, and Juan Pedro, I told a common trombone-player joke: "What's the difference between a dead snake in the road and a dead trombone player? The snake was on his way to a gig!" Rather than the anticipated giggling and comments of "Oh, that's bad!", my joke was received with shock and "Better not tell Ramón that joke!" Ramón, however, was fully aware of the trombone player jokes and found them funny. He responded to the trombone player joke by telling another: "How do you get a trombone player to turn down? Take away his chart!"

### *Women in Salsa*

While in New York City groups exist made up primarily, and even exclusively, of women, these types of groups are far more unusual at the neighborhood level. Groups of all women tend to be specialty acts obtaining work partially based on their gender novelty. They can certainly play at a highly skilled level, but their gender is usually noticed and commented on before their musical abilities. One Anglo woman I've spoken to who plays flute in salsa and Latin jazz bands is more acquainted with various Latin American musical styles than the majority of the salseros I have met. She is well versed in Venezuelan music, Colombian music, and Cuban music, all in addition to Salsa. Kim, now in her early 50s, must demonstrate a competency for Latin music well above and beyond that of many of the Latino men who play in the local groups. She also must tolerate male behaviors, such as swearing, smoking, and occasionally excessive drinking. The men might not be inclined to show women who are potentially romantic partners these behaviors.

I asked Kim about aggressive guys propositioning her. She responded that it usually wasn't a problem because her immediate use of words like "fuck" or "cunt" defused potential tensions. The onus was on her to let the guys know they could be themselves, and in turn the men usually treated her as a musical equal and fellow band member. Various musicians propositioned her from time to time. Since she was married through most of her musical career, other musicians tended to respect her marriage and usually did not pursue her. The more difficult situation occurred when men acted as if she was less intelligent than they or when they tried to dominate a performance situation. They might treat her as if she were incapable of dealing with issues such as how to get a gig or where to put her amplifier. A man steeped in notions of machismo might feel it was his responsibility to control these issues for her and, thus, control her

by default. Men like this angered Kim because they were treating her as if she was incapable of handling ordinary tasks. She then explained to them, sometimes angrily, that she could take care of herself. She would threaten to quit a group if a particular guy did not relent. Sometimes she did have to quit groups.

Kim was perceived of as attractive. Another woman who played trombone, Linda, was perceived of as physically unattractive. An overweight woman in her early 40s who could drink as much as any average *salsero*, Linda was a jazz musician who played trombone and, like other jazz musicians, enjoyed playing Salsa for the music, to practice her skills, and to work as a trombone player. The suggestion was that Linda was a lesbian and so the men treated her like a man. She was not a lesbian, but she fit what the Latinos thought of as unattractive or unfeminine. Linda sometimes had difficulty finding work with good bands and was often playing with less skilled groups or in situations where she was primarily playing Cumbia or Merengue and not Salsa. Linda now draws most of her performance work from playing American weddings; Kim, from performing Latin Jazz. These women are highly skilled. Both women hold day jobs as music schoolteachers and both women are Anglo-Americans.

Opportunities are different for Latinos. I met a teenage woman who was the daughter of Miguel's friends. Maria was a pianist, skilled at playing classical music. She could read music well, but at age 15 she did not know how to play Salsa or Jazz and did not have the skills to play music simply by hearing it. Her parents respected me as a pianist and knew that I was an educator of some kind<sup>33</sup> so they asked me what Maria could do to learn to play Salsa. I, of

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<sup>33</sup> In most cases, when I told people that I taught at Rutgers University--which was only five miles from where they live--and that I was finishing my PhD, they assumed I meant that I was a music teacher. At times, it was easier to let them continue to believe this rather explain what cultural anthropology was. Interviewing was difficult at times because the musicians would sometimes rattle off different aspects of the history of salsa, thinking that this

course, gave the accurate and standard answer of “Listen to Salsa and try to imitate what she hears on the recordings,” but I also made the other accurate and standard response of “And if there is a group she can play with...maybe there’s something at the school where they have a salsa band for the kids to play in.” I knew that Juan Pedro, Jose, Ramón and others had tried to establish salsa bands at their schools for their students. Her parents responded: “Oh no! We don’t trust the boys. You don’t know what they will do!” To Maria’s parents, it would not be appropriate behavior for a young girl to play in a band with young males. I asked Juan Pedro about this and he added: “You know, Roberto...you can’t have your daughter hanging around with so many boys...You don’t sleep at night!” While young Latinos often perform in a high school group and their parents may be very supportive, the young Latinas are not encouraged to pursue this activity. Consequently, some Latinas who are equally as talented as teenage boys, if not more so, are not directed towards playing Salsa. This is one reason why there are so few women working as instrumentalists.

Juan Pedro himself has two daughters ages 21 and 23. The older of the two enjoys music but has no real musical ability. The younger, Jenna, works in her father’s academy and takes percussion lessons with Peter. The musicians associated with Juan Pedro afford Jenna special status. For no reason other than respect for Juan Pedro, not one musician will proposition the girl, and she is seen as strictly unavailable to them. If someone has approached her, and I am inclined to believe that this has not happened, no one will ever talk about it.

It is more common for women to be active as singers not as instrumentalists. Salsa is, of course, filled with women who have become notable singers—Celia Cruz and La India, for

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is what I was after because they saw me as a musician. To them, musicians write about music, not urban life.

example—and local groups who want to perform Cruz’ or La India’s material will seek out women who can sing the lead parts of their songs. In order to produce high- pitched harmony parts, women often have roles singing *chorro*. Juan Pedro auditioned two women for his band. One was the sister of one of the lead singers and was automatically given the same “hands off” status as Juan Pedro’s daughters. Another was a nineteen-year-old who had been a high school student of Juan Pedro’s. Juan Pedro directly told the band that he promised her parents that the guys would not touch her. The nineteen-year-old did not last because she didn’t want to attend regular rehearsals. Jesse’s sister had a young child and also could not make regular rehearsals. Miguel tried a female singer for one gig and her boyfriend made his presence quite known to the band members. After two rehearsals and one gig, Miguel got annoyed at the boy friend and decided it was not worth the trouble to have the woman in his group.

Some other women may be active as dancers accompanying the musicians on stage or as a dance team that may perform in front of the band. The difference here is usually a matter of developed skill and professionalism. Women who may dance on stage with the band are likely to be considered as very attractive and will dress in a provocative manner. They may be perceived as “loose” or available, but this certainly may not be the case. This dance work is somewhat limited and their compensation is always lower than that of the musical performers.

Dancers who perform in front of the band, not on stage, but on the dance floor itself, are apt to be highly skilled professional dancers, usually a man-and-woman team. They will perform routines they have rehearsed and may teach members of the audience new dance steps. They may also use these situations to promote their own dancing school or performances. These dancers are not part of the band per se, but rather independent performers who may be contracted to perform with the band. It is necessary for these dancers to have skills greater than that of the audience.

For many of the professional dancers, dancing salsa is part of a repertoire of activities. One woman I met, Gabriella, was a professional dancer who started her career with salsa bands. Now the majority of her work comes as a nationally recognized Hip-Hop dancer, performing in Las Vegas shows or dancing alongside Jennifer Lopez.

Three points can be made from these stories of Latinas in Salsa: 1) There is a perception that women who will perform with bands are automatically available to men, 2) The men cannot control themselves and will always proposition the women, and 3) The women have no agency for rebuking the men. To these three points Jenna or Gabriella responded with a resoundingly sarcastic “I don’t think so....” These young women have experienced more autonomy and do not identify with the restrictions in the same way as the older generation.

Most of the women performing with bands, as singers or as dancers, choose to sing or to dance for the same reasons that a trumpet player plays the horn. They are drawn to this work and have the talent to do it. They are not motivated to perform simply to entertain men and certainly not because they are prostitutes or strippers. However, the perception of the women as loose or available to some extent exists. I have spoken with a woman in her 60s who wanted to be a professional dancer when she was younger, but her mother would not allow this because the dancers were thought to be whores.

A transition is in motion. In Latin communities, perceptions of women in the entertainment industries and of independent women in general persist as being sexually available. However, many people, both men and women, clearly know this not the case. In the context of traditional Latino culture where machismo is commonplace, women come under the control and domination of their fathers and their husbands. In the more modern urban areas in the last few decades, this lack of autonomy has been challenged and many men and women do not

subscribe to such practices, and yet many still do. A transition is in motion where the Puerto Rican community is becoming far more accepting of the idea of women as the equals and as being able to make their own decisions. Nevertheless, this transition to express their independence and/or sexuality is far from complete.

Facilitating this transition is the fact that many women are in the labor force and their work is needed as part of a family's economic strategy. Juan Pedro's wife, Anna, exemplifies this. First, in the context of the economic strategies of her family, Anna works as a school secretary. Second, she also tends to most of the administrative and clerical duties required by Juan's academy. Juan's youngest daughter also does this clerical work. In the beginning of 2005, Juan and Anna hired another woman to take over Anna's duties at the academy. Anna's role in the business diminished throughout the year, though in reality it released her from being there six days a week to only four. While Anna's role in the teaching studio is one of supplemental labor compared to Juan Pedro's, her regular job is not given supplemental status. This too echoes the transition. In the past, many women in Latino communities—and some Latinas in the present—might refer to their wage earning activities as “helping their husband” (Fernández-Kelly&Garcia, 1990, pp.130-149; Grasmuck&Pessar, 1991, p.155). This phrase allows their husbands to retain the title of “breadwinner.” However, there is a trend away from this belief. Anna's work as an administrative assistant nearly equals her husband's. Juan Pedro acknowledges her work and she does not present herself as doing supplemental work. Together, Juan Pedro and Anna provide for their family and themselves. This acknowledgment of her economic value may generally be rare among families and is likely a sign of her family's social mobility. This does, however, contradict Grasmuck's and Pessar's suggestion that middle-class women in Dominican and Cuban communities become more regulated to the domestic sphere

than working-class women (1991, p.154). It is also worth noting that while Anna does not refer to her work as “helping,” Juan Pedro represents her work in that manner: “I couldn’t do it without her” or “She helps so much.” He appreciates his wife’s significant efforts and would expect his daughters to seek careers if they so wished, but the fact that his wife needs to work may threaten his masculinity slightly as he cannot claim to be the sole provider for the family. This is not a prominent feature in his discourse. Virtually all of the married men in my research have working wives, so there appears to be a general acceptance of working women. Nevertheless, the men know of the older generations, especially within Puerto Rico, where husbands were the sole breadwinners and women remained in the house. The acknowledgement of this cultural change probably threatens the men somewhat even though they know it is for the better in most cases.

Another role for women in Salsa speaks to the transition. Women can sometimes take on roles as journalists or promoters focusing on Salsa. When I was doing preliminary research for my project, I met a woman in her 50s who had been writing about Salsa for decades. She managed acts and promoted various concerts. When I told her that I was writing about Salsa, and at the time I thought I might focus more on the 1970s than on recent occurrences, she said: “You weren’t there. I was there and I don’t remember you.” I explained that I turned eight at the end of 1975. I had made no claims to having been present for any Héctor Lavoe concerts or the fabled performance of the Fania All Stars at Yankee Stadium on August 24<sup>th</sup> in 1973. At first, she was defensive that I was exploring the history of Salsa. Her defensiveness may have had much to do with the fact that I am not a Latino. She quickly dropped her antagonism when I said I had taken piano lessons with Chico Mendoza and that I was an anthropologist who wanted to better describe what life was like for the performers of Salsa.

“Robert,” she said, “You know the musicians read the books that these people write about us and they say to me...We don’t see ourselves in their books. You better do a better job than these others....” She then continued telling stories of how much she adored La Lupe, an older pre-salsa Cuban singer who met with a tragic end as a result of cocaine abuse. The woman felt that Pattie LaBelle, and then Madonna, essentially stole La Lupe’s act. She related to me how when she was in her early 20s she looked like a young teenager. She was Héctor Lavoe’s friend and Lavoe never made any sexual advances towards her. The musicians in the 1970s looked after her and none of them “hit on” her. This woman is currently a promoter and still helps the “stars” of the 70s whenever she can.

### *Others*

Club owners and their employees, not just performers, are supported by Salsa. Bars and clubs hire salsa bands to attract larger crowds. Catering halls and other restaurants may benefit. Some people derive employment through providing and working sound systems for groups. Young people may get work helping the group to carry and set-up their equipment. An entire infrastructure is generated around Salsa.

Local clubs come and go. In and around Newark at least fifteen local bars/clubs present Salsa at any given time, but some clubs I performed at in 1995 did not exist when my research began in 2004. Some clubs switch their performance schedules around to attract different Latino ethnic groups. Once when David was trying to secure a performance, the club decided not to have Salsa or Latin Jazz. He related, “They told me that they didn’t want bands anymore. They just want to play Mexican music so the Mexicans will come and spend their entire pay check on Friday and Saturday night.”

Some club owners cannot afford to pay large salsa bands and so experiment with smaller

groups that rely on electronic reproductions of some instrumentalists, even the percussionist. A three-piece group can charge far less for a performance and can play a variety of Latin styles more easily than a larger band that needs to rehearse and co-ordinate a repertoire with 15 people. These groups, however, do not always satisfy the audience seeking an actual Salsa band.

Several individuals have been able to maintain small recording studios. A close friend of Juan Pedro's, Alberto, has operated a small studio in his basement for over 15 years. He has recorded several Salsa bands and several other groups playing Puerto Rican guitar music. The income drawn from the studio supplements his performance income, which can be less than that of others since he plays guitar and has not played continuously with Salsa bands. However, unlike most home-based recording studios in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, his recording technology is not computer based. His technology stems from around 1990, or earlier, and he cannot afford to modernize his studio. Consequently, he has recorded fewer salsa bands in recent years. The salsa bands gravitate to the more modernly equipped studios. At the time of my research, more of Alberto's business came from musicians playing Puerto Rican rural guitar music. These men are often migrants directly from Puerto Rico. Since my research is focused on Salsa, I have not had the opportunity to follow through on why this may be, though I have my assumptions. The guitar bands gravitated to Alberto's studio because they were attracted to his experience with their genre, not because the clientele was accustomed to older technology.

### **What Can Be Earned**

Most bands claim to charge \$1500-\$2000 for a performance, but many will perform for less, even less than \$1000. Bandleaders are traditionally silent on how much each individual performer is earning and what the band may be earning in total. This is done to avoid animosity between band members or a general mutiny by the band against the leader. When the total

payment is high, the pay to the individual band members will be more equal. However, as the pay increases, the bandleader will claim more. This is usually justified through claims that the bandleader is the person who has organized the group, invested in the sound system, and contracted the performance. Miguel's sound system is comprised of technology that is over 10 years old. Juan Pedro uses current technology that has required a more significant investment. Regardless, bandleaders prefer not to discuss the overall fee that the band is receiving for a particular performance and, therefore, the band members themselves are rarely aware of what this figure is.

In New York City and urban New Jersey, a performance pays about \$100 to \$150 for each performer. This figure has not significantly changed in ten years. In addition, there is a bit of a sliding scale. Singers frequently get paid the most, followed by pianists and bassists, then horn players, and finally the percussionist or any other auxiliary performer. It is common for a singer to walk away from a gig having earned \$200 while a percussionist has earned \$75. The differences are somewhat related to skill level and availability of performers on a given instrument. Singers are integral to the performance because of their visibility and for the simple fact that it is difficult to find quality singers.

Percussionists are also an integral part and the best earn as much as the finest singers. However, there is no shortage of mediocre percussionists. A number of Latino men, especially among Puerto Ricans and Cubans, claim to be able to play congas, bongos, and/or timbales. Playing these instruments may be an expression of Latino identity, as they are often considered the most Latin of all instruments. This situation creates more availability of percussionists than of other instrumentalists.

Singers and percussionists are almost exclusively Puerto Rican and working class, much

like the audience. Quality singers are difficult to find and they must have a strong command of Spanish. This is potentially problematic in New York and/or in New Jersey as many Latinos have grown up in a bi-lingual environment but are more dominate in English than in Spanish. The linguistic skills, however, are a symbol of authenticity. The percussionists are required to know specific Latino rhythms and, therefore, they possess knowledge that is specifically Latino—though potentially more specifically Cuban than Puerto Rican. As a result, the percussionists also have unquestionable authenticity in the performance. A dichotomy of compensation exists among those who claim the greatest amount of authenticity: The singer gets the most and percussionist gets the least. This creates animosity and mistrust.

Juan Pedro does not follow this rule. Juan's singers are young and inexperienced. His percussionists are not. Juan refers to his instrumentalists<sup>34</sup> as veterans and has paid them slightly more than his inexperienced singers. Overall, it is Juan's intention to pay everyone in the group the same, but this has not happened for every performance.

A successful group will perform anywhere from 26-52, or even more, gigs per year. Many groups and individuals do far less. Miguel, at the height of his band's popularity approached 26 gigs in 1998. Through their own networks, some individuals are able to perform more by working with multiple groups. This is not always easy to do since the primary performance night is Saturday and, in most cases, an individual can only perform with one group per night.

### *Illegal Drugs*

A few of my informants have mentioned another form of compensation: getting paid in

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<sup>34</sup> Including the percussionists.

cocaine. This has never been articulated as a current phenomenon, rather it is said in passing or as something they heard or something that they experienced when they were “young and stupid.” It is unclear if the men were referring to experiences they had in the 1970s, the 1980s or the 1990s, but clearly they were not talking about events that occurred in their present lives. I have rarely seen musicians using cocaine. When it did occur, it was in a casual context and did not represent any strong patterns of behavior. Instead my informants told me cautionary tales about how people indulged in various drug-related behaviors and eventually lost themselves to drugs.

While some of the performers may indulge in recreational drugs, and these are fewer than those who drink, the salsa performance does not usually connect to informal economies such as the drug trade. Drug dealers may frequent salsa performances, but they are almost never connected to the band itself. Rather, the party atmosphere of the performance may create an appealing situation for a drug dealer to move his product and, therefore, it is more the bar or club itself that attracts the individual dealer rather than any band. However, since the musicians and the drug dealers often appear in the same general space, associations between the drug dealers and the musicians are inferred. This assumption is rarely true. Musicians themselves do not indulge in these activities any more, or less, than the members of the audience.

### *Prestige*

There is also another factor in the compensation for the performance: prestige. Certainly, in a performance situation, the musicians are the center of attention, therefore recognizable in the community. However, people also gain local recognition when they are not performing. Musicians are valued by other community members not only for their talent and skill but also because of their role in the reproduction of Latino ethnicity. This special status for the musician leads, in turn, to respect. Prestige also results in free alcohol and/or other drugs, in women

willing to talk or flirt with the men, and in networking for other kinds of employment. The prestige can offset some of the stress of living an urban working class life, but it is not an act of resistance or even a conscious, coping strategy.

Raúl, the timbale player, had taken percussion lessons with Charles, another timbale player. Charles is a far more accomplished percussionist than most. He is locally revered as a musician and is accorded a high level of respect by all who know him. When Raúl found out I was performing with Charles, he praised Charles nonstop. This resulted in other musicians echoing Raúl's praise for Charles. Charles has been the most critical and intimidating of all my informants regarding my playing of Salsa. Early in our association, I understood that Charles' criticism warranted listening to closely.

Many people in Newark's North Ward recognize Juan Pedro. His role as an educator for the last 20 years has acquainted him with many families in the neighborhood. For a while, he was the music director for one of the local Catholic churches that provided Spanish language masses. His private school now attracts Latinos from all over northeastern New Jersey. He feels that he is a role model for many kids in Newark. He has grown up in the same neighborhood as they and has used music to take himself out of the working-class ghetto and into a more middle-class standing in the nearby suburbs. On the many gigs we have performed together over the last several years, I have seen him unexpectedly meet others who recognize and respect him. His general character is that of a kind, responsible, and ethical man. This accentuates the respect he is afforded.

Miguel, the bandleader, lives a harder life than Juan Pedro. He does not own his own home. He does not have a college education. His day job is that of a cook; his positions have been in nursing homes, at lunch counters, and in small bars. He is not the head chef at an

expensive restaurant and will likely never be one, but his work as a salsero and bandleader places him in a position where he has worked with the political elite of Newark. He too is recognized on the street for his activities as a musician. People seek him out as a performer or bandleader. This provides him with a sense of personal importance that he otherwise would find lacking in his working-class, inner-city life.

### *Using the Income*

All of this salsa activity operates outside of any regulating agency. This is an informal economy. At the local level, this is a cash business. Wages and payments are rarely reported to the IRS. Some musicians perform for years without knowing each other's last name, making reports of payments on taxes impossible. 1099 forms are not distributed. Social security numbers are not exchanged. To some extent this is a self-contained economy. Therefore, it is important to recognize that Salsa is not exactly a grassroots movement where civil society dictates how Salsa exists on the national and international stage. I will explore the larger and more capitalized music industry in a later chapter.

As this money remains in the informal economy, the money itself is often viewed like disposable income. For less professional performers, the money may get spent the same night of a gig on alcohol, narcotics, or women. Less professional performers may view the salsa performance as their opportunity to party for the night. Since they're getting paid in cash, the performers often hide the income from their wives or girlfriends, people who may prefer the money put to more practical uses. Some wives will know precisely what their husbands are doing. Anna is aware of with whom Juan is performing. Most women know how much money the bandleaders pay. Another informant told me this about his wife: "She knows...if I'm playing with Frankie. She says, 'Him? We need milk for the baby!' If I'm playing with Tito, she says,

‘Oh...maybe we can go to that new restaurant on Sunday.’” When Miguel’s band was performing frequently, Carlos would count on the money from the gig to use as an allowance to spend over the course of the week. Jose would give all of his gig money to his wife the moment he got home. David did the same.

### **Conclusion**

Salsa is often a part-time affair where the performers are best described as working class. While this is partially the result of the fact that my study focuses on working-class neighborhoods, I have never encountered a lawyer or a doctor playing Salsa. Salseros work in a wide variety of professions, but many men have become teachers of some kind. Aside from myself, Ramón is the only salsero I have ever met who has taught a college level course. In the summer of 2004, he taught a music appreciation class at a local community college. Gender differentiation has maintained many traditional attitudes of gender inequality, but some of these are also challenged. However, an occupational segregation of a kind does exist between genders.

While Salsa is an economic force, it is limited. Rarely does Salsa support a musician and even more rarely a family. The owners of salsa clubs, nevertheless, stand to earn more than the performers, but this too is unreliable. With the frequency of venues closing or changing owners, owning a club is risky business. Salsa likely does more to keep surplus capital circulating within a neighborhood than it facilitates any one performer accumulating wealth. Salsa is more than an economic force and the compensation it provides goes beyond that of wages. Salsa may do more to create ties among men within—and between—communities than it provides income. I will now focus on this issue.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Networks of Salsa**

Performance is the goal of any salsa band or salsero. Performance is employment. It is the main wage earning work and the main avenue by which performers generate local prestige both from the general audience and from other performers. However, very few salsa groups are able to garner enough work for their members to draw a steady wage, be it supplementary or primary income. While salsa groups can become locally known as a unit, individual performers are inclined to shift between groups and to work with a variety of bands. By doing so, musicians can generate a more consistent income, practice their skills in front of an audience, and establish a reputation as a performer. How, then, does a person get work, especially with multiple groups?

While many groups act like small businesses for the group leader, the performers themselves do not take this approach. The performers are organized into a variety of networks. These networks tend to fall into two different categories. First, familial networks are generally based around kin and fictive kin relationships. Second, networks are based around more professional relationships. These two forms of networks can overlap and musicians often maintain both types of networks. Either network may be the main one but some individuals exist in both equally. While the two networks create opportunities, tensions are generated as well.

#### **Members of the Groups**

The most common misconception about musical groups by both the fans of a particular genre and by academics writing textual analysis of musical performance is the notion that singers are the most important musicians. There is, of course, an immediate connection between singers and the audience because the singers are the most visible performers. The audience also tends to focus on the lyrics of a song to one degree or another. I do not mean to downplay the importance

of the singers, but rather my intention is to draw attention to the fact that the singers are not the only performers on stage. Audience and academics will focus on the stars of a group who are primarily the singers although sometimes they are percussionists, a horn player, a pianist or a bassist. However these “stars” will be one third of the group at best.

A salsa band, or salsa/cumbia/merengue band, often has three individuals whose main job is to sing but will also involve eight, ten, or even more instrumentalists. A typical salsa band can employ from 10-16 musicians. This includes three percussionists, three to five horn players, piano, bass, and sometimes guitar or *tres*. In some cases, an instrumentalist may pull double duty, playing both timbales and singing Chorro, or a chorro singer may play cowbell or *guiro*. This can reduce the number of musicians in a group.

Managing 15 musicians is a complicated task. Although this is part-time and relatively informal work, performers may not be able to make a particular rehearsal or job due to work, family, or other personal or professional obligations. Any bandleader needs to know of multiple individuals who can adequately fill the various roles, especially if a group is performing frequently. This has led to a network style of organizing for the majority of groups. Musicians will often know several other musicians and will recommend each other for gigs. Just as some instrumentalists perform with multiple bands, some chorro singers in one group will sing lead in another. The central figure in any particular group is the bandleader. The networks of organization become cohesive around the bandleaders because they are hiring the musicians and contracting performances.

### **Networks Based on Kin and Fictive Kin Relationships**

Kin/fictive kin networks are likely to be a performer’s original network. These are networks centered on brothers, cousins and, less commonly, fathers and sons. The fictive kin

relationship is based on either men of similar ages who begin performing with each other early in life, as high school friends, for example, or it will extend to individuals who have performed with each other over long periods of time. Some men have performed with each other in various settings for over ten, if not twenty or thirty years. If they become friends, the usual case, they will often treat each other as fictive kin. Juan Pedro often states, “It’s all *familia* here, Roberto.”

At the local level, these kinds of fictive kin relationships are generally considered trustworthy, flexible, and familiar. “Trustworthy” here means that individuals who know one another well can assume that band members will show up to a performance on time and perform to an expected level of proficiency. Performers who have a fictive kin relationship with a bandleader feel comfortable that they will get paid properly and timely at the end of the performance. Musicians are flexible in the sense that if a bandleader does not have the correct cash on hand to pay all of the performers at the end of the gig, the musicians with the more familiar relationships are more willing to wait to be paid some days after the performance. In addition, if a performer knows he will be late for a performance, the fictive kin relations are willing to compensate for this delay.

