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FRANCES R. APARICIO

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Listening to Salsa

GENDER, LATIN POPULAR MUSIC, AND PUERTO RICAN CULTURES

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This chapter may be read as a postmodern rendering constituted by diverse and conflicting views about salsa. It is not music history, for I do not attempt to include a complete narrative of the development of Latin(o) popular music, nor do I incorporate all of its major musicians and interpreters. Rather, I select specific case studies that illustrate the ways in which salsa music constitutes a symbolic site for negotiating issues of national identity, class, and race. I discuss this music simultaneously as mass culture, as marker of national identity, and as tropicalized ethnic expression.

To avoid the most relativist (nihilist) forms of a postmodernist analysis, this chapter refuses to deny salsa's value as a historically oppositional expression within the larger tradition of Afro-Caribbean music. Moreover, the tensions that arise from the divergent social constructions ascribed to salsa are articulated. While postmodernist theories have contributed substantially to our understanding of popular music beyond fixed, static definitions bound by nation, I agree with other critics that "this approach often seems to depoliticize such studies by emphasizing only the fluidity of boundaries rather than the actual positions they represent and the actors who constitute them."[5] As an engaged Latina scholar, I am interested in identifying and denouncing the colonialist constructions of salsa music by Anglo mainstream discourse and its concomitant othering, a political position that possibly will prove unpopular among those readers who equate crossing cultural borders with celebrating an assumed equality.

My stance, however, does not aim to defend an already anachronic or inherent concept of "authenticity" but rather to unmask the material, economic motivations and the power differentials that undergird the discursive strategies by which intercultural desire is articulated. Most important, I hope to illuminate theories and approaches to popular culture currently in circulation and to rewrite them as they are newly informed by the sociocultural practices and the perspectives of the colonized, displaced, and dispossessed cultural community of U.S. Latino/as, a perspective that remains minimally acknowledged by mainstream scholarship on popular music.

The multiple epigraphs that open this chapter illustrate the highly conflictive definitions that salsa evokes among Latino musicians and singers. Salsa music does not exist for some; for others it is only an imitation of Cuban music; and still for others, like Willie Colón and Rubén Blades, salsa is a syncretic cultural expression central to Latina/o urban communities in the United States and across Latin America, simultaneously traveling beyond borders. This plurality of ideological sites and discursive locations will illustrate the value of this music as metaphor for national identity, difference, hybridity, and oppositionality.

CHAPTER FOUR

Situating Salsa

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Music, Race, and Class Conflict in Puerto Rico

In Puerto Rico and other Caribbean countries, such as Venezuela,[1] salsa music has emerged as a marker of race and class differences. The cocolo-rockero dichotomy based on musical taste permeated youth culture in Puerto Rico during the 1980s. *Cocolos*, an African-derived term,[2] refers to young black men who attend salsa concerts and who drive old Toyotas with the driver's seat lowered and the loudspeakers playing salsa. The aesthetics of the car and the music, partly analogous to the Chicano lowrider tradition in the Southwest, associates salsa with this social sector. The *rockero*, or rock and roller, is the white middle-and-upper class young Puerto Rican who prefers to listen to Santana, Jimi Hendrix, Queen, and U.S. rock. While there is no particular car model that characterizes rockeros—perhaps the yuppified BMW—this audience prevails at city beaches and attends rock concerts by U.S. groups.

An event emblematic of this social duality occurred on June 12, 1987, when two concerts—one by Ratt and Poison, a couple of commercial heavy metal groups from the United States, and the other a concert in memory of salsa singer Ismael Rivera, the "sonero mayor" who had passed away recently—were planned for the same evening. They took place, respectively, in the Hiram Bithorn Stadium and in the Roberto Clemente Coliseum, two adjacent structures that share a common parking lot yet whose very names embody the racial and cultural dualities of Puerto Rican colonial society (Hiram Bithorn was a white Puerto Rican baseball player, and Clemente was black). There were fears that conflict and violence between the two groups would emerge before the events, and police were assigned to patrol the area. A few conflicts arose, yet considering that fifteen thousand fans attended the salsa concert (although the rock fans were not as numerous as expected), the evening went quite smoothly. The cocolo concert was attended by a racially diverse audience, by old and young peo-

ple, by families, elders, and politicians; the rock concert was filled with youngsters dressed in the black leather, hard rock style, with long hair, many of them smoking dope.