Once, when Miguel booked his band to perform at his sister’s wedding, Raúl showed up late because he had double-booked himself. His other gig was a mile away from the wedding site. Raúl thought he could slip out between sets at the wedding and perform at the other gig. He did not know the wedding was for family. He was embarrassed when he realized what he had done and felt as if he had let his friends down. He knew he had not lived up to the obligations of his familial network. Miguel was momentarily upset, but the performance continued without incident.

Part of the definition of the fictive kin relationships is familiar relations. This familiarity

makes a person more comfortable in front of an audience. While some performers thrive on an audience, others do not. To some, this is an anxiety-provoking scenario. The familiarity of having good friends around can potentially ease this stress. Johnny, for example, had never sung with any other band before joining his brother's. While very talented, Johnny experienced high levels of stress before and during each gig, stress that was eventually eased because the band members were men whom he had known for years and who were supportive of him.

I have observed, at the lower echelons of Salsa, that some musicians will not perform without friends in the band. The assumption is that friends look out for each other; however, in reality this may not be the case. Friends will defend friends in arguments with strangers. Friends may be more inclined to forgive indiscretions. A friend may also scold another if one happens to drink excessively at a particular performance. This reprimand, however, is given a few days after the actual performance and will be entertained only among friends. The pursuit of Salsa as a leisure activity for friends and kin is often the impetus for any musician to begin playing the music.

Fictive kin relationships are often a performer's entry into Salsa and the kin relationships feature prominently in the discourse of the bands. Miguel's band provides a typical case where kin and fictive kin relationships predominate. Although Miguel eventually became the bandleader, he did not begin in this position. In the early/mid 1980s, Jesús' father started the group as an opportunity for his sons. Jesús played bass and his brother Freddie played guitar. Both men sang. Mr. Rodriguez acted as the bandleader, directing the rehearsals, choosing the material for the group, and contracting the performances. This was a conscious effort on his part to provide his young sons, who had recently graduated from high school, with activities other than becoming involved in the urban street life of Newark in the mid 1980s. While it is unclear if

helping his sons avoid the pitfalls of drug abuse was one of his goals, the timing of this group coincides with the crack epidemic of the 1980s. Both Freddie and Jesús avoided this temptation. These men have had their share of self-destructive behaviors but significant addictions have not figured in their lives. They both currently live working-class lives in Newark; violence and drug abuse have not been their personal demons.

Mr. Rodriguez was a singer and percussionist who took it upon himself to teach his sons to play Salsa. For the first year or so, they rehearsed regularly. Other young neighborhood men participated in the group. These participants were acquaintances as well as older friends of Mr. Rodriguez. Miguel, a high school friend of Jesús', joined the group at its inception. Mr. Rodriguez passed away in 1990. Jesús, Miguel and Carlos still speak of him with loyalty, fondness, and respect. Apparently Mr. Rodriguez was a taskmaster who maintained the group with a firm hand.

One story Jesús tells frequently illustrates precisely how his father acted to protect his sons. At one performance in the late 1980s, something shocking occurred which Jesús tells both to describe the outrageous event and to demonstrate his father's protection. Newark has long been a place of urban violence and narco-trafficking and these forces have a propensity to seep into the daily lives of the people who live there. The conga player in the Rodriguez group had substance abuse problems. This was largely hidden from the band. During a drug transaction, the conga player had been shorted money. The person who shorted him showed up at a gig in the late 1980s. The conga player, while on stage, drew a gun and threatened this man. Mr. Rodriguez diffused the event. Violence and police were avoided. The conga player was fired and replaced by Carlos.

While the drama of this story makes it a good tale to tell on a gig—it is unusual for a

salsero to be armed, rarer still to draw a weapon, and even more so for this to happen while the musician is on stage. This story highlights another factor of urban life. The conga player's self-abusive behavior was ignored until it manifested itself into potential public violence. Such behavior would not have been accepted if it had affected the conga player's performance or reliability. However, as long as these issues were not a problem, virtually any "bad behavior" he was engaged in was tolerated. A public display of violence, however, is unacceptable. This is indicative of how most will react to another's self-abusive behaviors: "As long as it doesn't affect everyone else, it's your business and not mine." This acceptance is related to the depth of the kin and fictive kin relationships. In the more professional networks, however, self-abusive behaviors may be less tolerated. In no network is violence allowed. Unfortunately, a silence surrounds domestic violence between husband and wife. Rumors about people arise, but most men are willing to ignore the signs of these incidents in their friends' marriages. This willful ignorance appears to be a basic denial of one's friend's ability to actually commit such an act.

As Mr. Rodriguez became ill, Miguel took over the duties of directing the group. He began to contract work, run rehearsals, and choose material. Miguel also chose the personnel. Freddie did not continue with the group for a variety of reasons. As a guitar player, he did not have a prominent role in the group, so he preferred to pursue playing Puerto Rican guitar music referred to as *Jibaro*, deriving from the rural areas of Puerto Rico. Another reason, I suspect, was that Freddie strongly felt the loss of his father and could not emotionally continue in the group. Carlos, older than the rest of the young men, joined towards the end. Carlos looks 10-15 years younger than he actually is. A dead ringer for a local Newark politician who bares a strong resemblance to Sammy Davis Jr., Carlos, to the surprise of many, is actually a veteran of the Vietnam War. Carlos claims that Mr. Rodriguez had asked him to look after his sons once he

was gone. While Carlos never really “looked after” Jesús or Freddie, this association with Mr. Rodriguez enhanced the notion of fictive kin between Carlos and Jesús, Freddie, and Miguel. However, without Mr. Rodriguez as their leader, the group did not last long after his passing. Miguel had other networks in which to work and Jesús and Carlos stopped playing for a short time.

I met Carlos in the early 1990s when I was performing with a Latin jazz group in Newark. Carlos began coming to hear us regularly and eventually performed with us when our main *congero* could not make it to a gig. This Latin jazz group was entirely based on fictive kin relationships as every member of the group had gone to music school together. We performed the music we had learned while in college. By 1994, Miguel wanted to resurrect the group and Carlos suggested that I be the new pianist. I was brought in as a member of Carlos’ fictive kin.

The re-formed group had to include Carlos and Jesús, but Miguel wanted to create something more professional. At the time, this meant little more than a group performing from sheet music rather than one performing organically generated arrangements of simple tunes “by ear<sup>35</sup>.” Under Mr. Rodriguez, the group developed their arrangements in rehearsal. This made it difficult for a stranger to perform with the group because the arrangements were not written down. Miguel preferred to do more complex and better-known songs that required written arrangements. Unable to read music, Jesús could no longer be the bass player, though he would continue singing Chorro. Another high school friend who could read music, Fernando, was

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<sup>35</sup> Playing “by ear” is the notion that musicians play a song from hearing it and not from reading it from sheet music. In this situation the lauded “perfect pitch” comes into play. Perfect Pitch is the ability to recognize what a note is simply from hearing it. The majority of musicians in the world do not have perfect pitch. Most musicians can develop their ear and may have a very good sense of “relative pitch.” This occurs when musicians can figure out what a song/melody/chord progression is in relation to knowing what one note or chord is. Most musicians have this skill.

brought in to play bass, although he didn't play well. In addition, the group needed a lead singer. This is how Miguel's older brother Johnny received the opportunity to sing with the band. Cheo, the timbale player, and "Miguel the bongo player" were local guys from the neighborhood. The trumpet player, another young neighborhood man, aspired to more professional networks. He used the group as an opportunity to work on his arranging skills and was contracted by Miguel to write 12 arrangements of tunes.

Cornel, who had played trombone with the same Latin jazz band as I, was included in this group. Cornel is an African American and is the only non-Latino African American with whom I have ever performed Salsa. Cornel attended the rehearsals and was generally treated with respect; however, the ensemble wanted to perform a version of the "Banana Boat Song" which is best known as Harry Belafonte's calypso classic "Day-O." The lyrics of the song had been slightly changed and the song itself was far more Latin than Calypso, but the lyrics included odd references to Jamaica and loading boats with bananas. Cornel commented to me, "Great...now we're doing a racist song." After the first gig, Miguel stopped phoning Cornel, claiming that he didn't play Salsa well enough. Cornel confided in me that he didn't want to continue with the group and he became a forgotten member, never to perform with the band again. It's hard to say if this situation was the result of racist tendencies among the musicians. I asked Cornel if he had felt it was, and he said "No, not directly," but he did feel out of place. Essentially, Cornel had no potential fictive kin bonds with anyone besides me and I was motivated to learn to play Salsa better. Consequently, I was more focused on developing friendships with the other musicians in the group.

Cornel played trombone. In much of American popular music, be it Rock and Roll, Jazz or Country Music, the trombone is often unjustly the butt of many jokes. In Salsa, though, the

trombone is a revered instrument often valued more than trumpets or saxophones, much the opposite of what occurs in the jazz world<sup>36</sup>. A good trombone player is prized, but the group did not value Cornel. I play the piano. A good pianist is highly prized and pianists are in high demand. Whatever shortcomings I had as a performer were met with words of encouragement and others helped me to become a better salsero. This was not the approach taken with Cornel.

Cheo, the timbale player, was strongly connected to Miguel and Jesús through fictive kin relationships but “Miguel the bongo player” was not. Cheo would often drink too much on gigs and would, by the end of the night, play so loudly that it became distracting to the rest of the group. Since he was an old friend of Miguel’s and Jesús’s, this behavior was largely tolerated. It was certainly complained about and, as friends, Miguel and Jesús would speak to him about this issue. By 2000, Cheo had given up drinking, attended Church frequently, and stopped playing Salsa. “Miguel the bongo player” had other substance abuse problems, which caused him to occasionally “nod off” while rehearsing. “Miguel the bongo player” was kicked out of the group within a year.

### **Professional Networks**

Professional networks are slightly different. These networks are not based upon long-standing friendships, although these relationships certainly develop. Instead, these relationships are built upon performing experience, skill, and money. Professional networks usually apply to high-profile groups that perform outside of the local scene. The more professional groups will pay more and perform at more prestigious venues.

Better quality performances and higher pay will attract more performers, making it far

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<sup>36</sup> For example, a trombone player jokes: What’s the difference between a chain saw and a trombone? A Chain saw sounds good in a small group.

easier to fill the needed roles with more qualified individuals. This in turn makes it easier to fire members who do not perform up to an anticipated level or who spend too much time drinking or exhibiting other “bad behaviors.” The level of professional network can vary. Local bands rely on professional networks when their kin networks cannot supply the needed performers. These networks may connect to performers who play with national or international acts.

A major issue defining high-level networks is the difference between skill and talent. Talent is internal and not something that can be learned. It is a raw aptitude; in this case, for music, it will vary greatly between people and even among family members. Developed skill is another matter all together. There are multiple skills needed to practice the craft of music, especially as a performer negotiating professional networks. These skills include the ability to read and write music. Writing arrangements—orchestrating a particular piece of music for a band of multiple players and instruments to perform—is a complicated skill that comes with years of practice, training, and trial and error. This is crucial for expressing the music people “hear in their head” or what they imagine. It is also a means to generate non-performance musical work in Salsa. Individuals who are highly skilled in writing arrangements can earn additional income by providing their services to various bandleaders. Reading is essential for being able to walk into any performance situation and to play whatever is required. Reading music and writing music, to a lesser degree, are essential skills for activity in professional networks, except for extraordinary players.

Within the context of professional networks, it is a given that virtually all performers are talented. I mean no disservice by stressing skill and craft over raw talent. Both the talented and the skilled have developed an aspect of the music obtained only by playing and listening to a particular genre extensively. We could call it the “feel” of the music. This aspect is crucial to

performing Salsa properly. There is an analogous “feel” in virtually all forms of popular music, often setting the skills of one genre apart from another. And, yet, “feel” does not truly define anything, similar to other words: “groove,” “swing,” “spice,” “fire.” These words are as elusive as “soul” or “cool.”<sup>37</sup>.

In creating a professionally oriented group, Juan Pedro has required complex arrangements that are both well written and enjoyable for the musicians to play. Much of the music is organized so that any musician can walk into a situation with Juan Pedro and perform his music. In hiring a band member, Juan Pedro may prefer one with whom he has a familiar relationship, but he will often settle for someone who is professional.

Juan Pedro’s group, overall, has tried to maintain a more professional attitude. It is largely based on fictive kin relationships, and the men in the group are largely connected to several professional networks. Juan Pedro relies on his fictive kin relationships for his band members, such as using his own college buddy, Jose, in the band, but he has tried to extend his own network to bring in people who are more than just “neighborhood guys.” In doing so, Juan Pedro has mostly used familiar ties to coerce skilled musicians into his group and the best of the neighborhood guys.

Juan Pedro’s percussionists, Peter and another man named Cheo, have extensive resumes including performances with some of the most well-known performers in the salsa world. These are highly skilled men who perform music once a week at least. They are flexible in their approaches and perform almost as much non-Salsa as they do Salsa. Their own networks have afforded them the opportunities to tour the United States and to travel internationally performing

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<sup>37</sup> For a discussion of these with regard to the African-American community, see Kelly 23-26.

Salsa. In addition to the percussionists, Juan Pedro has also tried to incorporate a highly respected trombone player in his group. Ramón continues to perform with the most well-known and innovative Salsa and Latin jazz musicians from the past 30 years. All of these three men can read music and play multiple styles of music.

Peter and Ramón draw their primary incomes from the performance of music while Cheo maintains a day job. Cheo's children are younger than both Peter's and Ramón's; therefore, Cheo's financial burden is greater to bear, although he doesn't earn more money from music than Peter does. When Peter and Ramón had to support younger children, they worked a day job too. These three men receive inquiries for performance from people they know and from those they don't. They have established reputations beyond the confines of North Newark.

Experience is another key factor in defining professional networks. The more one plays, the more performers one meets. Thus a performer earns a reputation. A highly experienced and skilled musician will often get the opportunity to play with better bands—ones made up of individuals at least as talented, skilled, and/or experienced as he—and get the opportunity to earn more for a performance. While a local performance may pay \$100-\$150, Ramón will be paid more than \$500 per performance.

Exceptions do exist. Singers are not required to have the skills for reading music. Singers are able to survive and thrive on raw talent more than any other performer. However, entrance into highly skilled professional networks is usually easier for a younger individual than for one over 30. It is unlikely that a highly skilled band will take a new 43-year-old singer out on a tour, and often this entrance level work will not be appealing. This role pays very little and a lifestyle of traveling to a different city everyday, living out of a suitcase, is often unappealing to an older person. However, 43-year-olds do sing Chorro (backup) in salsa bands but are experienced in

their roles or networks. Their reputations are solid and they are accustomed to the lifestyle of touring.

### *Race and Musical Networks*

As I pointed out previously, African-Americans are largely absent from the kin networks, while I was absorbed into fictive kin. The situation is slightly different in the more professional networks. I have encountered several highly skilled and talented African-American jazz musicians who have worked frequently playing Salsa and other forms of Spanish-Caribbean music. These relationships between the musicians and the groups are maintained as highly professional arrangements. Since the musicians strive to perform the music at the highest level possible, the bands pay them and welcome them. No African-American jazz musician has commented to me about racist feelings stemming from the group and my informants among the Latinos never make racist jokes towards African-Americans, at least not in my presence.

However, only in the presence of African-Americans have I encountered my informants professing how Latin music is derived from African traditions. Unless television/film cameras, journalists, or ethnomusicologists are present, this subject is never discussed. While not an openly racist discourse, there is a silence about the African contribution to Latin music. This is certainly contradictory as many Latinos are dark skinned. Some even engage in explicitly African derived religious practices, specifically Santeria. While “The Religion,” as Santeria is informally called, has not been the focus of my study, some of my informants practice it. The “African-ness” of Santeria is largely replaced in conversation by its “Cuban-ness.” One of my informants traveled to Cuba to be blessed by a major Santero in order to play specific drums in religious rituals. Even though the Yuruban roots of Santeria are recognized, few—if any—salsa musicians are traveling to Nigeria to study drums or culture. Instead, Cuba is the goal.

I am sure that many of my informants, especially those who practice the religion, would be upset at being called racist towards African-Americans. Those who are politically minded see the obvious similarities between the struggles of African Americans and Latinos in the United States. However, the silence is deafening. I suspect that the African origins of Latin rhythms are not brought up in my presence, or in the presence of other Anglos, because of our acceptance into the fictive kin relationships. The Latinos are not compelled to acknowledge the African traditions because they are comfortable enough with us to avoid being on their guard. However, while I know Black musicians who have played with salsa bands, I don't know salsa bands that use Black musicians. While African-Americans and Latinos populate the same neighborhoods, African-Americans are missing from the fictive networks.

#### *Gender and Musical Networks*

Women are largely absent from these networks, especially the ones based on fictive kin. While the salseros are young, it is uncommon for teenage boys and girls to establish fictive relationships. Interactions between young men and women are more romantic and gendered. Learning to play, listening to recordings, and practicing vocal harmonies do not occur informally between young men and women. The boys are more concerned with impressing and pursuing the girls, and likewise, the girls. As stated earlier, parents are reluctant to allow their 15-year-old, unchaperoned daughters to hang around with a group of boys in a non-school related activity. This prevents networks of fictive kin from being established between men and women.

It is also improper for a man to casually call another man's wife or girlfriend to talk about music or gigs, just as it is socially inappropriate for a woman to call a man under similar circumstances. Yet, this is precisely what people do who share networks. The casual activities that occur to maintain and to utilize the networks might actually be interpreted as romantic

and/or sexual pursuit and cause tensions in personal relationships. Married women who sing Salsa may also be in situations where their husbands try to dissuade them from performing and, therefore, from being on stage in the public sphere. Network activities between single men and women may also be interpreted as romantic and/or sexual pursuit, a situation that either or both parties wish to avoid.

### **Contrasts Between the Two Networks**

The two types of networks certainly overlap and often mimic each other. The overlap comes from the fact that all performers have some fictive kin networks but not all have professional ones. The mimicking often comes in the form of fictive kin networks trying to act as professional networks and professional networks trying to maintain a discourse of familial connection.

Jesús, for example, has performed only with the group started by his father and then taken over by Miguel. This group has disbanded and is at this point unlikely to play together again. Jesús has stopped performing Salsa. The group disbanded partially because Miguel and Johnny clashed too often and eventually stopped speaking to each other. Many of the reasons for this sibling fighting had nothing to do with the band. Nevertheless, Johnny often felt that he should be paid more and that Miguel was keeping too much of the money for himself. Since he was a valuable singer, Miguel perhaps should have paid Johnny more. Miguel, however, did not always earn money on the band's gigs and would occasionally take a job where he earned no money at all in order to keep the group working. At other times, Miguel would earn \$500 for himself while paying the band members \$100 or less. Miguel did all of the legwork of securing gigs, like spending money on phone calls and investing money in sound equipment. If Miguel paid Johnny a total of \$1500 in 1998, Miguel likely would make \$2000. As the leader of the

band, the extra \$500 is relatively small compensation.

The band may have fallen apart because Miguel was not professional enough. Miguel's phone number changed frequently. As a result of bad credit, he could not obtain a consistent cellular telephone number and this cost him work. People who wanted to hire him could not find him. In some situations, Miguel could not pay all of his band members at the end of gigs. Eventually he owed money to many individuals; consequently, musicians no longer wanted to work with Miguel.

During the course of this research, Miguel and I had contracted a performance where we provided a Latin jazz band to perform alongside a Newark city councilman on a float in Newark's Portuguese Day Parade. I provided the band. We needed musicians who were able to play Brazilian music, not Salsa, so it was necessary to use musicians outside of our networks of Salsa musicians. Miguel provided the sound system. This was not our first time performing for the Newark politicians and we knew that we would have to wait for about three months to collect our money from the City of Newark. As we were both the bandleaders for this performance, we were both going to be compensated more than the rest of the band members or the guys working the sound system. Since we knew we had to wait months to be paid, we collected more than the average extra compensation. It was my responsibility to pay the band members, Miguel paid the sound men. Although Miguel received payment from Newark three months after our gig, he never paid me. I paid \$550 to the band members out of my own pocket. Consequently, Miguel owed me about \$800, \$550 for the band and \$250 for my work. In the long run, I am being compensated since Miguel had been a rich source of information for my research.

However, my other informants in Newark are well aware of Miguel's action, thus damaging his reputation. Jose, for example, claims that he will never work with Miguel again

because he owes him \$100. This coupled with the fact that Miguel still owes me \$800 reinforces the idea of Miguel's untrustworthiness. The hurtful aspect is that Miguel and I maintained a close familial tie.

Carlos suggested that Miguel had become threatened as my familial tie with Juan Pedro increased. Juan Pedro went to high school with Miguel and Jesús. He performed with them from time to time. If Miguel was in a jam and Fernando could not make a performance, he would try to pressure Juan Pedro to perform based on their fictive kin relationship. Juan Pedro frequently responded in a professional manner that was often interpreted by Miguel as arrogant. Juan Pedro would be perfectly willing to come and perform for Miguel if he paid Juan Pedro's asking price, which was about \$50 more—50% more—than what Miguel would pay Fernando. He often didn't have that money in the budget to pay Juan Pedro, and he certainly wasn't going to pay Juan Pedro more than he was earning himself. This created animosity between Miguel and Juan Pedro because Miguel felt that Juan Pedro should work with him based on their long-standing familial tie. In the context of familial relationships, bandleaders coerce individuals to work with them by applying pressure through their relationships as friends. Juan Pedro did not accept this from Miguel.

As Juan Pedro began his own group, Miguel saw Juan Pedro as potentially taking his already diminishing work from him. Juan Pedro knew the same club owners and politicians as Miguel and most of them preferred Juan Pedro's greater professionalism. Miguel stopped returning my phone calls during the course of my research.

Juan Pedro treats his band members like fictive kin relationships. He will use this to explain to band members why he may need to pay lower than standard wages or call sudden rehearsals. Work is harder to come by for Salsa bands in 2004 and 2005 than it was in 1998 and

1999 and Juan Pedro's band rehearses far more than it performs. After months of rehearsing without gigs, his band was becoming anxious. Juan Pedro tried to portray the band as a family ideal to diffuse the tension. Consequently, Juan Pedro's band has become more of a networking center than anything else. Musicians come to rehearse, but they are able to meet each other and to find out where the potential work may be. The quality of the arrangements that Juan Pedro uses is high enough to satisfy many skilled performers. This is unusual among low-level salsa bands. The high level of musicianship encourages the continual participation of high-level players.

The guarantee of a piano player, even one with ulterior ethnographic motives, facilitates the continuation of the group as well. Piano players are in high demand and, therefore, have better access to performance work. It is unusual for a skilled pianist to continue rehearsing with a mostly non-working band and extraordinary for one who says "Yes, let's try that" at every suggestion. I was the piano player in this group, so I seldom refused a rehearsal or impromptu get-together for the basic reason that this was the means by which I have done my research. Possibly were it not for the anthropologist, this group might not have lasted as long as it has.

Since many musicians maintain multiple networks, professional and fictive kin, obligations to one network or another can also cause tensions. Most performers must give priority to their professional networks. These networks pay more and provide better performance opportunities. These networks also usually perform at a higher level than the fictive kin ones, but fictive kin networks may call on a friend to perform at times either when the friend is already committed to a professional network gig or when he simply prefers to stay at home or go out with his wife/girlfriend one night. The fictive kin network may then engage in gossip about the individual and generate feelings of resentment towards him. The professional network may never

phone an individual for another gig again if he turns down an offer or if he cancels a job to perform with a lower level band. The latter of these scenarios does not happen, though the reverse may. One, however, may cancel on the familial network to perform for higher pay and a higher profile performance space.

Within this area of tension, fictive kin groups sometimes mimic the activities of professional networks, but it is largely a situation analogous to the lower class mimicking the middle class. The members of a group based on fictive kin networks may speak as though they are bound by contracts, though often many have no other opportunities to play. As the bandleader is the one distributing the pay, he may act as if there is a power relationship between the band members and him. This relationship suggests the members are reliant on the bandleader for work. In reality, the leader is just as dependent on the musicians: If he is able to have a more professional band, he will. Without the familial network, he may not be able to produce a full group on the night of a gig, and fictive kin bands do pay consistently. If bandleaders do not guarantee a certain wage per gig, their friends will leave them. The more professional bands will pay more but often not by a significant margin. If an individual in a fictive kin network feels he is being underpaid or dealt with unjustly, he may be far more inclined to speak out. Tensions like these between Miguel and Johnny are not uncommon. Friendships can be ruined over a few dollars.

Potentially any fictive kin band can grow into a professional one. Potentially most musicians can become skilled professionals. Potentially people who go to high school together can become international superstars together although this pattern occurs more frequently in English language pop music and perhaps in *Rock en espanole*. People seem to enjoy having their friends and family around when they become famous. At the mid level, professional networks

sometimes mimic the fictive kin. A difference between musicians who are friendly and personable and those who have fictive kin relationships exists. Being amiable is valued in all networks but some individuals have a reputation for arrogance.

While real friendships often result in fictive kin relationships at any level, the idea of fictive kin can be manipulated in professional networks. All bands encounter difficulty collecting payment at one time or another; it is a fact of the music industry<sup>38</sup>. A professional bandleader may stress the kin feelings among his band members when he cannot produce proper payment or when he needs a rehearsal from busy musicians. The most professional way of handling a job when the money from the client is not forthcoming is for the bandleader to pay the band himself and bear the brunt of the loss. The bandleader is, of course, earning more than the other members of the group consistently as compensation for his work in contracting the performances, but it is also his responsibility to handle any problems the band may encounter with the management of performance venues. Rehearsals may be paid for or be presented as part of the performance responsibility.

Gossip and reputation are often the only means by which musicians can monitor the activities of bandleaders. The music union is an irrelevant organization for nearly everyone who is not working on Broadway or recording internationally. Bandleaders who operate in professional networks but too often stress fictive kin, especially those who use fictive kin as an excuse to pay less or not on time, will get a reputation for being unprofessional. A group that is largely based around fictive kin but pays well and creates a generally pleasant and enjoyable

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<sup>38</sup> Once at a performance of the Jazz saxophone legend, Sonny Rollins, I was seated next to the internationally famous music critic, Ira Gitter. Mr. Gitter asked if I were ever on a gig where, when I was about to get paid, the club owner took out a gun and told me to get the hell out. No, that never happened to me.

atmosphere for performance will often have a reputation for being very professional.

The mechanism of gossip and reputation is the only real means of musicians learning about musicians who are not in their fictive kin networks. Individuals who drink to the extent that it impairs their performance or the performance of others will get a reputation of not being professionals. This causes them to rely mainly on fictive kin networks. In some professional networks, showing up for rehearsals and performances on time, being willing to rehearse, being able to read, avoiding getting fall-down drunk or high, having quality musical equipment, and helping with setting up and taking down gear all outweigh talent. The extremely talented who do not handle the aforementioned issues well may become restricted to their fictive kin networks. The moderately (though often above average) talented who do handle these issues acceptingly are able to work with a variety of performers.

### **Connecting to other music and technology**

Skilled musicians often play more than one style of music. As professional networks incline towards more ethnic diversity than the fictive kin networks, the professional networks connect musicians from various genres. Percussionists looking to perform more jazz music may perform with an Anglo or African-American sax player who likes to play Salsa but strives to play Jazz. These same horn players may invite the Latin musicians to perform at “Club Dates.” Club dates do not occur inside of clubs. These are American weddings, bar mitzvahs, and corporate parties. These gigs pay two to three times as much as salsa gigs<sup>39</sup>.

Salsa bands require a fairly large payment for a performance. Smaller clubs and restaurants often cannot afford this. Smaller groups emerge out of salsa bands to play smaller

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<sup>39</sup> They also require much more playing time of the same span of contracted performance and they require a wider repertoire than Salsa. They also usually do not require the same physical intensity of playing as Salsa.

venues. Technology can also compensate for the absence of musicians. Over the last 10-15 years technology has become available for musicians to pre-record various parts for songs via sequencers<sup>40</sup> and drum machines. This can facilitate performance groups of less than five men.

However, for proper performance, a salsa band really needs multiple performers. Drum machines do not interact with the other performers in the way that real musicians do. The same can be said for sequenced piano parts or horns. Sequenced performances predecide the length of songs and very little can be improvised with the structure of songs. Many musicians perform in this manner because it is easier for a three to five piece group to find work than a 15-member group, but this is often done with a sense of regret. As one of my informants, Jose, said: "I'm playing every Friday at the Renaissance on Lafayette. It's ok. It's with Raphael and his brother, but it's all sequenced...." The actual musical experience can be diminished for some performers by working with sequencers. The preference by the vast majority of musicians is to play with a full band of 10-15 musicians. However, the performance is more bearable because of Jose's fictive kin relationship with Raphael.

Technology often compensates for lack of musical skill. An individual can assemble an arrangement by playing it piece by piece into a recording device or sequencer. In this manner, one who is musically illiterate can construct an arrangement that then can be electronically transcribed and printed out as musical parts for performers to interpret. Cornell West refers to this as postmodern music; it is assembled, not written (Bill Maher Show 2004). This technology is now reduced in price so that it is affordable for average working-class people. However, the technology requires its own set of skills that are beyond using a word processing program or

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<sup>40</sup> A sequencer is an electronic device that plays back pre-programmed musical patterns. It is sort of like a pre-recording but no sound is actually recorded.

negotiating the Internet.

This technological advancement has had a number of consequences. First, among African-American and European-American genres, a large scale deskilling has occurred. As evident in popular music over the last 15 years, there are very few intricate string parts written for pop songs and even fewer intricate horn parts. Horns often are sampled<sup>41</sup> and strings played by one person on keyboard. In essence, this limits the depth of the performances. Secondly, there has been a strong decline in harmonically complicated compositions. It is easy to assemble pieces via digital technology and the quality of samples and synthesizers has become very high. With contemporary technology, it is easy to play just one chord and sound good, but many musicians do not learn how to excel with multiple chords. However, the decline in harmonic complexity has accompanied a trend in popular music that places the rhythm parts in the foreground. Complex harmonies get in the way when you want to hear the drums or the beat.

These issues have curiously been ignored in studies of Hip-Hop. Studies on Hip-Hop have been focused on the lyrical content, identity formation, self-representation, authenticity, and race (Lipsitz, 1994; Rose, 1994; Watkins, 2006). The issue of race is obviously central to Hip-Hop. In the past, studies were forced to argue that a DJ or MC was actually performing music. The racism was so strong that it was necessary to defend this point through the 1990s. The studies have not focused on what has been lost in the emergence of Hip-Hop. In European-American and African-American popular music virtuosity has been lost<sup>42</sup>.

Many of my informants work as music teachers. They report that there is no shortage of

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<sup>41</sup> Sampled, or sampling, refers to recording a musical phrase from a previously existing musical piece and playing it back out of context in a new musical piece.

<sup>42</sup> Cornell West suggests that virtuosity within rap music is contained within the linguistic versatility rather than in technical facility (482)

drummers and guitarists in their school band programs, but there are fewer horn players every year. Without high profile horn players or virtuoso musicians, children lack the inspiration to pick these instruments up or to practice with the goal of becoming a virtuoso. To expect Newark to create another Wayne Shorter or Sarah Vaughn, both Newark born and raised jazz musicians, is wishful thinking; to expect the Newark School System to produce quality young musicians is not. Salsa requires horn players. Synthesizers are not adequate replacements for horns. However, this does not hold true at the highest level. Marc Anthony, for example, is among salsa players who have made extensive use of synthesizers to fill out his horn section. The combining of a few real horns with synthesizers provides the sonic illusion of there being more actual horn players than there really are. However, the absence of complicated arrangements persists, apparently in order to match sonic aesthetics. The consumers expect some electronic sounds in order for music to sound contemporary.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Gender and Family**

Juan Pedro's life, however, does not revolve around music as much as it revolves around his family. Much the same can be said for Jose, Ramón, Alex, and others whose paths I have crossed. The central force in Juan Pedro's life is his family: his wife and two daughters and his brother. His parents too occupy a central place in his life, but they now live in Florida. This family extends to his nephew, in his early 20s, who often comes to Juan Pedro's home to hang around with his cousins and to his much younger, eight-year-old nephew, who lived with Juan Pedro and Anna for several months during my research. These nephews are the children of Anna's siblings. Although Benny, Juan Pedro's brother, is not married and has no children, he is thoroughly devoted to his two nieces.

“Some guys get lost. They drink too much. They party too much. They don't have that spiritual center....” When Juan Pedro told me this, he wasn't referring to religion or God as “spiritual.” He was referring to family. He meant that the men who were not married, men in their 30s, 40s and 50s, lacked the grounding force in their lives that family provided. Juan Pedro has been driven to provide for his family and this drive has led him to move beyond the confines of the North Ward and out of the ghetto. While he still works in Newark and maintains strong ties to Newark, he purchased a home in Belleville, NJ, in 1994. His after school music academy is in Belleville. Juan Pedro has been socialized, and many—if not all—of the men have been socialized, to provide for their families as part of their definition of manhood.

Over the course of a few months, Juan Pedro frequently spoke of this idea of family as spiritual center. It took a while to realize that what he was trying to say, indirectly, was that he was worried about me. I was unmarried and was in my late 30s during this research. “It's time

Roberto. You don't want to become like Miguel!" He would also often laugh that by the time I have children, his "babies" will be out of the house and that he'll call me to come and hang out and I'll have to say "No, I can't. I have to take care of the kids." There are times I forget that I am only five years younger than Juan Pedro. Anna, his wife, wants to see me married as well. At first she thought I was a bit younger than I was. When she discovered my age, she pleasantly, but directly, looked at me and said, "It's time!"

Regardless of what happens in my future, the message my friends were saying was that I need to take the precautions so that I don't become lost like some of the other musicians they know. It is really in this sense—their concern for my well-being—that I have become part of the fictive kin network and part of Juan Pedro's extended family. In fact, other than my parents and my dissertation advisor, the one person who pushed me the hardest to finish my PhD dissertation is Juan Pedro. When I remind him that it's largely about him, he gets shocked for a moment, and then says "Make sure I read it when it's done!"

### **Family and Life-Stages**

The majority of my informants are over thirty years old. Most are either married or divorced and have children regardless of their marital status. At first, I found I projected my own experience as a musician who has achieved a nominal career in jazz performance onto the Salseros: It takes time to establish one's self in the music business and therefore it makes sense that most of the men would be over thirty. Anecdotally, it strikes me that the Salseros are married and have children by the time they are thirty far more than the jazz musicians with whom I am acquainted. However, the role of family looms large in the everyday lives of the men I interviewed. Their participation in the performance of Salsa is affected by their family responsibilities and these responsibilities are affected by the stage in life the men find

themselves. Conversely, one's relationship to his family is affected by his participation in Salsa.

### *Young men*

The younger men--Frankie, Ricardo, Jiro—in my research were unmarried and did not yet have children. Regardless, their relationships are on display for everyone to see. The younger men are more likely to get frequent calls on their cell phones from their girlfriends than the married men. Unmarried men are also more likely to be the subject of suspicion by their partners. For the men in their 20s, it is considered normal. In the case of an older man, such as Miguel, this is considered a problem. The younger men, however, will be coached while the older men are mostly left on their own.

At rehearsals, younger men will get two kinds of advice. First, they are instructed by older men to tell their girlfriends that they are at rehearsal and cannot be interrupted. The younger men are told to say that they aren't doing anything wrong, but they need to work and cannot keep talking on the phone to their girlfriends. They are instructed to act "like a man" and stand up to their girlfriends or else they will always be plagued by jealousy. If the young man takes a phone call from his girlfriend shortly after receiving this advice, he will be teased. The teasing is harmless and quickly forgotten. It is accompanied by encouragement to stand up to the woman.

The second form of advice contrasts with the first. The older men will tell the young male to be attentive to his girlfriend. The younger man needs to make time for his girlfriend so that she will not feel the need to call. They may question what he has been doing with his time and ask if he sees her enough. If he responds that he has been with her frequently, the older men are likely to drop this line of inquiry and go back to the first with even more tenacity. The older men are engaging in a form of checking to be sure the younger man is respecting his girlfriend.

Tacitly, they recognize that while they need to coach the younger man on how to be a “man,” this coaching involves being sure that he is acting appropriately as an attentive partner.

Women, especially towards the younger men, can be seen as a disrupting force. Sex is seen as something that can draw them away from developing as a musician<sup>43</sup>. Women are seen as trying to tie men to them through having children. Some younger men have spoken to me of “Baby Mama Drama” where the mothers of their children may intentionally disrupt the lives of the men based on the obligations created by having children together. This is uncommon among the salsa musicians in my study because the majority is married. A wife is not one’s “Baby’s Mama” but rather the mother of one’s children. Younger non-musician men in the North Ward have mentioned the idea of “Baby Mama Drama” to me, not salseros.

The younger men in salsa bands differ from many of the younger men not in salsa bands because the musicians are more likely to have networks of friendship that extend beyond their age group. To this extent, the younger musicians have a greater exposure to a variety of older men to provide advice and to coach them through relationships. The networks of fictive kin I mentioned in the previous chapter also acts as networks of emotional support for men, even though the men are not necessarily acting in typically emotional ways. These networks of support extend beyond those of relationship advice to life planning.

Juan Pedro relished the role of mentor. His story of having been a young man in Salsa differs from many others. Juan Pedro was married at age seventeen and had his first daughter at age 19. He would often speak of this in two different ways. First, he claimed that being married

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<sup>43</sup> This is not a phenomenon strictly in Salsa or among Latinos. For instance, the jazz saxophonist, Ornette Coleman, once intended to be castrated so that he would stop thinking about women and therefore would be able to practice his music more frequently. The attending nurse talked him out of this desire.

with children at such a young age drove him to take as many gigs as he could. His family needed the money and he needed to provide it. A constant theme in his personal narrative is that his family and his desire to provide for them have fueled his drive to become successful. Frequently, he talked about his youth, and he held it up as an example to the younger guys. Juan Pedro often added that he was not driven to be famous and advised the young men to follow his example.

Juan Pedro's second way of talking about this time is less exemplary. He always stressed that he loved his wife and children but lamented that he was not ready for marriage or the responsibilities of family. He was too young. Juan Pedro talked about how, at age 20 and while in college, he would want to hang around other musicians to play and party like other men his own age. He stayed out after gigs partying and in hindsight felt as if he had neglected his wife and small children.

It was not necessarily Salsa that kept him away from his family at a young age, rather it may simply have been his life stage: too much responsibility too soon for a young man. The temptations for indulgence and even infidelity were great and at times he succumbed. His high profile as a performer may have attracted the indulgences a bit more than they would for others, but he was simply dealing with the temptations that present themselves to most other young men. However, it struck me that Juan Pedro did not quite have the guidance from older men that several salseros have. He would comment that he did not want the young men he knew now to make the same mistakes he made.

The "mistakes of youth" was an apparent theme. Bernie is a singer in his late 40s who has sung with some of the most notable performers in Salsa, including Héctor Lavoe. He laments that he was "stupid" when he was younger. He said he didn't "do right" by his first wife and rarely speaks of that marriage. Now he is devoted to his current wife and their young children.

He often shows up late for rehearsals because he needs to take care of his children, saying: “If I knew then what I know now....” Bernie told me that in the late 70s and early 80s he was sometimes earning \$5,000 a week from performing. This number is not adjusted for the value of money in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and it may be exaggerated. Nevertheless, much of that money was lost to the partying that Bernie had done in his 20s. Now he gives the money he earns from gigs directly to his wife.

A bit of jealousy disguised as advice by the older men towards the younger men existed. It centered less around age and more around marital status. The older men encouraged the younger men to talk with and to dance with women at the performances. If they did not, they were questioned as to why. This was not so much a questioning of a young man’s sexual preference as it was an older man’s expression of desire to meet women and perhaps a wish to live vicariously through the conquests of the younger men.

There is an interesting piece to Juan Pedro’s personal narrative. At the end of the 1990’s, Juan Pedro and Anna held a second wedding for themselves in a church. Their first wedding fifteen or so years earlier had not been in a church. Juan Pedro stressed that this event closed the book on any infidelity in his past. He considered that phase of his life over and insisted that if he married in the church, he would be “honest with God.” Regardless of whatever bad behaviors he may have had in the past, he still did his best to live up to his role as provider and usually succeeded at it.

### *Men Over Thirty*

The bulk of the men was over thirty, married, and had children ranging from toddlers to college age. A few were unmarried and fewer still had no children. A few different patterns emerge. One pattern was to integrate family into the production of salsa. Another was to consider

Salsa as private male space away from family. A third was neglecting family for the sake of performance.

In Miguel's band, which maintained a less professional atmosphere, the young sons of different band members often accompanied their fathers to rehearsals. Peering from behind an amplifier, a boy between ages 8 and 12 often watched his father and the other men with him. This was taken in stride by the other band members who themselves might twirl a timbale stick or do a long sliding sound on a trombone to entertain the young one. Sometimes, though rarely, a young girl instead of a boy accompanied her father. These girls were shown the same attentiveness, but concerns that the music was too loud and the language too coarse for them would often be expressed. Explanations as to why the children were there were rarely provided. Jesús frequently brought his son to rehearsals and it was assumed by the band members that Jesús was simply spending time with his son and wanted to bring him along. Sometimes Jesús would state that the boy's mother was at work and it was his responsibility to watch the young boy. As Jesús began playing Salsa with his own father many years earlier, there was a minor sense that he was trying to pass this on to his own son. A few of the sons were of similar ages and would play with others while the bands rehearsed. The young girls played with the boys if they were there together, but the girls were so rarely there that the girls themselves did not develop friendships with each other.

Rehearsals with Miguel often meant rehearsing at his home where, for quite a while, he was living with his parents. Miguel's mother became the de facto baby-sitter, especially if Jesús or Cheo brought his daughter. This familiarity was often accentuated by the familial, informal atmosphere surrounding Miguel's rehearsals. Miguel's mother often cooked for the band as well, if the rehearsal coincided with a perceived suppertime.

Children were rarely seen at rehearsals in clubs. If a young child were present, an explanation would be given, usually in the form of displaced blame: “My wife is at work” or “His mother needed me to watch him tonight.” The children were presented as a responsibility and a man’s wife, or his children’s mother, was criticized for not fulfilling her role as the primary caretaker. Rehearsals in clubs occurred at night, sometimes going to midnight. This was not considered time when a man should be responsible for watching his children. As Juan Pedro attempted to maintain a more professional atmosphere at his rehearsals, children were rarely present and would always come with an explanation.

Salsa for many becomes a man’s place away from home. It provides an opportunity to engage in a leisure activity with friends. Wives “bothered” their husbands if they called during this time. The men used the time to drink a few beers or indulge in stronger intoxicants. Being away from their wives and children was sometimes expressed as relief at being “out of the house.”

However, few of the men who had infants and toddlers acted this way. The men with the younger children were more likely to watch the clock during rehearsals and complain about needing to go home if things ran too late. If the bandleader was slow to pay the musicians after a performance, the ones with younger children were more likely to become agitated and impatient. The younger children created a greater responsibility.

For the men with younger children, the need to work and provide presents a particular challenge. If the musicians themselves are young, they may not yet have found a full-time job that pays an adequate salary. These men may work more than a standard forty-hour workweek in order to earn enough for their family. For the less skilled musician, this limits his involvement in Salsa. He may not have the time available for regular rehearsals. He may not be available to

travel from Newark to Upstate New York or to Pennsylvania for a performance and leaving the US to perform in Latin America will most likely be impossible. For a musician with more skill, such as Juan Pedro, long-distance and international travel may still remain impossible, but using his skill as a musician will still secure him work. In this sense, the younger musicians playing Salsa are the more skilled among their age group. The life of the less skilled may keep him from fully participating in the production of Salsa until his children are older. This results in confining the musician to local performance networks as he is not able to fully establish connections to professional networks while in his twenties.

There is another aspect to men who use Salsa as their leisure time: They may drink “too much” at a rehearsal or performance. One musician in Miguel’s band, Cheo, stands out as an example of this. Cheo, a percussionist in his early thirties, worked between eight and twelve hours a day at an auto parts store six days a week. He was married and had two small children. Cheo would frequently get drunk at performances and appear drunk at rehearsals. He often engaged in other intoxicants as well. Cheo was a part of Miguel’s familial network of musicians and a very talented percussionist. His indulgences were accepted, but quietly the musicians complained to one another that he was too drunk or was playing too loudly because he was drunk. The alcoholism he displayed had an effect on his family and his wife encouraged him to stop performing. Eventually, he became a born-again Christian and returned to Puerto Rico with his family.

Not all who overindulge leave the music business. Not all who have families are compelled to work as many hours at their day job as possible. Some of these men prefer to play music over other activities. If they are skilled enough to support themselves primarily through performance, they attempt to do just that. These musicians sometimes find themselves divorced

or living away from their wife and children. The hours needed to rehearse, the frequent late nights of performing, and the time needed for the individual musician to practice and to work on his craft places stress on families that are insurmountable. These men make a conscious choice of music over family. For some, such as Peter from Juan Pedro's band, this suits them fine. However, Peter's children are now adults and he spends time with his son and daughter on holidays and at celebrations and occasionally gets together with them for dinner.

The responsibilities of having small children essentially bars women from participating in Salsa. It would be considered an affront to the children's father if she were the one out rehearsing and performing. The men in the band might wonder why she was with them and not her children. The adherence to traditional gender roles and traditional gendered division of labor helps to keep women in their twenties and early thirties out of Salsa.

#### *Other Ways of Relating to Family and Women*

There are numerous variations to the kinds of relationships that the men have with women. Suspicions of infidelity happen, as well as actual infidelity. Older men who are divorced or are no longer living with their wives and family may pursue other women freely at performances. Each person is an individual and unique situations emerge.

Carlos, the conga player in Miguel's band, is unique. He is the only musician I've encountered who maintains a mistress. In these networks, I have known Carlos the longest, even before I considered studying anthropology. I have known him for close to 15 years, yet I didn't know he was married for at least eight years. I knew he had a girlfriend who was from Brazil. I knew he had a daughter whom he cared about deeply and to whom he was very attentive. I knew how well his daughter's junior high and high school soccer teams succeeded. I have met his girlfriend several times but I have never met his wife. I don't even know her name. One day,

Miguel and Jesús told me “Oh yeah, Carlos is married. It’s an arrangement they have....” Carlos provides for his family and respects his wife to the extent that he provides for her. This is a unique arrangement among all of the musicians.

Most musicians do not practice marital infidelity. However many tell what I would define as an “almost story.” The storyline is always similar: “I met this girl/lady/woman on a gig. She was beautiful. (The women in the stories are always beautiful, sexy, “built” or “smoking.”) I bought her drinks. We were dancing. She wanted me to go home with her and said we could do anything I wanted....” Someone who is listening to the story always asks, “So what did you do? Did you go with her?” The inevitable response is, “No way! My wife would kill me.” Knowing groans of disappointment and commiseration invariably follow this exchange.

I have heard this storyline far too often from too many people for it to actually be true every time. It is a good way for the men to display their machismo and sexual prowess to the other men without actually doing anything that may disrupt their marriages. It enables them to lay claim to the idea that they are still “man enough” to have any beautiful woman desire them. “What am I going to do? Take some woman I meet at a gig back to my house?” is a frequent response that displaces the act of infidelity with one of inconvenience. Again, this allows the men to display an inclination towards sexual promiscuity without ever acting upon it. Some of the performers are straightforward “I love my wife. Why would I want someone else?” This response usually comes from men like Juan Pedro who are very secure in their family life and in their class position.

Miguel never married. To the best of my knowledge, he has no children. While he certainly drinks to excess at times, he generally has no other substance abuse problems. Still, he has not moved out of his working-class life. Miguel lived in his parents’ home for years. Once

the parents moved to the New Jersey Shore, Miguel then bought his parents home along with his brother Johnny and the two lived there until their sibling bickering became too much to handle. He moved in with his girlfriend who was extremely jealous of him working as a musician. I never saw Miguel with a woman other than his girlfriend, but his girlfriend was always concerned that he was out with other women. She wanted him to stop playing music and end his band. Eventually, he left her because he was constantly being accused of behaviors that he really did not display. He bounced around between positions as a cook, but could never get the job of head chef at a restaurant. He implied that he had taken a culinary course, but it is unclear as to how significant the training was. Juan Pedro thought Miguel lacked the spiritual center of a family.

Most of the wives do not act like Miguel's girlfriend. The wives trust their husbands not to cheat on them at gigs and in the majority of cases this trust is well founded. Few wives make regular appearances at gigs. As Anna said "Why do I want to see him play *again*?" The sense is that the performances are boring to go to night after night. Anna and other wives occasionally come to gigs that are particular events where their friends attend, but they make no regular habit of going to performances.

However, single men may take advantage of opportunities presented to them. One Honduran singer who sang in Cumbia/Salsa bands used to carry around a briefcase that held a comb, cologne, deodorant, a mirror, breath mints, a toothbrush, toothpaste and condoms. He called it his survival kit. I told this to Bernie who said, "That's being prepared! I never went that far." Jose often talks about particular encounters he had before he was married and when he was touring South America with Cumbia bands. He tells the story of how the band's manager arranged for each band member to hook up with a different local girl for sex. Jose had met a

young woman whom he found both beautiful and intelligent. “We spent the whole night talking until the manager came up to us and said ‘so...you going to fuck or what?’” It was the manager’s job to be sure the women were “paid for.” The men don’t mind telling a set of their “greatest hits” from the past, but these stories are strictly in the past.

The men do not usually tell these stories if someone’s wife or girlfriend is nearby. As Juan Pedro said, “You don’t want to give her ideas and spark some jealousy even if you are not doing anything wrong.” I’ve known a few musicians who hid from their wives and girlfriends the extent to which they smoke marijuana. Their wives would get the sense that they were hiding something from them and automatically assume they were cheating on them. They were not. They were smoking pot, but the act of hiding something was apparent and the women assumed that it was infidelity. One musician’s wife frequently accused her husband of infidelity, so I found myself coercing the musician into telling her the truth.

### *Machismo*

Many of the women are relatively autonomous. Their husbands do not control their movements and the men usually do not control all the resources of the household. Married women will go out to clubs with other women and without their husbands, but they tend not to dance or to flirt with other men. This would be perceived as disrespecting their husbands. They go out to see their friends, to have some drinks, and to listen to music.

The men are often critical of machismo in the sense that typical machismo can be perceived as disrespecting women. But as Gutmann has clearly described in The Meaning of Macho, “Machismo” is not a monolithic term (2007, p.222 ). For my informants, “machismo” is often defined as “authority” through the phrases: “a man at the head of the household” and “what the man says is law.” However, machismo is defined better as men establishing power

relationships among other men (Lancaster, 1992, p.235) or as competition among men (Cubit, 1995, p.111). In the above stories of “promiscuity that never happens,” the men who tell these tales are clearly displaying their potential power to other men, and other men only. The simple fact is that individual men do not earn enough to control the resources of the family sufficiently to effectively extend control over their wives’ activities. The women must work in order for the family to have sufficient resources. In some cases the women earn as much or more than the men or, alternatively, their salary or job may be the source of the family’s health insurance. The economic equality deflates the power of traditional machismo if it is simply defined as men controlling their wives.

The reality is in how the tradition continues to manifest machismo in differing ways. One man told me, “My wife hates that crap. And so do I. One day I was out and I saw a young man disrespecting his girl...yelling at her in the street, you know...I said something to him and he....Well, let’s just say I taught him a lesson he needed to learn.” This informant actually took it upon himself to beat another man in the street because he felt as if the man was 1) acting out machismo and 2) disrespecting his “girl.” I suggest that the violent act was also a means for my informant to express his manhood. In his eyes, he became the greater man because he felt as if his actions respected women more than the other’s. However, it was also an act of machismo because he proved his manhood by hitting the other person. The stranger was yelling, berating and ordering his woman in public. These acts set off my informant. A handful of informants have mentioned stories about confronting other men they did not know when it appeared as if they were disrespecting their women. None of the other stories ended in violence, but the threat of violence was present: “If he threw down, I was ready to throw down.”

At one gig, Peter—Juan Pedro’s conga player—and I were standing outside the venue

doing what many men do. We were watching the women who were coming into the hall and arbitrarily deciding who we thought were the best looking. One woman, perhaps in her early 30s, arrived with her man. The woman was superficially attractive but also dressed in the most provocative outfit of all the women at the performance. Peter thought that it was wrong for her to dress that way. Of course he pointed this out to me after we both agreed on her attractiveness. He felt as if she was disrespecting her man. Her clothing was sure to attract attention and men were sure to approach her throughout the evening. Peter felt that she had crossed a line for a woman who was obviously with a date. We had no idea if this was a married couple or not.

I was struck by the fact that Peter was passing judgment on the woman but ignored any responsibility the man may have had. I suggested to Peter that maybe the guy liked it and maybe he wanted to show off his date. Perhaps, he got a thrill from other men desiring her. I said, “Yeah, but some guys like that. Don’t they?” This hadn’t occurred to Peter and he conceded that I could be right, but he added, “Well, that’s something different....” This man that Peter and I did not know certainly could have been expressing his own machismo through his date’s attractiveness. By being with her, he was passively showing the other men his status: He was man enough to be with one of the most attractive women at the event.

On a closer examination of my notes and experiences, I notice that married women do not usually dress in overtly provocative ways. The women and men who go out to dance Salsa certainly take pride in their appearance and the women may dress sexually by Anglo-American standards. However, the married women do not dress in overtly seductive ways. Skirts may be short, but not “too short.” Tops may accentuate cleavage, but not “too much cleavage.” The tighter clothing tends to be on the unmarried women—with no correlation to body type or even age. It is not as simple as saying “the younger women dress more provocatively.” The notion

expressed here is that only an available woman will dress provocatively. If a married woman did so, she would symbolically be making a statement about her relationship with her husband. This would be articulated as “disrespect.”

A silence exists around the issue of domestic violence, which causes problems over this issue of respect. My sense is that domestic violence among my informants is rare, but this may be due to the silence more than its absence. It also may be that the new economic equality between men and women defuses the potentiality of violence. The women are not bound to the men in the way some have been in generations past. Therefore, they may be more likely to leave their husbands if domestic violence occurs. I can attest to only one story of domestic violence. Its ending has the woman leaving her husband, but I do not know the duration of the pattern of violence.

At a backyard barbeque, some musicians told me how they were shaken up about a domestic event. The two musicians had returned from the home of one their non-musician friends, and they were shocked to see their friend berating and hitting his wife. “I didn’t know he was like that. We had to go.” They did nothing but were also disturbed and confused. The men were torn between defending their machismo by intervening or maintaining their loyalty by ignoring the incident. The musicians decided to ignore the incident because they did not want to disrespect their friend in his own home. They remained agitated because they knew their friend’s actions were not worthy of respect. Within the next few months, I heard that the woman had left the man and eventually divorced. No one connected the occurrence with that day, nor did anyone suggest that a pattern had emerged. Nevertheless, she left her man and returned to Puerto Rico.

The musicians partially defended their inaction by claiming that it was improper to

interfere with a man and his wife, yet these men had felt quite comfortable interfering with strangers, who were either married or dating. Since the non-musician's friend was part of their fictive kin network, it was easier for them to enter into denial about a friend's actions. This same denial is nonexistent when dealing with a stranger.

### *Later in Life*

There are also the older men in Salsa, the ones who have raised families already and have grandchildren. These grandfathers have more available time. They are almost always married, but may be with their second or third wife. They are not under the same pressure as their younger peers to get home to their wives. Proud of their grandchildren, they need not provide for them. There is, however, an age factor involved. Juan Pedro became a grandfather after my research was completed, but during the time I spent with him, he was looking forward to the decrease in responsibility. In his mid forties, he is still paying off his home with its second and third mortgages. He has not achieved the financial stability he desires and is still some years away from retirement. Ramon, 15 years Juan Pedro's senior, has also not quite achieved retirement, but his children are all grown with families of their own. He sold the large house he had owned and moved into a smaller one with his wife. His financial aspirations are strictly for himself and his wife.

### **Conclusion**

The drive to provide fuels the men to achieve and to advance economically. The men can use Salsa to help support their families. Some men lose their families by dedicating themselves to Salsa. A correlation, not a cause-and-effect relationship, emerges. Many of the men who participate in Salsa and maintain families find themselves more socially mobile than the men without families. I will explore this idea in my next chapter.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Social Mobility**

The geography of New Jersey is much like the megalopolis of the greater New York City area. The borders between towns and cities are rarely significant and are often marked by nothing more than street sign. Depending on the direction of one's approach, Belleville is a mile from the North Ward or it is a matter of crossing a street. People cannot exactly tell when they are in Belleville instead of North Newark until they are deeply within Belleville. Individuals may not know when they enter; however, when they are there, it is clear.

Belleville is significantly more middle-class than North Newark. Belleville is a suburb. Newark is a city. Towards the borders of the two, many shops and restaurants advertise in Spanish. As one travels northward into Belleville, the Spanish signs disappear. Some restaurants and delis advertise that they are Italian, but they do so in English. The white flight out of Newark dramatically increased after the Newark riots of 1968. The Italian community of Newark, which was not directly involved in the riots (Mumford, 2007, p.98), fled the North Ward and dispersed into the suburbs of New Jersey. Many simply moved to Belleville and Nutley, the next town to the north, or to Lyndhurst or Kearny, towns north and east of Belleville. Today, members of the Puerto Rican community of the North Ward are following the same path into Belleville, Nutley, and the other suburbs to the north of Newark. My informants tell me they move for their families. Though usually not articulated as such, they mean they are moving for the schools and to get away from the violence and the traps for younger people that may be more common in the North Ward.

Family is important to the members of this community. Sometimes people talk of their children as most important in their lives. For his wife and his children, Juan Pedro has taken

himself out of the working-class environment where he grew up and has entered the middle class. Jose, for his wife and his children, moved out of the more inner-city area of West New York, NJ, one of the sprawling urban areas across the Hudson from Manhattan, and moved to Belleville as well. He has made strides to enter the middle class. Ramón has lived a mostly middle-class life, having grown up in Puerto Rico and coming to the mainland to play trombone in various bands in the 1970s. These men have used music as their source of social mobility<sup>44</sup>. Their performance activities supplemented the incomes they earned on their day jobs to bring more cash into the homes. Their day jobs are all related to music.

An older couple I know, parents of an old friend mine, knew the bass player in Ruben Blades' band from the 1980s. Performing with Ruben Blades is significantly more prominent than playing local salsa gigs for Newark politicians or at a "Quinze," a Sweet 15 party, but this man held onto his job teaching music in the Bronx. Even high profile groups like that of Ruben Blades encounter periods of low productivity. When Ruben Blades is making a movie or campaigning to become the President of Panama, he is not performing Salsa. Where does this leave his band members? They are at home without work, if they have no alternatives.

A correlation emerged within my research. Among the salseros, it appears as if the men who have family for whom they are responsible are also the same musicians who achieve some

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<sup>44</sup> My father did much the same thing. My grandfather worked in the dye factories of Paterson, NJ. My grandmother, although encouraged by her teachers, never attended college, even though she graduated from high school at age 16 in the 1930s. She worked as a secretary for much of her life. My father began playing piano at a very young age and gigs in his late teens. He maintained a performance schedule of three or four gigs a week, plus giving music lessons privately, for decades. He, and some of his friends from Paterson, all moved into the middle class by virtue of their work as musicians and through their educations. He and all of his friends earned college degrees in music, my father a Master's degree in Composition from The Manhattan School of Music. My father is not famous, though he has a strong local reputation. His friends, especially my godfather, did the same and have arrived at similar circumstances: Home ownership in the suburbs and middle-class lives with money saved and investments made now that they approach retirement ages.

sort of social mobility and acquire a better standard of living. There is an intersection of family, social mobility, and music-as-work that can operate in the favor for the men who choose a career in music. First, the money earned through performance is often not calculated into family budgets. This allows a particular busy period of performance to create an economic boon for the family. Extra money appears that was not necessarily anticipated. Second, as stated earlier, several musicians in my study chose to pursue becoming music educators. To do so, they were required to earn college degrees. While their educations were not from prestigious universities—these men tend to go to Jersey City State College (now New Jersey City University) and not to Julliard—they do hold accredited bachelor's and master's degrees in music. By earning some “cultural capital” through education, they begin their path to social mobility

With regard to the first issue, one must acknowledge that the cost of living in the New York City area in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is high. Working class employment can be precarious in its job security. It is difficult to achieve social mobility for a family. It is practically required that both husband and wife earn a wage in order to provide sufficiently for the family and especially for the children. If the family does not include the money generated from Salsa as part of their predicted wages, the money earned by a man playing Salsa can be used to cover unexpected costs: car repairs, medical bills, a vacation, and so on. Juan Pedro built a new fence around his home in June of 2005. Shortly after building the fence, he worked out an arrangement to do about 25 gigs as the bass player in a friend's band throughout the summer. “Roberto, these gigs will pay for my fence!” I found it odd that his means to pay for his fence came after its construction, but I did not question this.

As to the second issue, the men who go to college to become music educators create a path towards social mobility for themselves. Through their educations, they are put in a position

where they can almost certainly be employed. The public school system guarantees the men predictable raises, comprehensive health insurance, ample days off and, once achieving tenure, secure lifetime employment. They also secure pensions and health insurance for their retirement. They achieve an economic stability that could otherwise be elusive to them without a college degree. In addition, the school systems pay for the men to earn graduate degrees. Juan Pedro used this opportunity to earn a master's degree in administration, with an eye on working as a principal or vice-principal in his last years of employment before he retires. Such a position increases the amount he will receive as a pension. Jose used this opportunity in a more musical way, earning a master's degree in music performance. He became a better performer while increasing his value to the school system, earning a raise simply because he held a advanced degree.

Family factors into this situation because the responsibilities of raising the family prompted these men to get educations and to hold onto their jobs during the period when they were earning tenure. Family is not required for social mobility to occur. Family is not required to encourage these men to go to college, but it helps. Part of the latent definition of "being a man" within the Latino community is to provide for one's family. Part of "the cult of machismo" is to show other men how well one can provide for his family. To this extent, the family becomes the inspiration to achieve. Not to achieve, not to provide, would be a failure of manhood.

### **Ethnic Variations on Social Mobility**

If "social mobility" refers to moving up in social class, how does the socially mobile person declare his mobility? A typical means is through consumption, especially through home ownership. The socially mobile men in my study own homes in towns like Belleville, Nutley, Bloomfield, and the other suburban towns near Newark. Social mobility is moving up and it is

moving out, “out” of the old neighborhood, out of Newark. This is a pattern historically followed by nearly every ethnic group that migrated to the United States<sup>45</sup>. However, there is variation based on ethnic aesthetics.

Juan Pedro has effectively removed all the grass from his property. Rather than the sprawling manicured lawns so often associated with suburban life, Juan Pedro has replaced his backyard grass with a patterned brick and replaced his front yard with wood chips and low maintenance bushes. “I hate to cut grass,” Juan Pedro says. He often explains to Jose, who is now a homeowner, that he should do the same. Jose, however, likes grass. Jose is Cuban.

There is absolutely no correlation to “Cuban-ness” or “Puerto Rican-ness” and a love or dislike for grass. Juan Pedro is simply expressing an urban aesthetic for asphalt and brick. He grew up in the inner city of Newark and he likes a man-made built environment. He also works very hard between his day job, his after school academy, his own band, and his additional gigs. He has little time to dedicate to landscaping and does not see it as valuable enough to pay someone else to do it for him. His statement of social mobility comes from his consumption, specifically his house for which he has invested considerably in its renovation. The inside is always neat and pleasant, viewed as a statement on his wife’s ability as a homemaker. They have redone their floors and the first story has a completely modern kitchen and a living room trimmed in rich woodwork. Jose spent much of the spring and summer of 2005 working on and renovating the home he and his wife bought in the fall of 2004. He will not have his friends over until he perceives it as ready, and this involves him redoing his own floors and replacing various features of the house. Jose’s home will be as neat and as pleasant as Juan Pedro’s, but Jose is socialized to a different form of social mobility. He is Cuban.

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<sup>45</sup> Or, in the case of Puerto Ricans, migrated to the mainland.

The Cuban experience is somewhat different from the Puerto Rican experience but Jose is not typical of Cubans in northern New Jersey. While academics have spoken to me about Bergenline Avenue, which extends through several towns in Hudson County, as being the center of Cuban New Jersey, it isn't quite so Cuban anymore in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Cuban community appears more socially mobile than the other Latinos in northern New Jersey.

The Cuban community has come to the United States in a different pattern than the Puerto Ricans. Cubans have arrived in various waves: the immediate post-Castro group, the mid to late 1960s exiles, a handful of defectors in the 1970s, the 125,000 Cubans that came after Marielle incident in 1980, and a slow but continual stream of defectors since (Portes, 1985, p.21). Puerto Ricans have trickled to the Mainland for decades. Large waves of migration may occur, as in the 1960s, but the flow has never halted. Puerto Ricans also travel back and forth easily between the Mainland and Puerto Rico because they are US citizens. The Cubans experienced various difficulties immigrating and they rarely went back to Cuba. I have encountered many Cubans who refuse to return to Cuba until Castro is removed from power or dead<sup>46</sup>. For those families who arrived from Cuba early, their children tend not to think critically about Cuba and the Island's relationship with the United States. They also will not go to Cuba until Castro is gone and really have no knowledge of what happens on the Island unless it is a dramatic news story.

Jose, however, would love to go to Cuba. His parents were among those who emigrated early from Cuba. There is a complexity to the Cuban community and the people are not united in their view of Castro's Cuba. Many Cubans, in northern New Jersey are fascinated by Cuba and

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<sup>46</sup> After my research was completed, Fidel Castro stepped down and appointed his brother Raúl as leader of Cuba. This change is insignificant to my anti-Castro informants as Cuba remains "Castro's Cuba."

think that Castro is decent, or at least they see Castro as having been Cuba's only alternative in 1959. Still, these Cubans think he should step down now, if only to avoid bloodshed when he passes away. Some feel Castro has overstayed his welcome. Others are completely apolitical.

Cuban immigrants and their children have variations of feelings and motivations. David, one of my other Cuban informants, hates Castro. David loves Che Guevara. David frequently reads Cuban history, but he has no idea what happens on the Island today. David also exemplifies what often gets lost in discussions about Cuban communities in the United States. David's family owned a fleet of taxis in Cuba. They lost them because of the Revolution and his family did not leave the Island with money. David would not have grown up wealthy in Cuba, but he would have grown up comfortably. Instead, he grew up in Hudson County, NJ, and his own family did not have access to resources to create social mobility. He also claims his friend's father in Cuba owned a steel mill. His friend would have grown up wealthy in Cuba but lost it all through the Revolution. The veracity of these stories is questionable. Perhaps they are romanticized versions of reality where their families did have access to some privilege, but not necessarily to the capital they imply. However the truth lies in the fact that the Cuban Revolution caused them downward social mobility and cut them off from their source of national identity. Most Cubans I have encountered, regardless of their politics, or lack thereof, are fiercely proud of being Cuban.

A number of the earlier Cuban arrivals arrived with money. They moved into Hudson County because Latinos were living there already. Housing was available. They set up businesses, earned, saved, and sent their children to college. Later, Cubans moved out of Hudson County to the greater suburbs of New Jersey. These Cubans are overwhelmingly white. David is noticeably darker than many other Cubans.

David takes the blame for his own youthful indiscretions and lack of social mobility. He does not blame others for mistakes he made as a young man. He could have gone to college, but instead he spent his time partying. David's first wife was also plagued by mental illness that caused his life to become difficult. In coping with this difficulty, David indulged in some clearly self-destructive behaviors. He was torn between obligations of duty and family, like many of my other informants. David had the reality of a wife who needed a level of care and attention he could not provide. She was legitimately ill in a manner that caused her to behave in unpredictable and potentially violent ways if she did not take her medication. Once his son was in college, David left his wife for another woman and has now started a new family. He is more responsible and sober, focused on providing for his current family and spending time with them. He performs because it is a way to earn money in addition to his own job and because he enjoys playing music. David, now in his mid 40s, wants to buy a house and he wants grass.

Juan Pedro is socially mobile, but he is among a new generation of Puerto Ricans entering the middle class. Jose is socially mobile, but he has more family members and older friends with whom to compare his form of social mobility. The lawn is irrelevant to Juan Pedro. He would prefer not to be bothered with the responsibility of lawn care. A lawn is somewhat irrelevant to Jose, but his desire for social mobility is more typical. He desires the marker of status that a lawn conveys, but he is embarrassed by this fact.

### **Spaces Left Behind**

A feature of social mobility for Latinos is a family or individual moving out of their working class/inner city neighborhoods. This process has been occurring over several decades, but its pace has increased. As mentioned in my introduction, I grew up closely connected to a middle-class Latino family from the time I was four years old. My friend's parents had grown up

in the Bronx in a working-class environment, benefited from City College's free tuition in the late 1950s/early 1960s, and moved to the New Jersey suburbs in 1964. There is nothing new about Latino upward social mobility. It is now simply more widespread. The movement of families out of the old neighborhoods has opened up spaces for new migrants. This pattern emerged some time ago; however, it has had a different effect in Hudson County than in Newark.

Hudson County is composed of several small cities/towns. Some of them are nationally well known—Hoboken, Jersey City, Bayonne—others are barely known even by people in New Jersey, namely Guttenberg and West New York. Bayonne is not particularly Latin. Jersey City is extremely diverse and geographically sprawling. While not simply contained within the northern areas of Jersey City and the towns to the north of them, the Latino population gravitates to the areas north of Bayonne. The Cuban community took hold in Union City and North Bergen in the 1960s. Nevertheless, while the Cuban community was growing and taking root, the Puerto Rican community was already there. A pattern of Spanish language dominance developed in Hudson County through the 1970s. At the same time, several Cuban families, and Puerto Ricans to a lesser degree, moved out of Hudson County into middle-class suburbs. With Spanish language prominence and with housing becoming periodically available, Hudson County is open to an influx of other Latino ethnicities. Peruvians, Dominicans, Ecuadorians, Chileans, Mexicans, virtually all Latino groups, have taken root in and around parts of Hudson County.

Juan Pedro once told me about a rehearsal on Bergenline Avenue, viewed as “the Cuban street.” This was Juan Pedro's conception as well. “Roberto, it has changed. It's a like a South American thing now where everybody is ‘you do your thing and I'll do mine.’ They pulled out a bottle of tequila from behind the counter in the bodega and we started doing shots right there.” Juan Pedro has been to parts of South America; his wife is Peruvian. His commentary meant: 1)

people were doing what they wanted and ignoring certain laws regarding the sale of alcohol and 2) people sold in unexpected places, out of people's shops. The latter reminded him of seeing people selling beer and liquor from their homes in South America. These impromptu bars are the equivalent of someone operating a bar out of their garage in the United States. This non-violent lawlessness surprised Juan Pedro.

David laments the changing area. He isn't particularly happy with the Cuban community shrinking and transforming into a new group of Latinos. David is proud of being Cuban. We were once driving and he told me about a gig he could have gotten in Hoboken at an outdoor Latin music festival. We had played this same gig a few years prior with a band performing the material of Carlos Santana and we could have done it again for significant pay. David, however, was determined not to take the gig, because he felt it would need too much rehearsal. I challenged him and suggested he didn't want to take the gig because he didn't want to hang around with all of the Dominicans, Colombians, and Puerto Ricans that would be in attendance. His friend, another Cuban, began laughing claiming I was correct. David, a bit shocked at my rather forward and accusatory analysis of his decision, refused to say I was wrong and quickly changed the subject.

The "Cuban-ness" of Hudson County has not quite diminished. There is a well-known spot where Santeria drumming occurs every Sunday. There are numerous Cuban restaurants and travel agencies that specifically handle travel between Hudson County and Miami. Services are available dealing directly with transferring money from the USA to family members in Cuba. Cuban groups like Los Van Van and Irekere<sup>47</sup> often perform at small local venues in Hudson

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<sup>47</sup> Many members of this group have defected to the United States already. Paquito D'Riviera and Arturo Sandoval are former Irekere members who defected in 1980s, partially with the help of the late Jazz legend, Dizzy

County when they are on international tours. *Timba*, a genre of Cuban music similar to Salsa, is beginning to grow in the United States and many of the Cuban musicians who play this Salsa-like genre live in Hudson County. The sense is that the area has transformed from a Cuban community to a Latin American community.

Darker skinned Cubans like David remain. Some of these individuals maintain a higher status staying in Hudson County than they would if they moved to the suburbs. In the suburbs, some would be seen simply as “black.” Many of the darker skinned Cubans, especially the more recent Afro-Cubans, are well aware of their African ethnic heritage to the point of some men stating to me “I am Fellani. My ancestors were Fellani“ or “I am Yoruban.” This is a level of African ethnicity stripped and stolen from most, if not all, African-Americans. The presence of a more diverse Latino community has certainly diminished the prominence of Cubans in general in Hudson County.

Newark has been negotiating a different sort of geographic social change. The Italian communities moving out allowed the Puerto Ricans to move in. While Hudson County is mostly apartment buildings, much of North Newark is composed of larger pre-war houses. On the one hand, people like Juan Pedro are leaving Newark but keeping more than just a foot in the old neighborhood. On the other hand, some socially mobile Puerto Ricans are staying in Newark and renovating their homes and directing their attention on improving the neighborhood. A realtor commented to me that the same exact property, in terms of size of house and property, that sells for \$250,000 in Newark’s Central Ward (the area described frequently as the African-American section of Newark) sells for \$450,000 in the North Ward. A friend of Juan Pedro’s was going to

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Gillespie.

sell his home in the spring of 2005. He was offered \$300,000 and he wanted to take it. Shortly after receiving the offer, he was notified by the City of Newark that his home actually qualified as a two family house and that its value was more than \$450,000. He decided to stay and is considering renovating the building so that he can rent part of it as an apartment.

However, just as in parts of Hudson County, Latinos are moving into the neighborhood. Mexicans are the recent arrivals, but Dominicans, Peruvians, Colombians, and others have all been entering the neighborhood since the 1980s. Similar to Hudson County, the predominance of Spanish language shops and services attract these individuals and there is relatively affordable housing to rent. However, the “Puerto Rican-ness” of the neighborhood is not diminishing in the same manner as the “Cuban-ness” of Hudson County. Unlike migration from Cuba, there is a steady flow of people coming directly from Puerto Rico. And, unlike every other Latino ethnic group, Puerto Ricans do not need to negotiate any immigration issues. Lately, various officials and service providers have been questioning them about their green cards. This is generally an insult to anyone who is Puerto Rican.

My own block in Jersey City in Hudson County is telling. Of the thirty or so homes on the block, seventeen contain Latino households. Three families are of African descent, eight are white working-class families, and one is a middle-class Anglo couple who have chosen to purchase their home here rather than rent someplace else more expensive. I am another: white and of a middle-class background, though socially liminal and earning a working-class wage. Jersey City and other parts of Hudson County are in the process of gentrifying. This has happened in Hoboken and the parts of Jersey City closest to the Hudson River where it takes a

Path train<sup>48</sup> ride of six minutes to arrive at the Wall Street/World Trade Center area of Manhattan.

North Newark is not gentrifying although the Ironbound area may be. North Newark lacks any transportation hubs for travel in and out of New York City. Newark still holds the stigma of race riots and carjackings. North Newark may be renovating and transforming itself. However, the symbol of social mobility is to leave Newark, not remain.

### **Effects of Social Mobility**

Curiously, tensions between the socially mobile musicians and those musicians unable to achieve mobility are not noticeable. Lack of class tension exists because, on the bandstand, social mobility is irrelevant. A number of equalizing factors directly connects to how “music as work” operates and to the Latino-ness and Puerto Rican-ness of Salsa. These equalizing factors also affect the way that the networks of musicians are constructed and maintained.

Social mobility has absolutely nothing to do with how well someone plays. The goal of any performance group is to obtain work and to perform. The quality of the band will often determine how much work a group gets. The quality of the band is largely determined by the quality of the individual performers. The quality of the musician is not affected by his or her social mobility. Socially mobile or not, the musicians tend to come from similar class experiences during their formative years while they are learning to play.

A musician who was enculturated first to the middle class may have an advantage over other musicians. Money may be available to provide children with more elaborate musical

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<sup>48</sup> Relatively equivalent to a subway.

training and more musical opportunities than those in the working class<sup>49</sup>. These musicians may learn to read music earlier, or better, than their working-class counterparts simply because they had access to better musical training. However, these same musicians will not establish networks with salseros at a young age. The ties of fictive kin can be established later in life, but the authenticity of the musician must be proved.

### **Conclusion**

Family is highly valued among the men who play Salsa and perhaps Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and other Latinos in general. Gender relationships today show a propensity towards economic equality that deflates an older generation's approach to machismo. The men have found new ways to practice machismo through bravado and through particular ways of "respecting" women, including confronting other men, outside of the family, who do not display "respect." This is reinforced through the networks of Salsa, giving men multi-generational networks of support, which are elusive for many non-salseros.

Family is also stated as the motivation for achieving social mobility. Lack of family can be perceived as a hindrance to social mobility. The social mobility experienced by salseros is similar to the pattern of white ethnic groups, specifically Italians, a generation or so earlier. This mobility is somewhat different for Puerto Ricans than for Cubans, mainly because of historical circumstance, patterns of migration from the Caribbean, and race.

As individual families move out of the urban areas of New Jersey, they become favored areas for new waves of Latino migration. New Latino ethnicities have been encouraged to move into these areas by the prominence of the Spanish language and the more affordable housing.

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<sup>49</sup> For instance, Julliard and Manhattan School of Music offer Saturday programs for talented high school students. Admission is not limited to residents of New York State and both of these schools are within reasonable driving distance from Newark. These programs are expensive for one to participate.

This movement changes the character of the neighborhoods. Gentrification, however, is mainly occurring in the areas near transportation hubs into Manhattan and not in the majority of the working-class neighborhoods.

## Chapter 8 Rehearsing Salsa

### Introduction

#### Miguel

I first met Miguel on a cold Sunday afternoon in February. Carlos had been telling me to about his salsa band for more than year but always in the past tense. After two years of inactivity, the band was re-forming and needed a piano player. Carlos recommended that my trombone-playing friend Cornel and I join the group. This wasn't the first Latin band I would play with, but it was my first, primarily salsa band. The others I had been involved in were mostly cumbia groups. Bolivians managed one and Colombians, the other. The cumbia bands played both Cumbia and Merengue, and they included some Salsa in their sets. I was excited because I wanted to play Salsa, but also—like many other salseros and jazz musicians—I didn't really care for Cumbia as much. I felt it was boring to play<sup>50</sup>.

We first met at Miguel's brother's auto repair garage. This belonged to his other brother David, not to Johnny. The garage was unheated, so we set up two space heaters near the band. Miguel set up his large sound system. He passed out the charts. Johnny was there and he was quite nervous. He had never sung with a band before. Jesús was also present making the strangers feel welcomed. Fernando played bass; Cheo, timbales, Miguel-the-bongo-player, bongos; Carlos, congas; Juan, trumpet; and lastly, Cornel and Miguel played trumpet and sang. I have a tendency to be much shyer than people expect—my physical size often misleads people into thinking I will be outgoing when I am often not. I was intimidated by the situation. After

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<sup>50</sup> While Salsa often features complex rhythmic piano parts, Cumbia tends to have the keyboard player playing only on the second beat of each measure. One could argue for a development of Cumbia from rural accordion based music, but the more intricate accordion parts moved to other instruments.

we began playing the first two or three tunes, they all commented that I was the only one who was accurately reading music. I relaxed in their affirmation of my skills.

They passed around beers and a bottle of Chivas Regal. Cheo offered me a line of cocaine. I declined<sup>51</sup>. The drinking was not excessive and simply a matter of sociability. When I commented that I didn't like Coors Light and preferred beers with more flavor such as Bass, Jesús and I entered into a conversation about them. No class distinction was made due to my preference for something different. Rather, the beer conversation was a moment of social bonding. Carlos, who had worked for Budweiser for a time, complained that it was "fucked up" that Miguel bought Coors. No one turned down the free beer, except Cheo. With pride, he professed that he didn't drink, a frequent irony among some casual drug users.

Johnny, Miguel's brother, was about 6'4", weighing about 350 pounds; he looked more German than Puerto Rican. He sang well, like Marc Anthony. Miguel and Jesús harmonized with him with professional precision. The three were very pleased with the first rehearsal, even though Johnny was quite nervous. Johnny had never sung lead in a band before. Carlos took pride in how well I performed on the first day. "That's my nigga," he told the other guys. Cornel looked at me and rolled his eyes when Carlos said that. I don't think I've heard anyone use that word again at a salsa rehearsal.

We continued to rehearse in Miguel's brother's garage for a few weeks and then shifted to Miguel's bedroom. Miguel lived in his parents' basement in Newark in a room that was renovated to look like a private apartment. Johnny, recently divorced, lived in the attic of the same house, which also had been renovated into an apartment. Their brother David lived in his

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<sup>51</sup> Declining the cocaine immediately established a pattern where I was never offered cocaine again. Cheo offered it to be friendly. When it was clear I had no interest, he was not insulted nor was he judgmental.

own home with his wife and kids, while their youngest brother, Jose, also lived in their parents' home. We had more space rehearsing at David's garage, but Miguel could leave his sound system set up in his bedroom.

Eventually, the band complained about the lack of room. We were all literally on top of one another without enough space to set up music stands. The music had to be placed on Miguel's bed for the horn players to read. Soon, we began rehearsing at one of the local bars that had a large room they used for catering in the back. Miguel was always aggravated that he needed to set up and take down the sound system every time we rehearsed.

### *Juan Pedro*

Juan Pedro was not a stranger to me when he started his group. We had gotten to know one another through Miguel, but we had first met many years prior when I was playing Cumbia with the Bolivian band and Juan Pedro was called in to sub for the regular bass player. Juan Pedro's after-school music academy had been open for a year or two in 2004 and he wanted to start his own salsa band. He had been telling me for some time that he wanted to start his own salsa band and had known I was an aspiring anthropologist. He didn't quite understand what anthropology was, but he respected the idea that I was trying to earn a PhD. On one gig with Miguel, I spent the breaks between sets reading Eric Wolf to which he emphatically pronounced, "Roberto...You cannot do anthropology during a gig!"

Juan used the men who taught at his school for his band. Peter, the bongo player, who usually played timbales when he performed professional gigs, was already giving percussion lessons at the school. Jose, the sax player, was an old college friend of Juan Pedro's who taught at the after-school academy as well. Jose and I already knew one another from Miguel's band. A bit different from everyone else, Jose was Cuban, not Puerto Rican, and lived in Hudson County,

not Newark. Jose knew David and the other Cuban musicians I knew in Hudson County and with whom I played Latin Jazz and Santana influenced Latin Rock and Roll. Jose and I quickly bonded as close friends based on inventing a fictive kin relationship because I knew guys who were from his older familial network in North Bergen. Jose aspires to play Jazz, and upon knowing that I was a skilled musician and a graduate of William Paterson's Jazz Program, he gave me a high level of respect and camaraderie. Jose and Ramón were the two most skilled jazz musicians I've encountered playing Salsa who were not Anglo-Americans. Most local salsa musicians do not cross genre lines. They are apt to play Salsa, other Latin popular music like Cumbia and Merengue, and little else.

Ramón lived nearby but he moved to a smaller home in a town a few miles away during the course of my research. He taught trombone and voice at the Academy. In the group, trumpet players revolved, first starting with some guys who taught in the Newark School System with Juan Pedro, later replaced by older guys who had been playing Salsa since the 1970s. The other percussionists, like Charles, lived nearby and had known Juan Pedro from high school. I asked Charles if he knew Miguel as well, "That guy? Please..." he responded. Charles had no respect for Miguel. Ramón, Peter, Charles, the two current trumpet players, all operate in multiple networks that extend well beyond local Salsa. To call Ramón a "local salsa guy" is to do a disservice to his extensive career and resume that includes many top-level salsa bands as well as high-level jazz performances with the likes of Wynton Marsalis.

Frankie and Ricardo, 28 and 27 years old respectively, were brought in to sing lead and Chorro. They had both been students of Juan Pedro's in high school and had never sung with a salsa band before. They had, however, performed with Juan Pedro when he was the musical director at one of the local Catholic churches. A third singer, a 19-year-old woman, was present

for the first few rehearsals. Later she was replaced by an older, experienced singer named David. He was then replaced by Jiro, a 21-year-old singer who wanted to be a star. I had met Jiro the year before with Miguel. Jiro was gaining local fame because he had appeared on “Showtime at the Apollo” and had won the amateur contest three consecutive times. Jiro would leave, return, and leave the group again over the next year as he received an invitation to work with a producer making hip-hop recordings in Los Angeles. When this did not work out, Jiro returned to Newark. He then moved to Puerto Rico to appear on a reality television program on the Telemundo Channel. The program was a combination of “Big Brother” and “American Idol” styled shows<sup>52</sup>.

Juan Pedro continued his mentor-like relationship with Ricky, Frankie, and Jiro during the rehearsals, instructing them not only on how to properly sing in Salsa bands but also how to act professionally. He was, and is, concerned that Jiro would be swept away by the promises of fame and fortune and would not develop into a working musician of high professional caliber. All three teased Juan Pedro that they were no longer in high school and he should relax. The band members joined in on the kidding of Juan Pedro when he appeared to treat Ricky and Frankie as if they were kids, suggesting that Ricky had passed a note to a girl during lunch to tell her he liked her, or that Frankie should “be sure to do his homework because finals were coming up.” In the midst of Jiro’s coming and going, Frankie’s sister planned on joining the group as a singer, but she could not make the rehearsals because she needed to take care of her young child. Eventually another older singer, in his early 50s, joined the group who had sung Chorro with Héctor Lavoe in the 1970s. Ricky and Frankie were very talented and very skilled at

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<sup>52</sup> “Big Brother” is a reality TV program where people live together in a house and their lives are on constant display for television cameras. “American Idol” is a nationally televised talent competition.

harmonizing, but neither had the raw talent and instinct that Miguel, Johnny, and Jesús had. However, over time Ricky and Frankie continually improved. Miguel, Johnny, and Jesús, on the contrary, were very good from day one but never developed or learned any new skills.

Juan Pedro's school was located a half block from his home and around the corner from Peter's apartment. The school was on the first floor of a large corner building that had storefronts on the main street, including a Chinese take out and a small photography studio. Above the school were residential apartments accessible only from the side street. We had to stop playing at 9:30 pm otherwise the neighbors complained. After many rehearsals, we would go back to Peter's apartment, which was actually in the same building as the school, or go to Juan Pedro's home and have a few beers and listen to music. Unlike hanging out with Miguel or even at Juan Pedro's house, the music we listened to at Peter's was high-level Latin Jazz and occasionally Cuban percussion music. Peter was direct about the connections between the music that he played and Cuban music. He also practiced "The Religion<sup>53</sup>," which emphasized his connections to Cuba. We made a habit of watching clips from Cuba of musicians on the Internet<sup>54</sup>.

### **Rehearsing**

Salsa as the (re)production of Latino/Puerto Rican culture emerges in three significant spheres: the rehearsal, the performance, and the national and international music industry. Performance is the main vehicle through which Salsa reproduces Puerto Rican and Latin cultures, but performance is impossible without rehearsal. However, the consumption of Latino culture though performance is usually not a field of cultural contestation, although for the greater

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<sup>53</sup> This is a reference to Santeria.

<sup>54</sup> Access [www.congahead.com](http://www.congahead.com) and click the "video" tab.

music industry, including radio broadcasts, it is. Rehearsals represent a field of contention among the cultural reproducers but not for those who consume this form of expressive culture. This chapter examines the phenomenon of rehearsing.

Performances and rehearsals are the two predictable and regular spaces for Salsa. These two events are related and work in tandem, but the two present different kinds of social interaction. Rehearsals tend to far outnumber performances. For some bands, performances are frequent and the group is prepared enough to deem steady rehearsing unnecessary. However this point only comes after a group has gone through some period of regular rehearsing.

Rehearsing is on one level simply the process of preparing a group for performing. During rehearsals the group's material is learned; complicated sections and passages in the music are worked out and clarified among the band members. Vocal parts are also divided among the singers. Any issues about or with the music are examined in rehearsal. Mistakes can be made and, thus, performance is refined. The pressure for a precise performance is lessened at a rehearsal, although the goal is a flawless execution of a piece.

Rehearsals differ significantly from performances in two fundamental ways. First, rehearsals are not done in front of an audience, although occasionally a few people will be watching the group at a rehearsal. No one is consuming a rehearsal per se and "guests" at a rehearsal generally understand this. In fact, some guests at rehearsals feel as if they have been given a special opportunity to see what goes on off stage. Second, these are unpaid rehearsals. In some professional cases, however, the musicians will be paid for rehearsing, but this is usually when they are performing with a well-known artist who generates a large amount of capital through his music. It is uncommon for a local level bandleader to pay the other musicians for their rehearsal time.

Even though rehearsals are unpaid, bandleaders generally require them. If a musician cannot make a rehearsal, he may not be given a particular gig. There are numerous exceptions to this, especially if a group has set members. If a steady performer in a particular group cannot make one rehearsal, no one will complain or lose his gig. Familial networks often secure a band member's position until he abuses the relationship. In some cases a musician's reputation reveals that he is one who knows many songs and has the ability to come into a gig without rehearsing and still perform at a high level. Although a musician may obtain a job without committing to a rehearsal, he generally attends the rehearsal nearest to the date of a gig. These musicians just do not come to rehearsals on a regular basis. In Juan Pedro's band, no one expects Ramón to show up to every rehearsal. He does, however, come whenever he can, and he has been in attendance more often than not.

Since the rehearsals are unpaid, one must also consider that \$150 for a one-night performance may be calculated as \$150 for a two-night commitment, assuming there is an equal number of rehearsals and performances. Rarely, if ever, is this the case. Juan Pedro's band rehearsed nearly 30 times from June 1, 2004 through June 1, 2005, but played only four performances during this period. Remuneration, therefore, can be calculated at \$600 for 34 nights or approximately \$17.50 a night.

The value of rehearsals, however, is not determined solely in this manner. First, rehearsals are rarely as long as performances. Juan Pedro often rehearsed for an hour and a half. Miguel would extend his rehearsal slightly longer, perhaps two hours, but the rehearsal would also start more slowly and chaotically, especially regarding the readiness of the sound system and the focus of the musicians.

Juan Pedro has been fortunate in that he owns a rehearsal space and has complete say

over how this physical space is utilized when he is not rehearsing. Consequently, Juan Pedro is able to leave his sound system prepared and ready for use whereas Miguel frequently had to set his sound system up in the rehearsal space. Since the rehearsal space was in Juan Pedro's music school, he was able to keep spare musical hardware—music stands, microphone cables, patch chords for the electronic instruments, percussion instruments—available, and he has been able to keep the music for the band on display in folders on shelves in his rehearsal space. Miguel, on the other hand, had to carry around his music from one rehearsal venue to another, at times forgetting or even losing sheet music. In Juan Pedro's rehearsal space, a copy machine is handy where sheet music can be duplicated immediately if a musician would like to take the music home with him to practice. All of these factors enhanced Juan Pedro's reputation for professionalism.

Rehearsals can have a more relaxed atmosphere. There are no dress codes for rehearsing, whereas a performance requires specific clothing such as a black suit and a white shirt owned by the musicians or possibly a special shirt owned by the bandleader. The only situation in which a particular dress is specified occurs when rehearsals become quasi-auditions. In this case, a bandleader may invite a prospective client to come to a rehearsal to talk business or hear a band. Even in this situation, casual clothing is completely acceptable, but a bandleader may find himself telling the musicians not to wear shorts, not to dress too casually, because a potential client is expected. Another possible occurrence happens when a band videotapes a rehearsal with the intent of using it to obtain work. This is a controlled performance completed in the time and space allotted for rehearsing. Musicians value these events affecting dress because they have a more direct relationship with obtaining work.

The private nature of rehearsing can also generate a relaxed atmosphere. The absence of

an audience creates a situation where the musicians are strictly playing for one another. Musicians enjoy playing music. A rehearsal creates an opportunity to play. One does not often find opportunities to play with a full band in a situation where an audience is not expecting something. The rehearsal provides this space; as such, it becomes leisure space.

Since Miguel rehearsed in the back room of a bar most of the time, there would occasionally be a small audience. The musicians generally ignore the audience in these situations and the audience eventually becomes bored. In rehearsal, a band often plays the same song four or five times in a row, something that would never be done in a performance context. An audience that wants to see the band rehearse usually accepts this but still drifts away around the third time a song is played. If someone yells out “Do something else!”, the bandleader responds, “We’re rehearsing. Leave if you don’t like it.” On many occasions, guys at the bar have bought a round of beers for the band during the rehearsal. This too can be interpreted as an act of machismo or at least as an act of displaying one’s manliness. A man can afford to buy a round of beers for 11 guys; a boy cannot.

This private nature of rehearsing, however, does not always reduce stress. In fact it often increases it. Here, the competition among musicians in the band can be at its most fierce. The performance abilities of musicians are on display to other musicians in the rehearsal. One-upmanship is common, but discussions of how things should be played are rare. These discussions may become heated. The rehearsals also allow musicians to check one another out to see if they want to use each other on additional gigs with other bands, and thus expand their musical networks.

In Miguel’s rehearsals, guys fought over how particular percussion breaks should be accomplished. In many tunes, the percussionist needs to play sections in a particular rhythmic

phrase in unison. Percussionists, then, argue over what is the precise way to play the phrase. By listening to the original recording of a composition, these problems can easily be solved. Miguel's percussionist sometimes could not accurately reproduce the phrase because of limited skills. While the argument was often about what the proper phrase was, the sub-text of the argument was criticism: Cheo censuring Carlos for not being able to execute the phrase properly.

Rehearsing with Juan Pedro was far more challenging for me at first than rehearsing with Miguel. The musicians playing with Juan Pedro are of a higher caliber. They have more experience. In part, they were often on my case to play up to the high standard of performance that they held for themselves. As a musician myself, I learned more about playing Salsa properly during the time I rehearsed with Juan Pedro's band than I had in the previous 15 years of playing in salsa bands with weaker musicians.

### *Performing Masculinity*

There is also another issue regarding the definition of manhood contained within the rehearsal space, which I describe as: A man shows up for work and produces. In a rehearsal or performance situation, a man executes his role in the music with perfection. If he does not, he will hear about it from the other men in the band. If he does perform well, no one really celebrates him for doing what he is supposed to do. When I finally overcame criticisms and played at the level the other musicians expected, they simply said, "Now you got it" and raised a beer to me. A man does not need or require any other special acknowledgment.

However, I also felt that there was a minor ethnic bias. There were times when I played parts exactly as they sounded on the recordings we were trying to imitate, yet I was still told it was not correct. When speaking of this to non-Latinos, white or black, my experience was often echoed back to me: Non-Latinos receive more flack from the Latinos to play the music properly,

to swing appropriately. Nevertheless, I was also told, and have experienced, that the tables turn quickly when a salsa bands decides to switch to an American “jazz” or “swing” beat. The salseros frequently do not play that music properly and often sound amateurish when trying. As one non-Latino informant stated: “Well, Rob, just wait until they start trying to swing. We can play Latin so much better than they can play jazz. That’s your time to give them shit right back”

I disagree with this concept made from an ethnic point of view but not from one based on musicality. Many non-Latinos playing Salsa are very accomplished jazz musicians. They have developed skills for learning and studying music beyond that of most salseros or any group of musicians dedicated to playing only one genre of music. Even some of the most skilled salseros do not recognize the names of typical jazz musicians such Wayne Shorter, Joe Henderson, or Art Blakey while the non-Latinos are quite familiar with Héctor Lavoe, Marc Anthony, or Tito Nieves. A trained jazz musician of any ethnicity is skilled at adapting to varying musical situations and by nature devours new music like a hungry athlete. This is not to disparage the Latinos in any way, but rather it speaks of the disconnectedness to non-Latino expressive culture.

Peter is a highly skilled and very talented percussion player. He has performed with many well-known artists and has toured the globe playing Salsa. He has performed with Jose and me in a Latin jazz context and does so quite well. He had no idea who Horace Silver was. The casual music aficionado may not know who Horace Silver is, but every single jazz musician since 1959 knows who Horace Silver is.

The dominant social group in United States society clearly consumes multiple forms of expressive culture from a variety of social and ethnic groups. The non-dominant social groups tend to consume the expressive culture generated only for and by their own social group or a closely related social group. Rarely possessing an insider’s depth of knowledge about a particular

genre, the middle-class musicians and audience tend to possess a wider breadth of knowledge of multiple genres. This can change as one's class position changes. As one enters the middle class, there are markers of cultural capital in the consumption of music. Knowledge of multiple musical genres is a form of cultural capital, just as an awareness of cinema that includes knowledge of the directors is a source of cultural capital. (Bourdieu, 1984, p.27).

The criticism that other non-Latinos and I have received playing Salsa is far less when we play with bands comprised of weaker musicians. One afternoon I told Raúl, a timbale player in Miguel's group, that I was frustrated with the criticisms I was receiving from some members in Juan Pedro's band. He reacted by saying: "You? They're on your case?" He was surprised that the musicians were criticizing my abilities. For performances, Juan Pedro often hired neighborhood guys to operate the sound. These soundmen, who did not have the same level of musicianship as the majority of those in the performing group, praised my abilities and often asked for my phone number for possible future work. This was done in part because piano players are difficult to find; we are at a premium in the music world, regardless of genre. This touches on the prestige issues connected to Salsa.

First, to some salseros, having a "white" or "Anglo" musician may represent a validation of their role in US society. There is a kind of status in having white guys around that comes from associating the Latinos with the dominant ethnic group in US society. Whitening the band slightly—never completely and rarely on the percussion—could be interpreted as a way of raising the prestige of the other musicians. It is a way of showing that the musicians are "more than" simply neighborhood guys trapped in their socio-economic class. A kind of structural racism appears here because black musicians do not provide this distance from the socio-economic class. The weaker musicians, such as some in Miguel's groups, are the likely ones to

refer to “the niggers” or use some other racial epithet. Little difference in economic class exists between most members of Juan Pedro’s band and those in Miguel’s, but the musicians in Juan Pedro’s band are all of a consistently higher caliber.

Second, the white musicians have a reputation of being more professional. The white musicians have a reputation for showing up on time and not overdrinking during a performance. From what I’ve observed, this is not the case. The white guys are just as likely to show up late and just as likely to over drink. However, few musicians get inappropriately drunk on gigs. Most do drink; some drink a little too much. Few approach “fall down” drunk. Few drink to the point that it affects their performance or their professionalism, regardless of ethnicity.

In Juan Pedro’s group, all of the performers are highly experienced and have strong professional attitudes. They never fought as the guys in Miguel’s band did. Even the percussion players could read music, a rarity in most genres. Juan Pedro’s group had no need for an Anglo musician in their band for validation. If anything, they were more like the musicians who had suffered from having aspects of their music co-opted by Anglo musicians.

In the preliminary stages of my research when I spent more time in Spanish Harlem, there was a well-known trumpet player in his 70s who was often present at the International Salsa Museum where I would meet and talk with people. The trumpet player refused to be interviewed. He refused to talk to me. He wouldn’t even respond to my greetings. One of the Anglo guys who was often found at the Salsa Museum commented to me that this trumpet player did not like white guys. He felt that white guys had stolen his music and that he had lost far too many gigs to Anglos. This is logical: The Anglo guys play horns in salsa bands more often than they play other instruments. He may well have lost many gigs to white guys, and this particular individual was a rather dark-skinned Puerto Rican. While I cannot mention his name, this musician has an

international reputation. His name resonates with all salsa musicians who are aware of the history of the music. I can accept being perceived symbolically as an exploiting force by this man, because he deserves the status of a Willie Colón or Tito Puente, and he does not have it among non-musicians. Although he may have lost work and been exploited by non-Latinos, his reputation among salseros is extensive and impeccable.

### **Social Practices at Rehearsals**

Rehearsals represent the time when the social bonds among musicians are developed and solidified. A typical rehearsal begins with the guys slowly appearing and casually greeting each other. Typically, everyone greets and shakes hands with everyone else. If one does not, he is considered as aloof or unfriendly, or as a person who considers himself superior to the rest of the band. Deference and respect are given to those who are most experienced, but the idea is to emphasize equality among the band members.

In the face of Anglo dominance in the United States, the rehearsal allows the musicians to reinforce their roles in the localized Latino community. While at times socially aggressive to women, the band members tend not to embrace individuals who are aggressive in their approach to other band members. An individual who callously tells another how to play or coerces others will be shunned, especially among a more skilled group such as Juan Pedro's. A tacit acknowledgment persists that the musicians are equal and possess unique knowledge about Latino culture. A Latino who breaks this implied agreement will be said to think he "is a star" and may be undermined in his attempts to achieve this. The undermining may be in the form of gossip, but a white musician who breaks this agreement may be replaced in the band. The value of the performer in terms of recreating Latino ethnicity is tacitly acknowledged and applies to all band members.

Musicians use rehearsal time to network, both in terms of finding what gigs are available and of catching up on the activities of other musicians. They keep track of the lives of others, such as the passing of older musicians, the family status of musicians, and the status of difficult or fortunate economic situations. They also gossip about others. This either creates or harms reputations. Through this process, word circulates about overly aggressive musicians or about egotistical performers who consider themselves stars. “Yes, he’s available...but he doesn’t think he needs to rehearse” is frequently heard.

Some musicians obtain opportunities to enter the larger music industry. When one does, this will be celebrated. If this same musician finds himself playing local gigs, gossip will be exchanged about whether his time on a more national or international circuit has affected his ego. If a musician is still living in Newark or playing local gigs, this fact will be accentuated if the musician considers himself a star or acts aggressively. If he is not acting like a star, he will be praised. “Oh yeah, he’s always available to rehearse for a gig. Nice guy.” If he behaves in a superior manner, this too will be repeated.

The message imparted is: We are Latinos/Puerto Ricans playing music. We are equal. We are no better than our audience.

### **Conclusion**

Rehearsal is the space where the band refines its craft. It is usually not given a direct monetary value. In this process, conscious decisions are made as to what pieces of expressive culture will be reproduced in performance for the audience. This can create stress among the musicians as they struggle to learn how to execute passages in the music properly. The Latino specific aspect of the music is emphasized, and non-Latino musicians may be placed under greater scrutiny during the rehearsals.

The rehearsals also allow the musicians to network in order to find more work and to gossip about other musicians in order to keep track of friends and associates and to maintain reputations as performers. The cultural message generated in the rehearsal is that all the musicians are equal as human beings, although older and more experienced musicians are given greater respect for their proven skill and experience. The prestige generated by performing Salsa is earned. Once earned, however, an individual is still considered no better than another. Gossip maintains this “equality.”

## **Chapter 9 Performing Salsa**

### **Introduction**

The room smells of stale beer and cigarettes. Many rooms do. It's a bit of a cliché to say so, but you really don't know the smell until you've experienced it 20, 30, or 50 times. The smell permeates the carpets and whatever fabric there may be in a club or catering hall. It's gotten better in New York and New Jersey now that there is a ban on smoking in places of business, but the sour smell remains. It's especially pungent combined with the smell of newly painted walls. The Flamboyant Manor did not have the additional odor of chemicals.

The tables at the Flamboyant Manor were all lined up, cafeteria style to the right of the stage and towards the back of the room for about 100 yards. They were also to the left of the stage, but they did not go back so far. The room was shaped much like an "L." A few hundred people could fit in the hall at these tables. In front of the stage was a small dance floor. The Flamboyant had a relatively small dance floor compared to some other clubs. Behind the dance floor, directly across from the stage, was a bar. It was not a fancy or traditional wooden bar; that was saved for the front room. The bar by the dance floor was more like a counter with beer taps and a small refrigerator behind it. The front bar was better stocked.

The dance floor bar held a few cases of Budweiser, Coors Light and Heineken as well as some bottles of vodka, bourbon, gin and tequila, and Chivas Regal. There always seemed to be Chivas Regal and Hennessy at every gig in every club or catering hall. There might be some relatively top shelf liquors, Stolichnaya vodka for instance, but never the "trendy" or "hip" designer vodkas or whiskeys one might find at a dance club in Manhattan or at most dance clubs

in Jersey. If it was a cumbia gig, there would be a brand of aguardiente called Cristal, a licorice flavored liqueur from Colombia. If Salsa, the Cristal would be at the front bar, but not in the dance hall. Cristal would be someplace, but easy access to it was unnecessary if the audience was primarily Puerto Rican.

The most attractive bartenders stayed in the front bar, which technically had nothing to do with the performance in the hall, except for the fact that the only men's room in the entire building was there. The bartenders in the front bar were always women and their job included keeping the patrons at the bar drinking and spending money. At the bar in the catering hall, the intention was to get a patron to buy an entire bottle to share with his friends. Women didn't buy these bottles, but women would certainly buy their own drinks from time to time. The bottles may go for 300-400% more at the bar than at a liquor store. A sign of a man's success and prominence was apparent if he spent \$70 on a bottle of Johnny Walker Red, which he instantly shared. A similar gesture is found in the situation where men insist on buying the band a round of drinks after a set. Always appreciated, the band acknowledges the man for his generosity. Clubs rarely, if ever, provide the band with free beer or alcohol<sup>55</sup>.

There might be food. Over small flames, large silver trays are filled with pork, rice and beans, fried plantains, chicken, a variety of deep-fried and battered foods like crab cakes, fish sticks and pork. Always a lot of pork. It is difficult to be a vegetarian on the gigs, and the vegetarians were usually the Anglos. There were also bowls of salad, nothing fancy, just iceberg lettuce with a simple dressing.

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<sup>55</sup> "Free beer" is common misconception that non- musicians have. Salseros rarely get free or even discounted beers from the clubs where they perform. This is probably because for a group of 15 musicians, it can mean 60 beers over the course of a night. That is at least \$300 worth of profit the club owner would not receive.

The age distribution always struck to me. The audience was composed of folks from ages one to 90. Many performances were parties of some sort with few single men and women between ages 21 and 30. These parties were not “pick-up joints,” instead they contained families: husbands and wives in their 30s and 40s with their children and possibly with their parents. The band often had a similar age distribution, though no one was usually under 30. I’ve performed at over 1500 gigs playing many genres of music over the last 20 years. The only other place that I have seen this age distribution is at weddings, not at rock or hip-hop clubs or at jazz gigs. However, a jazz performance may have band members with such age distribution. The middle-aged men in the audience at the gigs often try to out do each other by spending more and more money, and they also eye any woman under 35.

The men had to dance. The women appeared to love to dance and would drag their boyfriends and husbands out onto the dance floor, with very little resistance. The audience then called for more Salsa. If a couple were particularly adept at dancing, the audience would watch them closely, more so than they watched the band. It was especially impressive if the couple was older than fifty. They might not dance as frenetically as those in their 30s, but both partners knew exactly how the other would move. It really is a treat for the eyes. Younger people might get up and dance to a DJ playing *Bachata* or *Reggaeton*, but the middle aged and over wanted Salsa, and they liked it best from live musicians, not the DJ.

The DJ and the band traded off spaces of time. The band played for 45 minutes and the DJ would play for the next 45. A band might play three sets—three slots of about 45 minutes—over the course of four hours. The DJ might work for five hours. If the DJ played the same songs as the band, this would anger Miguel. Often the DJ played a greater variety of Latin music than the band. This compensated for the styles the band did not perform much. This annoyed the DJ

because he might want to play mostly Salsa. However, this was the band's specialty.

I am describing what it was like at the Flamboyant Manor in North Newark, a restaurant I've performed in maybe 20 or 30 times with Miguel and Juan Pedro. The experience was the same in many places. The Mediterranean Manor in the Ironbound was much the same, but the proper bar was further separated from the dance hall, just like at Krystal's in Lyndhurst, just two miles from North Newark. The Players Club on Verona Avenue was the same but without separate bar area at all. The clubs on Broad Street near Chester Avenue opened and closed. They were smaller, like The Players Club. Sometimes the Broad Street clubs were geared towards younger people. These clubs shifted in their music depending on what was currently most popular. In 2004 and 2005 they mostly have Reggaeton, which is provided by DJ's and not live bands.

### **Performing Salsa**

There is little point to rehearsing without performing. Performance is acting out the expressive culture that is Salsa. Performance and rehearsing work in tandem, but the presence of the audience significantly changes the actions of the musicians. Performance opportunities are the basic goal of any salsa group. While it is through performance that a musician will generate income, it is also through performance that a band will directly engage an audience. In performance the group, in conjunction with the audience, reproduces and acts out aspects of Puerto Rican and Latino culture. The audience is not passive in the performance. Salsa is participatory in that the audience has an active role through dance.

The audience and the salsa band have a symbiotic relationship. Ideally, the music inspires people to dance and in return the dancers inspire the musicians to lift their performance. A poorly rehearsed group or a group lacking skill and/or talent may not provide this inspiration and

therefore the feedback. A group performing a repertoire unfamiliar to the audience may also not inspire the dancers and generate the emotional feedback loop. In either case, a band that does not inspire the audience to dance will have difficulty finding work.

Multiple kinds of performance opportunities exist. It is often the juxtaposition of Salsa with an event that reinforces the association of Salsa with Puerto Rican and Latino culture. Some performances are more relaxed than others; some are shorter. Some performances allow audience members to act out their fantasies of being a DJ on the radio while others are the backdrop to courting between men and women.

### **Types of performance opportunities**

My favorite place to play is called Willie's Steak House in the Bronx. Although I never performed there with Miguel or Juan Pedro—the Bronx was out of their networks for gigs—. Ramón, Peter, Charles, and Jose all knew this place. Willie's Steak house is a bar with a small stage and dining area. Pictures of the owner with Tito Puente hang on the walls beside photos of other salsa legends like Willie Colón, Héctor Lavoe, and El Gran Combo. Willie's often hosted salsa bands there and the audience knew their music extremely well, which is why I enjoyed playing there so much. I heard patrons argue over which Bronx bars had the best juke boxes for Salsa. Willie's was one of those places where musicians would come to hang out, drink, and size up the competition. In this place, one of many such places, middle-aged men were heard complaining about the youth and how "Back in our day...if you acted up and got into trouble, what would your parents do? Send you back to Puerto Rico for a few months to live your grand parents on the farm! Nothing to do!"

Willie's Steak House, like The Players Club in Newark, is a bar that has Salsa and Latin jazz bands. Although few of these places had as much Latin Jazz as Willie's, these places were

nearly identical throughout the New York and New Jersey area. Some places similar to Willie's featured Merengue, but the merengue clubs were larger. Other places featured Cumbia, but not Mexican Cumbia. These would be Colombian clubs. These kinds of clubs often closed and opened repeatedly over the course of many years. There was one constant: You never heard Ricky Martin<sup>56</sup> on the jukebox and you always heard Marc Anthony.

Charles plays a bar in Brooklyn almost every weekend where the band does not start until one in the morning. They play from 1am to 4am. Charles has been performing here for many years, earning maybe \$75.00 a night, but alcohol was free. When Charles stopped drinking some years ago, it had an indirect effect on his pay. He used to drink \$50.00 worth of alcohol. Now he gets only the cash.

There is a problem with many of these places: The owners do not pay very much. They are not fancy clubs where people dress up and pay \$20 to enter. These clubs can afford to hire known acts with recordings aired on the radio. Many of these lower level places, the chuchifrito circuit<sup>57</sup> (Manuel, 1995, p.84), pay the band a portion of what they take in at the door. Five or ten dollars is charged for a patron to enter. An extremely popular spot can come up with \$2000.00 to pay a band but most cannot. The low level clubs, and even more so the more high profile places, will be filled with single men and women, or men and women pretending to be single. Many bands cannot rely on these places to draw an income. In Charles' case, he would

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<sup>56</sup>Ricky Martin presented a bit of a dilemma to the musicians. They were quite proud of the Puerto Rican entertainer's success, but they didn't like the music and they thought he was probably gay. The feelings might best be summed up in a joke my friend Frank would often tell: "We Puerto Ricans should be very proud of Ricky Martin. I mean...he's very successful and we usually don't get that kind of attention. He's a real man for what he has done...and it takes a real man to take it up the ass like he does." Homophobic jokes such as this were common. Misogynistic jokes were very rare.

<sup>57</sup> This is a play on "The Chitlin' Circuit" which was used to describe low level African-American clubs where Jazz musicians played in the 1930s and 40s.

often do a gig in the evening and then travel to Brooklyn to play his steady job.

### **Types of Performances**

Miguel and Juan Pedro would get work in other contexts outside of the clubs. These divide into four categories: 1) Open Parties, 2) Closed Parties, 3) Concerts/Dances, and 4) Political Functions.

#### *Open Parties*

First, there are “parties” given at a place like the Flamboyant. Sometimes they have holiday themes, such as Christmas, Halloween, or Valentine’s Day. At times, there is no theme at all, just a party. It may be promoted as “Miguel Rodriguez y Su Orchestra” but the event is clear. One or two people rented the hall and charged admission. They kept the admission fee and paid the band from that. The club still charged for alcohol but none of that would go to the band. Miguel threw a number of these parties. He would sell tickets to his friends and co-workers ahead of time and try and convince band members to sell tickets as well. He did not always earn back his investment. These were generally open parties and anyone who wanted to come could simply pay the admission fee and attend. However, strangers under 30 were discouraged from entering.

A crowd of people in their late teens and early 20s often loitered around outside in front of the club. The person holding the party would hire a police officer to stand outside to dissuade the young people from behaving badly and to leave the patrons alone. This security was also charged with keeping an eye on the patrons’ cars. Fights among the young people might occur; the police tried to discourage this sort of activity, sometimes to no avail. If a policeman broke up a fight ending a disagreement, no one would get in trouble. If the violence accelerated, some of the youth might find themselves in jail. Most of the time, however, the younger people were

relatively well behaved. They had no place else to go except to hang out in front of a club. By hanging out, the young guys might meet younger women who wanted to talk with them. Men always significantly outnumbered women.

A young aspiring local singer often joined the band for a song or two at some of these parties. Shortly after Jiro made his appearances on *Showtime at the Apollo*, occasionally he would join Miguel's band and sing the modern R&B song he had sung on television. In the mid 1990s, a different local singer would come up between sets at Miguel's performances and sing with prerecorded backing tracks of music. This young man from North Newark has progressed to become a nationally recognized salsa singer. However, Frankie Negrón never responded to any of my inquires to be interviewed for this research, or perhaps my overtures to interview him never reached him through the networks I used.

#### *Closed Parties*

Second, there were closed parties. Some of these were political functions I will elaborate on below. Some were weddings, christenings, New Year's Eve parties, birthday celebrations, Sweet 15 parties, if a family had recently come from Puerto Rico, or sometimes Sweet 16 parties if they had been in the mainland US for a generation or two. Others were private Christmas parties for a business or Mother's Day parties as well, though sometimes Mother's Day celebrations belong in the first category of performances. All of these events will be contracted ahead of time and a fee for the band negotiated. A contract will usually be worked out between the band and the people holding the party. This contract will hold up in small claims court, and has in Miguel's case, if the client refuses to pay or cannot pay the band. These performances are key to establishing a steady income for a band.

A number of these events are explicitly Latino in character. While in Anglo-America it is

common to have a Sweet 16 party, Latin Americans tend to celebrate a young woman's 15<sup>th</sup> birthday with the same zeal. This is called a *Quince*, though it is also referred to as *Quinceanera*. These parties are essentially "coming out" parties meant to celebrate a girl's transition into womanhood. They can be as costly and as elaborate as weddings. They actually mirror wedding celebrations. The many I have observed and participated in within the Puerto Rican community usually involve the young woman having an escort, taking on a role similar to a groom, though he is unlikely to get much attention. This escort may be her boyfriend or he may be only a friend. The young woman usually wears a white dress that implies a wedding gown but looks more like a prom dress.

A number of her friends take on roles similar to that of bridesmaids. These young women wear similar outfits, essentially the same as bridesmaids' dresses. It seemed important that their outfits did not overshadow that of the young woman's whose 15<sup>th</sup> birthday they were celebrating. The friends too will have escorts, but they are there to support the young woman and her friends. To this extent, they don't really imitate groomsmen. The young men wear tuxedo-styled outfits that look more like prom tuxedos.

In Newark, there are two unique occurrences at these parties. The first is a traditional Puerto Rican practice. The young woman sits in the middle of the room, or in the middle of the dance floor, and her father removes her shoes and replaces them with a different pair. The original pair is usually plain in appearance but the new pair is stylish and expensive looking. The exchange symbolizes a transition, the father's sheparding of the girl into womanhood. The woman, her friends, and their escorts all perform a choreographed dance routine to a pre-recorded salsa song. Usually this salsa composition is from the 1970s and not a current hit. Unlike the usual repertoire of the band, this song is far more likely to be from the Fania All-

Stars. It is never a Marc Anthony tune.

While the dance steps of the young people are not particularly provocative, I suggest that this event is meant to declare the girl's sexuality. Since the dance always follows the shoe exchange, the birthday girl has already been symbolically declared a woman. The dance displays the young women interacting with the young men where all of the participants attempt to dance in the manner of their parents. It is never a hip-hop dance, the style to which the young people are more accustomed. The dance accentuates the fact that the girl is now a young woman because her friends and she are dancing with the young men and touching them in front of their parents and their community. This is all symbolic. The young woman may have had several boyfriends and her virginity lost before this event. Chastity is often symbolic in nature. Most young women are no longer under the total scrutiny and control of their parents in their daily lives as in the past.

This showcase dance is the most talked about event at the Quince. While the guest may comment on how pretty the young woman appears in her dress or how wonderful her hair looks that evening, the dancing is more inclusive. With the dancing, others are able to comment on how well, both in terms of appearance and dancing skill, all the young people look when they dance. Like the older couple on the dance floor that I mentioned before, all eyes are drawn to the floor as the guests watch the youth dance. As Raúl's daughter's Quince approached, he told me how her friends and she had rehearsed their routine weekly for months. He was proud of helping his daughter choose her song. The small rituals that occur at a wedding such as the cutting of a cake, toasting by the best man, the throwing of a bouquet of flowers and so on are all absent at the Quince. The dance allows for a participatory event that makes the young woman, her friends, and their escorts the focal point of the celebration.

Another uniquely Latino styled event is the Mother's Day celebration. I have been playing Salsa, Cumbia, and Merengue since 1990; during that time I had performed on Mother's Day five times. The Anglo and African-American musicians I know who do not play Salsa or any other Latin music have never performed at a party on Mother's Day<sup>58</sup>. The salsa and the cumbia bands I have been acquainted with often are hired to play at special parties on Mother's Day. It is fairly common among many Latino ethnicities to celebrate in this manner. No special rituals occur for the mothers at these parties; rather, it is that the women, more so than the men, enjoy dancing. It is simply an effort to give "mom" what she wants on Mother's Day: she would like to dance and she would like to have her husband, or the children's father, take care of the kids for her while she dances. At the more open parties that celebrate Mother's Day, the women have a tendency to be young, often women in their early twenties. The children are not always present. They may be with their grandparents because the women's husbands, boyfriends, or children's fathers are likely to be the ones who take them out on this day. Nearly every salsa or cumbia band I have been associated with has performed on Mother's Day at one time or another, some frequently. Only Juan Pedro's group has not, and this is more likely related to the fact the Juan Pedro's band has not yet garnered a reputation to attract frequent work to date. I would predict that on Mother's Day 2007 Juan Pedro's group will be performing somewhere<sup>59</sup>.

#### *Concert/Dances*

For a third category of performance, there will be various concert/dance events. These

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<sup>58</sup> It is not uncommon for Anglo or African-American musicians to perform at a brunch setting on Mother's Day, but these gigs are no different from playing in any other restaurant or brunch event. It's simply that the owners of restaurants expect a larger crowd as families go out to celebrate the holiday.

<sup>59</sup> While editing my dissertation after Mother's Day 2007, I noticed that this did not occur.

may be at colleges. I've worked as an adjunct professor at Rutgers University in Newark during the course of this research. I've also performed at Rutgers with Miguel when his band has been contracted to play for the Hispanic Students Association. It has sometimes been a bit of a shock to students who on a Thursday listen to me lecture about the !Kung in South Africa and then on Saturday see me playing Salsa. On the few times this has happened, I have laughed it off saying, "I told you I play with salsa bands." With Miguel, I had traveled to perform at universities in Albany and Buffalo, NY, because some young people who grew up in the North Ward attended SUNY schools and want to contract a *real* (meaning "authentic") salsa band for an event. The band, however, was not happy with the eight-hour ride to Buffalo, but Miguel paid us double. One also gets double pay for New Year's Eve.

There are more concert-like events in the spring and summer. Branch Brook Park in Newark frequently holds festivals where the Park Commission hires bands to play, sometimes to coincide with the Cherry Blossom Festival.<sup>60</sup> There are also block parties. Juan Pedro performed approximately 25 block parties throughout Hudson County with his friend's band in the summer of 2005. His friend obtained a contract with the Parks Department. Juan Pedro was able to contract his own band at some block parties in Newark that summer. Miguel had done the same years prior.

Often at the block parties, and sometimes at both the open and closed parties, a host of sorts imitates radio announcers. He will be a local neighborhood resident, who takes the microphone between sets by the band(s) and recites the typical banter from a well-known DJ's radio program. This is not done as parody; he will speak with full sincerity and present what he

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<sup>60</sup> Forgotten in the stereotypes of carjackings and the Sopranos, Newark has an expanse of Japanese cherry trees in Branch Brook Park that rival those in Washington, DC.

says as his own material. Many years had gone by before it was pointed out to me that the announcer was simply saying what he had heard on the radio that week. Some men do not have the talent to play an instrument or to sing, but they may adore music and crave the stage. By acting out the routine of the radio announcer, it allows the hosts to feel as if they are just as much a part of the event as the band. And, of course, they are. The audience never directly criticizes the announcer, although some may comment privately that they know what he is doing. The audience does not heckle.

### *Politically Related Salsa Gigs*

Finally, there are the gigs performed for the politicians. Politicians make frequent usage of Salsa as well, which reinforces the community's cultural identification with Salsa. First, it is used by politicians and other civic institutions as a backdrop to promote political campaigns and ideas; second, as a source of community mobilization for temporary goals; and third, as a general source for community identity. These are not exclusive categories and they in fact often overlap and acknowledge each other.

Puerto Rican politicians almost always appear in public with a salsa band in Newark and Hudson County. As one Newark politician said to me, "This is what the people want. Salsa is who we are!" This phenomenon happens for two reasons: 1) People like to dance and party and the music simply facilitates this. The music allows the politician to provide a "good impression" where the people walk away having had a good time. 2) The music allows the politician to appear to be "of the people." Salsa shows that he is "one of them." To enhance this position, politicians exclusively use local bands: Newark politicians use Newark bands; Hudson County politicians use musicians from Hudson County.

Civic institutions also employ salsa groups during their events. These events include

banquets for Latino police and firemen, meetings and parties for Latino chambers of commerce, and for general fundraisers for civic organizations. In 2001 the Newark Museum secured funding for research in and exhibits of Puerto Rican culture. Miguel's band performed during the inaugural event for the new division of the museum. Local politicians always attend these events and often make speeches expressing their political support and/or intentions for such organizations. I have seen these politicians incorporate Salsa and even members of the bands into their speeches. The most striking of such approaches occurs when they acknowledge the non-Latinos in the group. In order to portray the Latino population as influential and Salsa as a means to spread such influence, non-Latinos performing the music are singled out. I have been the object of such speeches twice.

Politicians, civic institution, and the bands themselves all welcome this interaction. The events generate work and therefore income for salsa performers. Miguel once commented how he was happy that he had made the needed connection with the new president of the Essex County Hispanic Policemen's Association. His previous connection to the Association had retired in 1999, coinciding with the dwindling of work overall. In 2004, Miguel's work schedule showed promise because of his re-involvement with this organization. The anticipation was that work for policemen generally expands into work for firemen and more work for politicians. However, this did not happen for Miguel. Juan Pedro and other musicians associated with Miguel claimed that it was Miguel's fault. Through bad business practices, Miguel did not manage to make this opportunity work.

Salsa performances have also been presented for community political mobilization. Most

recently this has occurred for Vieques<sup>61</sup> protests and for hurricane relief fundraisers. Latino politicians initiated these events. Since these were issues directly affecting Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans, the local communities felt obliged to provide their support. This mobilization and politics occurred through and around issues of identity. The groups that participated in such events were expected to volunteer their time. I participated as a performer for some events and declined pay when I realized it was coming directly from Miguel and not the politicians who organized the event. Other non-Latinos who participated did not turn down the pay. However, the message sent was that the non-Latinos were not expected to work for free. We weren't Puerto Rican, so it wasn't anticipated that we would want to volunteer our time.

An exclusively Cuban incident that generated community mobilization occurred in the spring of 2000: the plight of Elián González. While members of Hudson County's Cuban community were mobilized for protest to keep Elián in the United States, the musicians were not. As this was a Cuban issue, the Puerto Rican community of Hudson County and Newark were ambivalent. Also, as a result of the contested identity issues surrounding Salsa, the music was not employed in the rallies for Elián. In one event for Elián in Jersey City, Latin Jazz was employed as the musical backdrop. Latin Jazz is more frequently recognized as Cuban than Salsa by the general public and even by musicians. The event itself involved speeches by multiple politicians and businessmen—Latino, African-American, and Anglo—who seemed less interested in promoting Cuban and/or Hispanic identity than in appeasing their middle-class Cuban constituents. This turned out to be a very unusual event in that it was funded by a Hasidic

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61 Vieques is a small island off the coast and a part of Puerto Rico. The US Navy used the island as a weapons testing ground until protests caused the cessation of the bombings in 2003.

business<sup>62</sup> promoting free internet service. Free food was also handed out by one of Mohammad Ali's daughters. The musicians, who were all paid, tried to hide their faces when they realized they were going to be on Telemundo. One musician, a percussionist from the Dominican Republic named Raphael, was concerned that Castro himself would see the footage and that Raphael would be banned from traveling to Cuba and thus damaging his tentative international career.

There are also the parades celebrating Puerto Rican culture. These are both political and non-political. My participation in them has almost always been political in nature. The city councilmen in Newark are required to appear in at least two of Newark's ethnic parades each year. They have the Newark Puerto Rican Day Parade, which occurs in September during Hispanic heritage month, a Portuguese Day Parade, a St Patrick's Day Parade, and an African-American Day Parade. Newark also maintained a Columbus Day Parade celebrating Italian ethnicity, but this ended in 1998. Miguel would provide the music for the councilmen's float for every parade except for the African-American Day Parade.

However, during the parades, politicians are not the only ones to participate. Community organizations march and may hire a salsa band to perform on their float for the Puerto Rican Day Parade. Budweiser and Bacardi will have floats with salsa bands. Local businesses may do the same. Newark's parade is similar to the famous New York Puerto Rican Day Parade. The New York parade, however, is on a much larger scale and always occurs on the second weekend after Memorial Day. Both parades appear on local Spanish television stations.

What is reflected in Newark's inter-ethnic politics in the parades is notable. Miguel was

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<sup>62</sup> I asked one of the Hasidic men why they were supporting the event. He explained to me that it was part of their beliefs to combine business interests with issues of social justice.

never asked to provide music for the African-American Parade. There is an obvious logic to this. African-Americans make up nearly half of Newark's population and among them are several extremely talented and professional musicians. Newark has produced numerous world-class jazz musicians of legendary status, such as Sara Vaughan and Wayne Shorter. It would be inappropriate to use a Puerto Rican band, and perhaps even more so to use an Anglo-American one. Miguel often asked me to provide the music for the St. Patrick's Day and Portuguese Day events.

The oddest of all the events is the St. Patrick's Day parade. Today Newark is not known for its Irish population, though there are a few Irish bars in the city. However, a large number of the policemen and firemen are Irish. The police and firemen marched through one of the more impoverished African-American neighborhoods, but it always appeared to be more of a show of police presence to inner-city Blacks than anything else. Once, Miguel was instructed specifically not to use Latino musicians for this. He was told: "I want blonde hair and blue-eyed white guys in the band! No Niggers. No Spics!" Ironically an African-American, who organized events for Newark's City Hall, gave Miguel this directive.

Newark's Portuguese Day Parade is the largest single ethnic event in the United States. The San Gennaro festival in Manhattan attracts a larger total number of visitors, but the event is spread over the course of a week. The Portuguese Day occurs over the course of a weekend and the Parade attracts hundreds of thousands of people. It is held in Newark's Ironbound section, nationally known as a Portuguese neighborhood. In the late 1990s, the day of the parade was moved to coincide with New York's Puerto Rican Day Parade. The Parade's organizers seemed to make a conscious decision to hold the Portuguese Day Parade on a day when most of Newark's Puerto Rican population was likely to be in Manhattan celebrating their heritage. By

doing this, fewer Puerto Ricans attended the Portuguese Day Parade.

Ironically, there is likely to be a Puerto Rican event at a catering hall in the Ironbound on the Friday or Saturday of the parade weekend. An annual dinner for the Roberto Clemente Little League is held every year in the Portuguese neighborhood. This is a community organization that supports various politicians and community members. In the late 1970s, their baseball teams were of such a high caliber that they competed in the playoffs for the Little League World Series. However, at that time the city had helped to fund the Little League. Now it is mostly community supported. The dinner is a fundraiser for the baseball team and they always hire a Salsa band.

### **Repertoire**

The performance of Salsa requires specific repertoires. The audience's expectations have a direct relationship to the repertoire being performed. While there is a wide range of repertoire to choose from, there are some restrictions. As I have alluded to already, additional genres of music appear in the performance context next to Salsa, and their ethnic affiliations reflect the ethnic composition of the audience. Puerto Rican bands do not play songs from Cuba but Merengue is often played alongside Salsa. Cumbia may or may not be accepted.

Salsa is directly related to older forms of music that come from Cuba. The music emerged as a specific genre after immigration from Cuba became difficult. Salsa also emerged as the face of Latinos in the US Northeast changed from Cuban to Puerto Rican. Cuban music, however, did not stop developing in 1961, and Cuba has generated its own salsa groups. However, groups like Los Van Van are usually not labeled as playing Salsa, regardless of the extent to which their music sounds like Salsa. Cuban music is now frequently played in Hudson County and in New York, but this music is called *Timba* and is somewhat different from Salsa in its rhythms. The music of groups such as the Buena Vista Social Club may be interpreted by

non-Latinos as Salsa but it is not. While highly successful both as a film and recordings, the Buena Vista Social Club's material has been consumed by Anglos, African-Americans, and Latino middle classes. These social groups are distanced from local level Salsa. One will not find these recordings on the jukeboxes or DJ bins in the salsa clubs of Newark, Manhattan, or the Bronx. However, they may appear on the jukebox of a place like Willie's Steak House where the clientele has a particularly developed knowledge of Latin music.

Merengue is a different case. Migration from the Dominican Republic to the United States increased greatly in the 1980s but, as noted earlier, many of my informants played with merengue bands in their earliest performing years in the 1970s. In the mid 1980s, Merengue began to displace Salsa on some radio stations and merengue bands and salsa bands competed for the same performance spaces. This competition from Merengue still exists. My own informants sometimes complain about being underpriced for a performance by merengue bands that will perform for half the price charged by salsa bands. Or as Miguel has said, "I can't get a gig at The Latin Room. They have only merengue bands that come in with 10 guys and charge \$300 for the whole band."

Salsa bands are often expected to perform some Merengue at the local level. In part this is because the Dominican populations and the Puerto Rican populations in the Newark area share the same space and frequent the same bars, restaurants, and other potential performance venues. While differences in the ethnicities may certainly be observed and maintained, if only in the assertion of ethnic pride, a Latino solidarity has been generated between Dominicans and Puerto Ricans in the Newark area of NJ. In addition, Merengue and Salsa share the same radio stations and the larger music industry has categorized them together as *Tropical Music*. At a more simple level, the audience enjoys dancing Merengue and enjoys engaging in dances other than Salsa

during a performance. This brings variety to the evening. Nevertheless, it is the ethnic solidarity and shared socio-economic statuses among Puerto Ricans and Dominicans that give the final approval of the performance of Merengue as opposed to other styles of music, such as Cumbia.

Cumbia has a slightly different status than merengue. Cumbia to many salsa musicians means a popular music from Colombia that people have been playing in the United States since at least the mid-1980s. To the Latin music audience, Cumbia means both this and popular music from Mexico only recently being played in the Northeast of the United States. To some South Americans, especially those from the Southern Cone, Cumbia generally refers to Latin dance music that the international music industry calls Latin Pop. To the recording industry, Cumbia tends to mean the aforementioned Mexican music. For the populations in New York and New Jersey, however, Cumbia usually refers to Colombian music. It hit its popular stride in the late 1980s and early 1990s but has waned in recent years between Puerto Rican and Dominican audiences.

Non-Latino musicians who performed salsa frequently in the early 1990s referred to the three styles of music as one idea, a Joycean “SalsaCumbiaMerengue.” Cumbia has lost its primary role in the repertoire, though many bands will have a cumbia piece or two prepared to play if the audience requests it. If the band knows ahead of time that some Colombians may be present at a performance (such as a wedding), the band will be prepared to play Cumbia. The audience in Newark that demands Salsa and Merengue does not demand Cumbia in the same manner.

Conversely, Colombian and Central American groups playing primarily Cumbia will often play Salsa and Merengue in their performance. An extensive salsa scene exists in Colombia (Waxer, 2002), but the Salsa played will not be Puerto Rican Salsa. Instead, it will be

compositions from South and Central America. There are significant exceptions as some Salsa songs have been hits across Latin ethnicities. Marc Anthony is a prime example of a performer whose compositions will be played by multiple ethnicities and his material has even made it into the repertoire of non-Latino bands who play affairs for white middle-class audiences.

The Anglo groups may know a song by Marc Anthony or two as their obligatory salsa tunes. Marc Anthony has become synonymous with Salsa for many non-Latino musicians who do not follow Salsa closely. While the Puerto Rican audience may enjoy Marc Anthony's material, he is not the greatest inspiration to the musicians. In 2005, and for the last 20 years or so, the one group that defines Salsa is El Gran Combo, an internationally known group directly from Puerto Rico. As stated before, in the 1970s and into the 1980s, the ultimate salsa group was the Fania All-Stars.

As the salsa performance is apt to have a greater integration of age groups than one will find at most other musical performances, space is created for music that appeals to the youth. Audience members under 30 may enjoy Salsa but may also be seeking ways to create and consume their own forms of expressive culture. In the late 1990s, *Bachata* was a genre that DJ's often played between the sets of the salsa performance. *Bachata* is a rural music from the Dominican Republic that became quite popular among Dominican and Puerto Rican youth internationally starting in the 1980s (Pacini Hernandez, 1995, pp.1-34). *Bachata*'s popularity has waned and is now largely replaced by a newer style of music called *Reggaeton*. It is recognized as being more Puerto Rican whereas *Bachata* is known as Dominican. Because of this, the audience tends to celebrate *Reggaeton* more than *Bachata*. While many younger Latinos may consume Hip-Hop primarily, this music is rarely present in the salsa performance. The exception

occurs when it is played by DJ's or when presented in a Latino version via Reggaeton<sup>63</sup>.

Salsa bands do not play Latin Pop or *Rock en Espanole*. Salsa bands do play Marc Anthony. They do not play Ricky Martin. The Latin Pop genres tend not to appear beside Salsa. Latin Pop appeals more to a middle-class Latino audience and to some Latino youth markets. Perhaps this is because these styles appeal to a more homogenized Latino community than to those situated in the working-class environment. The recording industry has promoted these genres heavily. I will address this idea in the following chapter.

The repertoire, therefore, reinforces which musical markers become associated with the local community. The performers have the final decision on this. They are choosing what aspects of expressive culture to perform. Their performance reinforces the history of the genre as well. Frequently, different bandleaders have told me that they play the *best* Salsa, referring to their choice of repertoire, but this “best salsa” usually correlates to the bandleaders’ youth. In this situation, Salsa is rarely the most current recordings.

Some salsa material is not performed. The works of the salsa stars from the 1970s—Héctor LaVoe, Willie Colón, Reuben Blades, The Fania All-Stars—are rarely performed. It is not part of the current salsa repertoire at the local level, but I have heard this material from DJs at parties. This is especially important because the material directly engages urban street life in its lyrical content. This music was political at times in its content and also in the outspokenness of the musicians in support of Castro’s Cuba. Some even traveled to Havana for performances. Individual musicians and salsa aficionados may be aware of this material, but it is not performed

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<sup>63</sup> As a matter of personal taste, I do not care for Reggaeton. Many salseros over 30 do not. What is fascinating about Reggaeton is that the rhythms sound more like electronic versions of Afro-Reggae or Axé music from Bahia, Brazil, than Hip-Hop.

live. It does not have a prominent role on mainstream Latino urban radio. It will, however, be played on specific radio programs, usually on Sundays or on college stations that dedicate Friday nights to salsa music. While these performers are overwhelmingly Puerto Rican, the music is frequently presented in an Afro-Cuban or Spanish speaking Afro-Caribbean context.

Second, there is the music that is performed. The more prominent repertoire is that of El Gran Combo, current salsa hits, and Salsa from the 1980s. As a result of the vertical integration of various age grades at a salsa performance, the repertoire is geared to diverse nostalgia. The dominant age group is the 40-50 year old man who “came of age” in the late 1970s and early 1980s. His theme music may be “I’ll Always Love You” by Tito Nieves or “Telephono” by El Gran Combo rather than “Canta Mi Gente” by Héctor Lavoe or “Pedro Navaja” by Ruben Blades.

Academics seem to adore “Pedro Navaja” for its lyrical poetry and complex musical arrangements. I am no exception to this, and I first heard Miguel play “Pedro Navaja” on his stereo at home. I asked Juan Pedro if we could learn it for his band. His response was “which song?” Jose, whose breadth of musical knowledge tends to be wider than Juan Pedro’s, knew the song, but spent more time commenting on its similarity to the Kurt Weil/Bobby Darin classic “Mack the Knife” than any other aspect of the song. Latinos and non-Latinos alike have made the same comment. “Mack the Knife” changes keys with every verse, so does “Pedro Navaja”. The melody and harmony are different. “Pedro Navaja” is a much more complex composition with multiple instrumental sections. Yet, the association between the two is pervasive. Lyrically, the subject matter is similar: a two-bit thug and the dangerous street life he negotiates. However, musicians sometimes listen to the music of a song before the lyrics.

## **Conclusion**

No local level Salsa would exist without performance. And yet, it is about much more than simply the music. The performance is the space where Salsa directly interacts with the local community. Through this process, the performance creates a uniquely Latino and Puerto Rican space, where gendered codes of status are on display. The performance accentuates the ethnic identity of its participants and occurs in a variety of ethnically structured and/or influenced events. In a way, Salsa stamps an event, clearly marking it as Puerto Rican. In much the same way, a different Latino ethnic group might play Merengue and mark the musical event as Dominican. In a political context, Salsa shows the politician or the event as being Puerto Rican or, at the very least, it acknowledges the prominence of Puerto Ricans in a particular region.

The audience is just as much a participant in performance as the band. The audience often dictates what material the band will actually play. The audience provides the dancing and Salsa has always been dance music. Without the dancing element, the audience loses its primary social role in performance. Without a social role, the audience might abandon Salsa and develop an alternative to take its place. This has happened time and again to a variety of popular musical styles that first began as dance music, and these styles usually lose local level and working-class support in the process.

One may consider the local level performance the most central of salsa experiences. A musician who claims to play Salsa but has never attended or played at a local level performance will have a very hard time being recognized.

## **Chapter 10**

### **Selling Salsa**

Music encompasses a number of meanings beyond that of melody, harmony, and rhythm. While I have largely discussed the role music plays as a means of employment and a life strategy, the integration of economics and daily life are interpreted symbolically in the music. In this sense, particular music becomes a source of identity in the daily life of its producers and consumers. The identity includes specific knowledge about the art form enabling popular music to represent the community supporting it. Performers and composers are judged by the community to the extent to which the individuals are experienced with the aspects of daily life that the music touches. Music itself is a commodity. When the music is packaged and sold, the culture is too. Through the recording industry, the capital generated by selling music and commodified culture is significant and surpasses the possibilities available at the local level. However, the apparent authenticity necessary for Latin popular music to sell in this wider market is generated at the local level.

A symbiotic, exploitive, unequal, and necessary relationship exists between the international music industry and the local level of Salsa. The industry plays the role of providing an outlet to some performers. It promotes and markets music to the communities that consumes it. The industry provides the “hit songs” that the local bands perform and their audiences expect. The recording industry makes a wide array of music available. Radio stations play this music. Trade journals and fan magazines inform prospective audiences about new releases and about the activities and views of the performers. The industry relies on the local level performance to reproduce the talent the industry commodifies and to provide new innovations and songs. This cycle facilitates continual sources of popular music and culture.

In the broadest of terms, the industry promotes music but invests little into developing new talent. The recording industry gives nothing back to the community aside from the totality of its recorded popular music. Different aspects of the overall industry may connect with the community level through promoting concerts and broadcasting community news and events<sup>64</sup> on radio and in print. One of the complicating factors is the diversity in Latin popular music emanating from the different Latino communities in the United States. A limited number of radio stations and magazines serve and reflect this diversity.

One aspect of Latin popular music is ethnicity. One need not be Puerto Rican to be considered in Salsa, but one must be knowledgeable of the experience of the urban Puerto Rican community. One must play the music correctly; play in the accurate style with the appropriate rhythmic approach. Most popular music has a rhythmic approach unique to the genre. As this rhythmic diversity is vast among Latin popular styles, rhythmic styles eventually represent different national and regional identities. The totality of the Latin Popular Music industry is then burdened with needing to represent the Puerto Ricans, the Cubans, the Dominicans, the Colombians, the Mexicans, and all other Latino groups while, at the same time, trying to represent the Latino community as a homogenized whole.

### **Contradictions in the Industry**

The herculean task of representing each Latino ethnic group individually and collectively is wrought with contradictions and difficulties. While a Mexican-American may certainly enjoy and consume Salsa, it is not Mexican music. Salsa does not say “Mexican” to its consumers and

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<sup>64</sup> Non-musical events are rarely promoted unless they are on a large scale, such as issues relating to Vieques.

it makes no attempt to do so<sup>65</sup>. While people are free to choose which music they prefer to listen to, Salsa will not represent the Mexican-American community. However, it will represent a generalized Puerto Rican community.

One means of avoiding this dilemma has been to produce a genre of popular music that appeals to a wide range of Latinos. The industry has supported this move for at least 25 years. As I stated in the first chapter, the radio stations sought to promote a more homogenous and less rhythmic music starting in the early 1980s (Manuel, 1991, pp.170-171). This music was often slower and “sweeter.” Since the early 80s, there has been a steady flow of romantic crooners promoted by the industry and some of the performers have sold quite well. This trajectory cumulated in the Latin Pop Explosion of the late 1990s. While the Latin Pop Explosion achieved a fair amount of crossover success, its greater achievement has been the validation of pan-Latino popular music. Two genres of Latin popular music came into their own at this time: Latin Pop and Rock en Espanole. Latin Pop is an extension of ballads and homogenized music that began in the 1980s. Ballads are produced with modern production techniques and electronic instruments along with dance songs and pop hits in Spanish. These songs may or may not feature Latin percussion. Drawing on various Latin American influences, Rock en Espanole is broader and more diverse, Rock en Espanole seems freer to be more creative and innovative than Latin Pop. At times, though, the two genres are interchangeable. The artists who loosely fit into these genres have received significant promotion from the industry trades and fan magazines.

However, sales on this music have not been as lucrative as the industry expected. On October 4, 2003, it was reported in *Billboard* (Cobo, 2003, p.41) that while all of the sale outlets

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<sup>65</sup> Unless, of course, it's a Mexican group performing Salsa. In which case, the fact that the band is Mexican is likely to be promoted both by the band and the industry.

had expected various Latin Pop recordings to sell, the more ethnically specific Mexican music sold the best. Record stores complained of having an excess of Latin Pop product on hand and not enough Mexican music to sell. Since the increase in migration from Mexico to the United States, legally and otherwise, has increased, Mexican communities are now appearing throughout the United States, even in areas once dominated by Puerto Ricans, such as New York City and Newark. Having several number one hits, Mexican artists now dominate the Latin pop charts in *Billboard*. Nationwide, a salsa composition has rarely held a number one Latin song since 2002.

The Latino community is obviously diverse in ethnic composition, but it is also diverse in class and immigration experience. Latin pop and Rock en Espanole do not necessarily speak to the immigrant experience or to the rural migrant. Pan-Latinoism is a phenomenon available more to the socially mobile and established middle-class Latinos than to the transnational immigrants who remain in ethnically segregated neighborhoods. This ethnic isolation, then, reproduces itself through popular culture where a community will consume ethnic specific popular music rather than pan-Latino music or music authentic to a different Latino group.

The industry has attempted to group geographic regions together, especially with regard to the Spanish Caribbean. Salsa is charted together with Merengue and other music from the Spanish Caribbean<sup>66</sup> as Tropical Music (Manuel, 1991, p.169). The only theme unifying Tropical Music as a genre is the use of styles prevalent in the Caribbean, whether the music was produced and recorded in Santiago or Bayonne. Via 97.7, WSKQ, Tropical music dominates the local airwaves in the New York-New Jersey area, which contains the largest concentration of Caribbean Latinos. Currently, the music played on this station tends to be Merengue, Reggaeton,

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<sup>66</sup> And music that does not originate here, but is still played in the styles of the Spanish Caribbean.

and Salsa, but rarely is the older 1970s Salsa heard. As an alternative, more pan-Latino music may be found on 92.7, WQBU, which rarely plays Tropical Music.

Realistically the consumption of genres in music is a matter of personal choice. However, I found that the more middle-class a person is the more likely he is to be knowledgeable about music. If an individual is a regular consumer of Salsa and not Puerto Rican, Cuban, or Dominican, the consumer more often fits a more middle-class lifestyle or at least has an education more comparable to one from the middle class. Such people are often removed from their ethnically specific communities or are socially mobile enough to exist outside of the community. Since immigration from Latin America to the US has been occurring for well over a century, many families in the NY-NJ area have been here for generations

On more locally programmed and less mass-oriented radio stations in the New York City area, programs exist that specialize in a wider range of music than the Tropical Music played by the main radio stations; however, none of this programming—radio broadcasts of Fania records or even Puerto Rican groups like El Gran Combo or Sonora Ponceña— occurs 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Much of it is on public airwaves, like 99.5, WBAI, and college radio stations like 89.9, WKCR. These programs operate outside of the commercialized music industry. Many Latinos seek these programs out and listen to them, thus proving that the mainstream industry does not necessarily provide what the people want to hear.

### **Salsa, Miami, and the Return of the Cubans**

There is one more issue to raise with regard to the music industry: The Cubans have come back, figuratively. According to some, this has had a significant affect on the representation of Salsa. Of course, Cubans have never left Latin Popular music. The late Celia Cruz is Cuban. Paquito D’Rivera is Cuban. Ruben Blades’ parents are from Cuba. Los Van Van,

a Cuban dance band playing music that sounds much like Salsa, performs in Hudson County, NJ, in small venues for the Cuban community whenever it comes to New York City. There are Cubans throughout the New York-New Jersey Latino community, and many of them have been in the area since the early 1960s. What has changed significantly is the group's political-economic influence in the United States and the role the Cuban community of Miami plays in the Latin recording industry.

Alejandro Portes has documented in detail many of the changes in the Cuban community of Miami: (1) The early post-Castro migration which eventually resulted in the construction of an ethnic enclave in Miami, (2) the negative opinions of Cuban-Americans in the months immediately after the Marielle Cuban boat people, and (3) the political movements that followed 1980 to establish the Cuban community in Miami. (Portes & Stepick 1993. pp. 30-37) In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this community is perceived as successful and productive. In 1980, nearly 125,000 Cubans entered the United States in about five months (Portes&Stepick, 1993, p.21). Many of these Cubans were said to be criminals that Castro had allowed out from the Cuban jails. Fidel Castro made a declaration that Cubans in America should come to Cuba and retrieve their relatives, if they wanted them in the United States so much. Many Cubans in the US attempted to do just that. They chartered boats to Cuba to pick up their relatives, though often coming back with Cubans unrelated to them. Marielle was the port of departure. This incident generated extensive anti-Cuban feelings among the Anglo-Americans in Miami, which then spread nationwide. Rather than staying a distrusted and reviled group, the Cuban community in Miami turned inward and through self-reflection used this incident to gain political-economic power in Florida and throughout the USA (Portes&Stepick, 1993, pp. 30-37).

The strategy of running Cuban-Americans for political office in Florida was effective

beyond the hopes of most Cubans. By the mid 1980s, a Cuban was mayor of Miami, and others held political offices in various municipalities in Miami-Dade County. There were now ten state legislators of Cuban descent in Florida. Cuban businesses flourished and grew beyond the confines of Miami. Some gained connections with national politicians who in turn provided Cuban-American corporations with national contracts. Historically anti-Castro, the Cuban community in Miami aligned itself with the United States' global war on Communism as the enclave of Miami established itself (Portes&Stepick, 1993, pp. 126-129).

There are extensive connections between northern New Jersey and Miami. While Miami contains the largest Cuban community in the United States, Hudson County is the other area in the US with a significant Cuban community. Many in New Jersey have relatives in Miami and throughout southern Florida. Older Latinos prefer moving to Florida for their retirement and to spend their final years in a climate similar to the Caribbean. These familial connections between New Jersey and Florida have also granted influence to a congressman who represented the Cubans in New Jersey: Robert Torricelli. He eventually rose to US Senator only to be forced to resign under scandals of corruption. Nevertheless, an ethnic divide between Cubans and Puerto Ricans has been established between the New York area and Miami for many Latinos.

This divide has played itself out in numerous ways. Cubans in Hudson County have spoken to me about the burial of Celia Cruz, the most famous woman of Salsa. She was born in Cuba but is buried in New York<sup>67</sup>. This has a symbolic effect. Some Cubans and Puerto Ricans suggest that the singer chose her burial site because she wished to be interred near the Puerto Rican people of the New York area who had supported and loved her so much throughout her

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<sup>67</sup> Cruz died in 2003.

career. I suspect this to be the truth, in addition to the fact that her home in the United States was in New York, not in Miami. However, I've been told she is buried in New York because she was dark skinned and that the significantly white Miami Cuban community of the 1970s shunned her because of racism, unlike the Puerto Rican community. The New Yorkers did not care about her "race" and they embraced her. It really doesn't matter if this conjecture is true or not; what matters is that some people believe it to be true. The divide plays itself out in even more significant ways for Salsa and the Latin music industry.

Two Latinos have experienced more crossover success than any others. The first is Mexican-American Carlos Santana who has always performed primarily for a rock and roll audience. Highly influenced by blues music, Santana is a guitar player who rose to popularity as part of the Haight-Ashbury scene in San Francisco in the late 1960s. Santana incorporated Latin percussion into his music. According to the video, [Viva Santana](#), this was not Santana's original idea. Rather, it was the idea of his organ player and lead singer, Greg Rollie. It is revealing that the Latin Pop Explosion had one of its biggest hits with Santana's song "Maria, Maria." It wasn't unusual for Santana to have a hit at this time; he also had another one called "Smooth." Santana has been a rock star since the original Woodstock concert and has continuously made records since 1969. He has produced many hits. Nevertheless, the lyrics of "Maria, Maria," referencing Spanish Harlem and the sound of Santana's guitar in the neighborhood, were odd. Santana was not a musical icon in the working-class Puerto Rican community, the dominant Latin ethnicity of Spanish Harlem until the Mexican population began to grow (Sherman, 2006, pp.121-122). Instead, this reveals misconceptions in the music industry about Spanish Harlem and the Puerto Rican community in general.

However, my experience with Cuban musicians in New Jersey clearly taught me that

Santana was an icon to many Cuban-Americans. Bergenline Avenue is the main street running through several towns in Hudson County and has been known for its many Cuban businesses. Unfortunately, Bergenline Avenue would not hold the same national recognition as Spanish Harlem. While a pop song, “Maria Maria” whitewashed the Puerto Rican experience in Spanish Harlem, it created associations between music, performers, and communities that never really existed.

The other stellar crossover star is Gloria Estefan. Her group, the Miami Sound Machine, recorded a series of hits throughout the later part of the 1980s and early 1990s. Estefan is Cuban. It is rumored that her father had been a bodyguard for the former dictator, Batista, the very dictator whom Castro and Guevara overthrew. This is a contested notion that may or may not be true, but it has helped to portray Estefan as anti-Castro, which she herself has stated publicly. Based in Miami, the success of the group gave her producer/manager/husband, Emilio Estefan, significant influence in the Latin Music industry in the US<sup>68</sup>. This has made Estefan the target of rumor and accusation.

Quietly, the Latin music industry moved from New York City to Miami during the early 1990s. Symbolically, this was a movement from the control of Puerto Ricans to the control of Cubans. Willie Colón in recent years has become politically active. He ran for office as the representative for New York’s 17<sup>th</sup> Congressional District in 1993 and for Public Advocate of the City of New York in 2001. He did so after initially announcing his candidacy for Bronx Borough President earlier that spring. He has tried to disseminate information about the changes

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<sup>68</sup> It is not uncommon for producers and managers to gain industry influence when the artist with whom they are involved gains success. Santana’s manager had been the legendary rock and roll promoter Bill Graham and both Graham and Santana operated in a rock and roll context, not a Latin popular music context.

in the Latin music industry publicly, but he is rarely heard. Colón made statements via the Internet as the first Latin Grammy awards show was approaching in September 2000. The marginalization of Colón in the music business is the very issue at hand. Colón contends that the Cubans and Emilio Estefan control the music industry. The industry, apparently, is not interested in promoting Puerto Rican artists.

The original source for Willie Colón's assessment is difficult to isolate. His ideas spread via e-mail forums on the Internet and were among the original inspirations for my project. They have been attributed to a September 16, 2000 AP release (JAQO), but no such release exists. Colón's statements remain on the web dating to September 22, 2000 (Colón). In the postmodern age, information travels differently than it has in the past. By virtue of the e-mail lists, where group members receive and reply to various electronic messages centered around the theme of the group, Colón's words spread throughout the world of Salsa. In Colón's statement, he refers to Gloria and Emilio Estefan as the "Cuban-American Mafia." He criticizes the original Latin Grammy show for being held in Miami instead of New York City. He suggests that the music industry is redefining Salsa as nothing more than a variant of Cuban music. He also asserts that he and his fellow musicians who either traveled to Cuba or, in Colón's case, insulted the former military dictator of Chile, Generalissimo Pinochet, have been blackballed by the Latin music industry (Colón). Central to Colón's argument is that recently the music industry has tended to celebrate the Cuban-ness of Latin music and ignore the many contributions of Puerto Ricans. The veracity of this statement is questionable.

The reality is that one of the most powerful men in the Latin music industry is Ralph Mercado. Mercado is Puerto Rican and he works with Estefan. Mercado runs his own record label, which records Salsa: RMM Records. His biggest star is also Puerto Rican: Marc Anthony.

Another of his acts is also Puerto Rican: La India. However, Mercado too is the subject of rumor and accusation. He has been called the “star maker.” It has been suggested that if Mercado doesn’t want an act to be successful, it will not. Rumor has it that Mercado often dictates which musicians play on certain recordings. Supposedly, he uses a limited number of instrumentalists on all of his recordings. In turn, this contributes to the fact that many current salsa recordings sound alike. This is a description of a recording industry mogul, not an anti-Puerto Rican.

The success of two performers reveals another flaw in the anti-Puerto Rican accusation. While Marc Anthony may be regarded legitimately as a salsaero, the biggest star and driving force behind the Pop Explosion is Ricky Martin. Martin, a Puerto Rican, has been a recording artist since the early 1980s when he began working with the earliest of “boy bands,” Menudo. Jennifer Lopez also has achieved stellar success. While Lopez’s music has little to do with Salsa and is better described as Hip-Hop, her ethnicity cannot be denied and she herself is from working-class Puerto Rican neighborhoods of the Bronx. Thus, the three biggest stars of the Latin Pop Explosion—Anthony, Martin, and Lopez—are Puerto Rican.

Another factor may shape the perception of Emilio Estefan’s power and influence that has little to do with his actions. A feature of neoliberalism is the decrease in the number of independent media outlets that include a reduction in the number of actual record companies. Currently, there are only a few major recording labels, Sony, WEA, and BMG. These labels are part of larger multinational corporations. The Sony Corporation owns the CBS and Columbia brands. WEA is the Warner Brothers Corporation. BMG is General Electric. The labels are divided into subsidiaries that handle various genres of music; therefore, while RMM Records is Ralph Mercado Music, it is actually a division of Sony. Miami Sound Machine recorded on Columbia records and Emilio Estefan rose through the ranks of this label through the group’s

success. Columbia too is now a subsidiary of Sony. While Estefan may wield considerable influence at Sony, his overall power is likely to be overstated by those who claim he controls the Latin music industry. The subsidiaries may sign and promote whomever they choose. Nevertheless, the neoliberal business strategies of cross-marketing through the various media outlets owned by the larger corporation elevated Estefan into a position of influence over the entire industry.

Furthermore, Colón's accusation that Estefan dictates who gets a Latin Grammy is probably false. The Latin Grammy awards were established in 2000 in the wake of the Latin Pop Explosion. This award ceremony is dedicated to recognizing Latino artists. The Latin Grammys have been held five times in Los Angeles, once in Miami, and in 2006 they were held in New York City at Madison Square Garden. It is unlikely that Estefan will stand in the way of a successful Puerto Rican act receiving a Latin Grammy. More likely, Estefan is influenced by capital generation, and he promotes Grammys for those who have had the most success in a particular year.

There are also conceptions and representations of Latin musicians that have shifted significantly to Cubans. In the course of my research, many Anglo-Americans have asked me if I am writing about the Buena Vista Social Club. Obviously, I am not. I enjoy the music of the Buena Vista Social Club and I respect its success. However, they do not play Salsa. In fact, they do not play current Cuban music. They play a 1950s style of Cuban music. In a sense, the recordings represent nostalgia for pre-revolutionary Cuba. The success of this music has propelled the Buena Vista Social Club into the collective consciousness of the Euro-American world. Interestingly, many recordings by the individual artists were released during the handful of years that followed the initial release of the Buena Vista Social Club. Many of these

recordings were made on the RCA label in the 1950s and the company retained the rights to the recordings.

The discourse surrounding the Latin Pop Explosion presents a selective history of Latin Music in the United States. Much of this discourse seemed to desire a return to 1959. The aforementioned “Maria Maria” also made references to *West Side Story*, whereas Spanish Harlem and the Latino community have grown and diversified significantly since 1959. The Latin Pop Explosion ignored the local level performance of Salsa and represented the street through references to Spanish Harlem. Scholars have celebrated Spanish Harlem, but its influence can be overstated. With waves of migration out of Puerto Rico that by-pass New York and go straight to New Jersey, Spanish Harlem has become somewhat irrelevant to a Puerto Rican population born in New Jersey or born in Puerto Rico and enculturated in New Jersey. The New Jersey musicians certainly go to New York to perform, but these performances happen in the Bronx and Brooklyn far more often than in Spanish Harlem. For many of the musicians, the defining musical artists are not just the New York groups. They are the Puerto Rican groups.

The striking factor in the media discourse about the Latin Pop Explosion was what it omitted: Fania Records and the Puerto Rican artists such as El Gran Combo and Sonora Ponceña. One suggestion is that Colón is bitter about being excluded from the success of the Latin Pop Explosion. An important question is: Why were Willie Colón and Héctor Lavoe left out? Why was the experience of urban Puerto Ricans, the driving force behind the maintenance of the Latin Recording industry in the 1970s, omitted from the discourse of Latin Popular music<sup>69</sup>? Perhaps Colón and Lavoe were ignored because they were too “hard,” too urban, and too percussive

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<sup>69</sup> While in the last stages of completing my dissertation, a film about Lavoe has been released entitled “El Cantante” starring Marc Anthony as Lavoe and Jennifer Lopez as his love interest.

musically. Perhaps they had been too critical of the industry and of political events throughout their careers. They also had no current recordings to promote in the way that Santana did.

Complicating this is the fact that Cuban music has developed and continued since 1959. Timba has become the current rage in Cuba and Timba bands perform in New York City and in Hudson County. Cuban singers, such as Silvio Rodriguez, have developed a new form of a ballad genre called *Nuevo Tropical* and are well known throughout Latin America. This music is ignored by the American recording industry. I have been told that tourists (mostly Europeans) in Havana now seek out the Buena Vista Social Club style and that more bands are performing this music. The drive to the pre-Castro Cuban music appears strong.

Colón, Lavoe, Blades, and the Fania All-Stars have all performed in Havana and they have received death threats as a result from Cubans in Miami. While Colón had no new record to promote in 1999 or 2000, Ruben Blades did. Blades has also been politically active like Colón, having run for president of Panama, his country of birth. Ruben Blades was also excluded from the Latin Pop Explosion. If this is due to his fame as an actor, it strikes me as suspiciously political.

I am left wondering if Colón is not altogether wrong in his assessment. While it is absurd to make a general statement about the political leanings of an entire community of Cubans, the influence of the conservative anti-Castro Cubans is strong in the United States. The record companies are in Miami, but it is impossible to verify the ethnicity of the record executives simply by their last names. However, there are tendencies among non-Puerto Ricans to distance themselves from Puerto Ricans (Flores, 2001, pp.161-162).

And yet, perhaps this is simply a case of the industry seeking to present pan-Latino music. Among the Mexicans, Colombians, Peruvians, Dominicans, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans,

only so much space is available for each ethnicity. It may be easier for the Latino music industry to try and serve the Latin population as a collective group and not as individual markets. Nevertheless, as I stated at the beginning of this chapter, this strategy is not reflected in the record sales. For future generations, this strategy may be effective, but an enculturation process to the United States is still occurring for Latinos. Clearly, many Latinos are new to the United States and, consequently, their identification to their mother nation overrides an identity built upon a sense of general Latino-ness.

Regardless, Salsa has faded yet again from popularity. It has the appearance of being a structural phenomenon as the industry is simply ignoring it. Salsa certainly continues to thrive at the local level. It may be fashion—younger Puerto Ricans are making and consuming Reggaeton records far more than Salsa. Yet, many of these younger people still listen and dance to Salsa. In ethnic space, music becomes an identifier for each Latin group, but there is limited room to present all ethnicities. Although Puerto Ricans are the most prominent, Salsa has been incorporating multiple ethnic groups since its inception.

Salsa has faded from popularity before and returned, but it has never ceased to exist. It is simply not the main form of Latin popular music consumed in the US by Latinos today. There is every reason to suspect that Salsa will re-emerge again. Salsa has not lost its community support. It remains integrated into the lives of hundreds, if not thousands, of musicians and music lovers. Salsa is not dead. It's only resting.

## **Chapter 11**

### **Conclusion**

From an anthropological perspective, “popular culture” is often a misnomer as it can be hard, if not impossible, to distinguish it from “culture.” My goal has been to find ways to help move the concept of popular culture from the realm of cultural studies into anthropological consideration by demonstrating how there is no real distinction between popular culture and culture. In doing so, I have tried to consider Salsa in its localized setting integrated with local political-economic practices and the daily lives of its producers. My goal was to ground music in the reality from which it comes. In the process, perhaps I have demystified the production of music and the lives of the performers. My main premise throughout the research has been “music is work.” “Work” is not popular culture; it is just culture.

Salsa itself is integrated into the lives of the local performers and consumers in a multitude of ways. It is a source of work and prestige, a means to create bonds between men, and a field for acting out gender roles in a potentially healthy way. Salsa is a signifier of identity and a standard bearer for a shared experience of life. It is an artistic expression ready to go against the grain of a larger political-economic force generating popular culture for a mass audience while simultaneously being a training ground and innovator for the same political-economic force. Salsa is more than simply music and dance.

Popular culture, nevertheless, has often been embedded in debates of high vs. low culture. This distinction is not one embraced by anthropology because it implies a value difference between the two. Is Brahms more valuable than Willie Colón? There is a century between the lives of these two men, so the question in and of itself is disconcerting. If the audience for Brahms is more likely upper and middle class while the audience for Willie Colón

is more likely middle and working class, does high culture mean that culture for the upper class is better than culture for the working class? Left out of this questioning is a consideration of the relationship between upper, middle, and working class. If members of the upper class earn large amounts of capital through the production and sale of popular culture through the recording industry, is not “popular culture” part of the upper class?

Popular culture is nothing more than simply culture, but my inclination is also to consider musical popular culture as a form of expressive culture. It is an art form expressing the lives of its producers and consumers. It expresses emotional content related to the live experience of its audience: love, day-to-day struggles, and cultural and community specific experiences. It is also a vehicle to express cultural practices: gender relationships, forms of prestige, ethnic identity, and solidarity. All forms of art express these issues, but what makes music as popular culture unique is that it is an art form available across class lines and it is integrated into local economies. Music is the most democratic of art forms.

Theodor Adorno in his essay “On Popular Music” (1990, P. 302) simultaneously bemoaned and celebrated the democratization created by popular music. To Adorno, the simulacrum of the recorded work of music combined with the availability of mass media would, at its best, put the works of the great composers of the European classical tradition into the hands of the working class. At its worst, it would create a standardization of musical form, a repetitive redundancy. Adorno was concerned that popular music would create a passive listening to music. And there are ways in which his fears not only came true but also superseded his hope. Adorno underestimated the depth of the democratization of music created by popular culture.

I would suggest that the democratization of music through the invention of popular culture has had a profound effect for the producers and performers of music. Elite musical

educations are not required for the production of Salsa. The depth of musical knowledge we find with the performers of European classical music and American Jazz is not necessary for the production of popular culture, though depth of knowledge to the specific genre of popular culture is commonplace, if not required. Furthermore, Salsa and popular music in general do not require the investment of capital needed to make a film in order to be considered of quality or to generate capital. It does not need the institutional sanction that visual art or literature needs to be moderately successful. Music is an art form available to the working class to produce. Poetry most certainly is as well, but poetry is not integrated into local economies. It is exceedingly unlikely that one can achieve social mobility out of the working class through the production of poetry<sup>70</sup>.

Hoggart in The Uses of Literacy (1990 Pp. 32-33) suggested that working class culture remains unseen, but popular music in the decades since has shown this to not necessarily be the case. At a different point in history, Hoggart is correct. However mass media and growth of popular culture has brought working class culture out into the open. Salsa, like Hip-Hop, Country, and several forms of Rock and Roll, brings working class culture to a mass audience. The democratization of music is not just a process of making the consumption of a variety of music available across class lines; it is also the process of making musical voice available across class lines. Therefore the unseen working-class culture now stands toe to toe with the visible upper-class culture and in many ways the musical practices of the working class overshadow that of the upper class.

There have been legitimate musical concerns around this democratization. Both Adorno

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<sup>70</sup> I think an argument can be made that considering some Hip-hop as poetry does demonstrate that poetry can provide social mobility. However, this poetry is fused with music and does not represent poetry on its own.

and Hoggart lamented aspects of popular music suggesting that popular music would become standardized and eventually thin and lacking of depth. While it is true that standardization—the similarities in musical form, chord progressions, rhythmic approaches, orchestration, and lyrical content—has become a feature of popular music<sup>71</sup>, this need not result in a lack of depth in its content. The ability of the performer to have some levels of virtuosity is valued to varying degrees in different genres of music. In Salsa, this virtuosity is often most valued in the percussion. But even more so, Salsa demands that it be played correctly. “Correctly” in this case is defined as playing with the right rhythmic inflection as well as melodic approach. The listener is not passive because the consumer of Salsa can hear when the music is performed incorrectly. The audience may not be able to say what is performed inaccurately, but they will sense that something is wrong. For Salsa, the working class has the developed and critical ear that Stuart Hall sought in The Popular Arts (1964 p. 15), but it is a developed ear that listens critically for stylistic accuracy.

In Subculture (1981 p.25), Hebdige considers the audience as a less passive consumer in considering the various ways punk rock styles created an economy and a collective identity. Salsa is also further integrated into the local economy. This speaks to two issues. The first is that the punk rock movement of the late 70s was a youth movement acting out a teenage rejection of the values and habits of an older generation. Punk rock becomes a form of resistance to perceived authority figures that strives to allow the youth to define themselves autonomously.

If Salsa is a movement, it is not one of youth. It is an ethnic movement. The Puerto

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71 It is worth pointing out that since the 1960s, producers of popular culture have often challenged this standardization by experimenting with song forms, harmonic arrangements, and instrumentation. One need only look at the seminal works Sgt Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band (1967) and Magical Mystery Tour (1967) by The Beatles for evidence of this.

Rican-ness and Latino-ness of Salsa are pronounced as a means to signify a third racial/ethnic category in the white/black dichotomy so prevalent in the United States and in international politics. Salsa and Puerto Ricans do not represent a bridge between white and black America, rather they represent another category in the pluralistic culture of the United States. And as I argued at the beginning of my study, as long as Salsa retains its working-class support, it will remain a vibrant and relevant art form. With the working-class support, Salsa is organically generated from the bottom up and becomes a kind of resistance to a dominant power hegemonically telling the audience what music they should consume. Which brings us to the second issue to consider: Raymond Williams' notion of the social definition of culture.

Williams in The Long Revolution (1965, pp. 57-60) suggests that the definition of culture is created through the social practices of the people within the culture. Furthermore, this social definition combines with the ideal and documentary definitions of culture to formulate issues of identity. In the field of multi-culturalism in the United States, "culture" has a tendency to be defined through the various forms of expressive culture our subcultures embrace. Music, of course, fits firmly within this lay definition of culture. But as the performance of music is a social event, it becomes a social practice. However, the cultural and social practices embedded into Salsa are more complex than those of the punk rock movement. The young people wearing Mohawk haircuts with safety pins in their lips and noses might abandon these practices as they get older and become mainstream citizens not raging against a machine. The Puerto Ricans are always Puerto Ricans, regardless of age and professional stature.

My study has been one to demonstrate the social practices embedded into Salsa. Using the Puerto Rican community of Newark as the main setting for my research, I document the working-class neighborhood in which the majority of my informants live, currently or until

relatively recently. This community is one that supports Salsa through producing and consuming it. They reproduce the “texts” that Williams refers to by performing the songs the audience wants to hear.

As I presented the three main bandleaders in my research, I acknowledged that there is a wide range of talent and skill between them. Any person can potentially be talented, not all have developed their skills. The democratization of popular music allows the talented but not fully skilled to perform and thrive within Salsa and other forms of popular music. A performer from a working-class background most certainly can acquire the skills and training we find with virtuosic musicians, but this acquisition may be more readily available for the artist of a middle-class background. It is very difficult to quantify, but I would also suggest that a working-class life could fuel the performer with a range of strong emotional experiences to give the performer a depth that he can express through his music. While this is most certainly true of a performer of any class standing, the economic difficulties of the working-class condition create a greater potentiality to experience emotional hardship and, therefore, depth of emotional experience to be articulated through music.

I show how the salseros were actually multi-ethnic. Salsa is by no means only produced by Puerto Ricans. The audience as well is not limited to Puerto Ricans. Salsa has always been a pan-Latino music, but this statement fails to acknowledge the many Anglo- and Afro-Americans who have performed and supported Salsa. Since the majority of Salsa’s performers and supporters are Puerto Rican, the music acquires its primary ethnic identification with this group. But Salsa is a source of work and this fact combined with the notion that music of any style is free to be consumed, performed, and enjoyed by anyone is what draws a variety of people to Salsa. However, Salsa’s role in the local economies is primarily entrenched in the Latino and

Puerto Rican communities. For the non-Latinos, Salsa is a personal avenue to the informal economy. For the Puerto Ricans within the neighborhood, it is part of the community's informal economy.

Men in performance dominate Salsa. This speaks to a key form of social relationship: gender relationships. Salsa performance can be a healthy demonstration of machismo. It is men demonstrating their skills and abilities in a highly visible setting, making performance analogous with what has often been conceived of as “men’s space”—the street, the politics, the working world. Women are not prohibited from playing Salsa, but a skilled woman musician performing Salsa is a rarity. The near total absence of women in performance, except in roles of singing or dancing, is also connected to various networks the musicians build up (see below). The roles that women can have in Salsa, aside from dancing and singing, are analogous with women’s traditional roles. As journalists and promoters of performances, the women are supporting the men. The irony here is that while these roles can be deconstructed to a traditional allegory, it is possible the income generated from promotion or journalism can be greater than that of performance. Also, to be sanctioned as a journalist requires education and training that exceeds that of many of the local level performers. Rather than considering this fact as contradictory to my assertion that is supported by the working-class, it demonstrates how Salsa can be a path of social mobility. The need to write about and to promote Salsa fuels the efforts of some to acquire the needed skill sets to be a journalist

As I engaged the network organization of Salsa, I emphasized how there will be at least seven, if not thirteen, other performers on stage with the musicians. A network form of organization is key in order to make sure that these seats are always occupied. The networks vary between those based on family-like relationships and those based more on professional

relationships.

To call a network “family-like” is to refer to the feelings of fictive kin that the men frequently create. Most salsa groups at the local level will have a core membership of fictive kin relationships. Men who start performing together at young ages--high school and the like--will often continue playing music with each other with a level of trust not always present for others. These fictive relationships allow rules to be bent and broken that otherwise would not be in strictly professional relationships. Since the core of the fictive networks tends to be established early in life, these networks will often exclude women. The separation or chaperoning of teenage men and women prevent the musical bonds to be established. The absence of women in the groups allows the men to avoid competing with one another for a band member’s attentions. For similar reasons of separation in their teen years, African-Americans are often excluded from these networks as well.

The professional networks are more contract based and there is little room for bending the rules. While professional networks are often the primary form of network at the higher levels of Salsa, they still do appear at the local level, especially for musicians who do not know one another personally. When dealing with professional networks certain behaviors are expected, such as being paid on time. A musician may enter a group through a professional network, but over time be transformed into a familial relationship. At this point, the rules can be bent.

Another form of social relationships embedded in Salsa is family relationships. My informants hold family in high regard and the most successful of my informants, Juan Pedro, cite his family as his main inspiration and motivation to work and to perform. The life stages of the performers also affect how they relate with their families and with women in general. A younger man may be excused for promiscuous behavior where as an older man may be questioned. The

men maintain ways of expressing their machismo through the tales they tell to each other.

What is key is seeing how the networks of performers also became networks of support among men. The notions of family were often reinforced through these networks while being a “man” was also promoted. There is no contradiction here; rather, it is an embracing of the role of responsible husband and father who provides for his family as part of the machismo ethos. Unknown women would still be viewed primarily as sexual objects, but known women, women in relationships with the men, were treated as more complete human beings.

Family also influences the social mobility of the salseros. As we see in Chapter Seven, the idea of family as a motivational force continues. It is the intersection of salsa as work and the importance of family that fuels this social mobility. Salsa generates income that facilitates the mobility. The family provides the motivation to go out and find the work in order to enhance the family’s income. Though thoroughly quantifying this process is elusive since the income is under reported due to its informal nature. However, music also supports the mobility in an indirect way. As many of the salseros have earned college degrees in music and are actively teaching music in schools, these men have been able to secure steady employment with predictable raises that provide extensive quality health insurance. Music was the reason why many of these men went to college. Having gone to college may be the strongest evidence of their socially mobility.

With Chapter Eight, I moved into a different aspect of Salsa, rehearsing the performance. While performance may reinforce Latino identity for the audience, the rehearsal is the opportunity to decide what is going to be promoted. A rehearsal is not a space for a critical discussion on the condition of Latinos, but the selection of material will often frame what aspects of Latino-ism are being reinforced. Choosing one set of material over another will affect how the audience conceives Salsa. The rehearsal is where the choice is made.

The rehearsals are also social events. Here the men can talk. They may compete for perfection in execution of the material. They will exchange information about their networks. Rehearsals are opportunities for the musicians to experiment in ways they cannot in front of an audience and they are opportunities for the men to play in a more relaxed environment. Rehearsing is integral to the ultimate goal of performing.

Performance is the main objective of any salsa band. Performance is where the income is generated, where the men are on display, and where the audience can engage the music and the musicians. The networks of the musicians are all focused upon securing performance opportunities. The social mobility cannot occur without the income of performance.

As stated, there is a variety of performance opportunities. Some of these are specifically used to enhance ethnic identity, such as the use of Salsa in political activities. Some opportunities are within ethnic-specific contexts, such as playing at a Quinceanera. While other opportunities are simply for leisure activities: parties and dances. The use of Salsa and the other forms of Latin popular music at these events clearly delineates these as Latino/Puerto Rican affairs.

Audience members are active participants. As dancers, they inspire the musicians. As customers, they affect what material the band plays. There is an organic relationship between the two groups, performers and audience, which creates the event in total. This is crucial to the maintenance of Salsa. As argued earlier, Salsa has not lost its working-class support. As long as this remains the case, Salsa will remain viable at the local level. Salsa has not lost its community.

Finally in Chapter Ten, I documented some of the misconceptions and contestations within the greater music industry. The music industry is motivated by a desire to generate the maximum amount of monetary return for its investment in a recording project. Theoretically, this

is accomplished by attracting the widest audience, and the industry has sought to promote pan-Latino music that does not clearly present itself as any specific ethnicity. However, this is not always what the people want. Working-class immigrant communities appear to desire ethnic specific music. As more generations emerge enculturated to the US, this may change. But many of the Latino communities have simply not been established long enough in the USA to fully embrace pan-Latinoism through expressive culture.

Conflict between record executives and recording artists is not limited to Latin music nor is it any sort of a new phenomenon. The issue is: who controls the industry? In the long run, it is neither truly the consumer nor the artist; instead, it is the recording executives who decide whom to promote. Some successful music will fall to the wayside and be forgotten. For instance, Ricky Martin has become irrelevant. By virtue of the wide marketplace that is the music industry, some music will not be successful regardless of the capital invested in promoting it. And some music, such as Salsa, will remain supported by the local community. Thus, it will remain relevant and potentially return to widespread commercial success. This has happened to Salsa before. It is likely to happen again.

## Glossary

**Bachata.** A music from the Dominican Republic, originally a rural music. It features guitars, not pianos, with the percussion. Bachata was popular in the NY-NJ area throughout the 1990s.

**BeBop.** A style of American Jazz that appeared in the 1940s. This music is closely associated with Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie.

**bolero.** A ballad

**Bomba.** A uniquely Puerto Rican folkloric musical style.

**Boogaloo** (Bugalou). A style of music developed primarily in the New York City area in the 1960s prior to the emergence of Salsa.

**bongos.** Small wooden drums similar to congas in their use of imitation and real animal skins and in how they are played with hands instead of sticks. Bongos almost always come as an attached pair of drums. Bongeros will play a repetitive musical pattern similar to the congas and timbales. However a bongero will often also play cowbell or guiro instead of the bongos. Bongos are frequently solo instruments.

**bongero.** One who plays bongos.

**break** (percussion break). A brief moment in a song where the music changes. Often this will be a rhythmic pattern played in unison. Sometimes only the percussion, or the percussion with the piano and bass, will play this pattern.

**Charanga.** A style of music from Puerto Rico and Cuba featuring violins.

**chart.** The written sheet music a musician reads.

**chorro.** Background or backup singers. To sing chorro is to sing in the accompanying chorus to the sonero. The chorus of a song is also referred to as a chorro.

**conjunto.** An instrumentation style featuring trumpets and trombones.

**clave.** The repeated rhythmic pattern upon which salsa rhythms are based. It is a two-bar pattern which is repeated throughout the song. There are two patterns, 2-3 and 3-2. In the first, there are two hits on beats 2 and 3 of the bar and then hits on the downbeat of beat 1, the upbeat of beat two and the downbeat of beat 4 of the following bar. 3-2 will reverse the bars. Sometimes the pattern will be played and sometimes not. However, the rhythm of all musical phrases needs to fall comfortably with the clave. The word “clave” translates to “key”; therefore, it is essential that the rhythmic phrases match the clave. Clave is the key to Salsa. Playing it wrongly is playing Salsa incorrectly. Understanding this important yet simple rhythmic phrase can take a lifetime. Claves are also specific wooden sticks that are used to play the clave pattern.

**congas.** Large wooden drums usually with imitation animal skins stretched along the top. Older congas and congas made to be “traditional” would use real animal skin. While many players get a variety of tones from one conga, congeros will often use two or three drums. Sometimes more will be used. Congas are played with hands. Congas generally provide consistent rhythmic patterns that are essential to the polyrhythm.

**congero.** One who plays congas.

**cowbell.** A metal instrument common in many styles of music. Cowbells are played with sticks.

**Cumbia.** A contemporary dance music from Colombia. The word is also used to describe some Mexican styles of music. The word is sometimes used in the Southern Cone to simply refer to Latin American pop or dance music. The Colombian style is frequently performed in NY and NJ by salsa bands or with Salsa and Meringue. Colombian-styled Cumbia is produced throughout Central America. It is also a specific dance.

**day job.** The job one works in addition to his/her musical activity. Often a musician’s main income will come from his day job.

**gig.** Common musician’s slang for a performance.

**gua gua co.** Specific Cuban musical rhythm

**guiro.** A hollowed gourd (or a plastic or metal replication) with ridges carved into it. Guiros are played with a special stick that is scraped over the ridges.

**Jibaro.** Refers to someone who dwells in the rural regions of Puerto Rico. The word poorly translates to “peasant.” Jibaro music refers to the musical styles of rural Puerto Rico.

**Mambo.** A word with many meanings. It refers to a style of music popular in the 40s and 50s mostly associated with artists like Tito Puente, although the style began earlier in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It also refers to a dance. In Salsa, a mambo may refer to a specific section of a song. This section will usually feature the horn section. Salsa at times has been called Mambo.

**Merengue.** A music from the Dominican Republic, which is a dance as well. Merengue will frequently be performed with Salsa and Cumbia. Some bands play primarily only two of the three styles in any combination.

**montuno.** The repetitive piano part that is both harmonic and an essential aspect of the rhythm section.

**Mozambique.** Specific Cuban musical rhythm.

**Pachanga.** A style similar to Charanga, often featuring a flutist.

**patch chords.** Wires that attached to either an instrument or a microphone to an amplification device.

**Plena.** A uniquely Puerto Rican folkloric musical style.

**Reggaeton.** A contemporary urban musical style.

**Rhumba.** A dance and a musical style. A rhumba can simply refer to a group of musicians getting together. It can be used to describe a small party.

**Salsa.** A unique music stemming from both Puerto Rican and Cuban musical traditions that came into existence during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

**salsero.** One who plays Salsa

**Son.** A Cuban musical style from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The word specifically refers to the rhythmic pattern.

**sonero.** A lead singer

**three-bar cue.** Salsa band terminology that academically may be better stated as a “2<sup>nd</sup> ending.” In an open-ended section of a composition where a musical phrase is repeated indefinitely, the bandleader will give a cue—alert the musicians—as to when to go on to the next musical section. Since the songs are built on the clave pattern, changing a phrase on the third bar will invert the clave pattern. When one open-ended musical section is supposed to switch to a section where the clave changes, a cue will be given to change mid phrase. It is customary to give a four bar or two bar cue. Since the clave pattern is going to change, an even numbered cue is confusing and impractical. A one bar cue is also impractical, hence a three bar cue.

**Timba**—A contemporary music from Cuba. Timba is similar to Salsa, though it varies somewhat in its rhythms. Timba in Cuba has largely developed synchronically with Salsa. There are few, if any, actual Cuban salsa bands. The Cuban bands tend to play Timba instead.

**timbales.** A set of two or more drums with cymbals and assorted percussion including various cowbells and wood blocks. Timbales are played with sticks. Timbale players will also play on the sides of their drums. The side hits and the cowbells are the main sources of the Timbale’s contribution to the polyrhythms created by the rhythm section. The timbales will often provide the percussive accents in the performance of any song.

**timbalista.** One who plays timbales.

**tres.** A nine-string guitar used in a variety of Puerto Rican music.

**woodblock.** Wooden block shaped to be sonorous; also played with sticks.

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