I mention this demographic example to comment on the age-marked basis of rock audiences in Latin America and on the more diverse generational audience of salsa music in Puerto Rico. The fact that even the governor of Puerto Rico attended the concert in honor of Ismael, the same governor who organized the salsa concert in Seville, Spain, attests to the collective representativity of this music. The *San Juan Star* published a double article on the two concerts, with side-by-side pictures of two singers and two columns of text, one reviewing each event. The gap was reaffirmed in the headlines that read: "Some Like It Loud, Others Like It Lively," and the layout played with the opposition and the simultaneity of both kinds of music in relation to each other.[3] While the audience at the salsa concert booed and hissed at the mention of the next-door event, some rock fans were quoted as expressing interest in having attended the salsa event, suggesting that perhaps salsa music possesses much more acceptance and popularity in Puerto Rico than the dichotomy literally suggests.

Like all dichotomies, the cocolo-rockero one articulates a socioeconomic and racial division, yet it is also a social construct.[4] In other words, while it is true that many young men in Puerto Rico would not even dream of listening to or buying each other's music, there are those who enjoy both salsa and rock, who listen to both, who dance to both, and who even consume both. As a Puerto Rican teenager growing up in San Juan in the late 1960s and early 1970s, I attended high school dances that were almost always articulations of a double consciousness in their musical representation. Somehow we managed always to hire two bands, one that would play U.S. rock and roll and soft popular ballads (the Beatles, the Beach Boys, etc.) and the indispensable Latin music band that would perform salsa, merengue, and bolero classics. The bands would alternate shifts so that in the best of a colonized society we enjoyed nonstop live music. Quite significant, however, were the differing meanings and values of each culturally delineated musical repertoire. While U.S. rock and roll allowed us to differentiate ourselves generationally from our parents—I recall the many vigilant mothers who would sit at the front row tables as *chaperonas*—the Latin music constantly invited all in the audience to partake in the pleasures of familiar rhythms, melodies, and intimate romantic ballads to which our parents and grandparents had also sung and danced during their youth.

Like linguistic hybridity, these cultural practices cannot be explained exclusively as binary oppositions. Rather, it is essential to remember that

The *San Juan Star* published a double article on the salsa concert in honor of Ismael Rivera and the rock concert featuring Ratt and Poison, two heavy metal groups. Both concerts took place on Friday, June 12, 1987. Courtesy of the *San Juan Star.*

throughout an individual's lifetime, these musical choices are not fixed or stagnant. For instance, a very well known salsa interpreter in Puerto Rico, Tony Vega, was born in Philadelphia and grew up in a Jewish neighborhood. When he moved back to Puerto Rico, his favorite groups were Chicago and Santana. His first band performed "American" (U.S.) music, and as journalists interestingly commented, he is white, with green eyes and straight dark hair.[5] He has received Golden and Silver Record awards for his recordings, he performed at the Sevilla concert, and he is considered one of the most popular salseros in Puerto Rico today. However, one of Tony Vega's recent numbers, "Busca el ritmo,"[6] deploys this rockero-cocolo dichotomy to reaffirm the connection between Afro-Caribbean rhythms and the "competence" and "authenticity" of musicians and of the music in a song that reaffirms the African legacy of our cultural identity.

The song begins with a denunciation of many musicians' ignorance of the Afro-Caribbean repertoire, a lack of knowledge that, as it is implied, results from spending too much time listening to "ritmos extranjeros" [foreign rhythms], thus affecting the quality of salsa performances. The song's refrain posits an imperative both to musicians and their audience. Like an old Cuban song titled "Cambia el paso," Tony Vega exhorts his listeners

and fans to give up rock and roll and to "find the rhythm" of Latino music. A tongue-in-cheek mimicry of the penetration of Anglo musical values—as in disco music—is evident in the parodically mispronounced English and code switching at the end of the song. However, the fact that English constitutes part of the surface structure of the text also implies complicity and an ambiguous self-location on the part of the singing subject. To reject rock and roll as an icon of Anglo culture and of foreign intervention and to strategically essentialize Afro-Caribbean rhythms and protect their purity seems a naïve stance on the part of the composer or at best an outdated expression of nationalism.

It also elides the multilayered musical and structural influences, including that of rock, on the development of salsa, let alone the multicultural trajectories of its own interpreters, such as Tony Vega himself. Thus, the ideological values of the song cannot be located necessarily in the individual, personal subject locations, as the case of Tony Vega and his song demonstrate, but rather are interpreted as collective, symbolic cultural spaces in which tensions between the national (in this case, the colonized) and the foreign are articulated as the fear of losing locally produced musical traditions in favor of musical imports. The contradictory facts that Tony Vega, as a musician, was very much nurtured and influenced by U.S. and British rock groups and that, moreover, salsa music as a whole has integrated rock musical structures into its diverse repertoire attest to the symbolic and strategic value of this musical positioning. A strictly musical reading of "Busca el ritmo" would not convincingly explain this value, for it resides within the larger social framework of Puerto Rican urban youth culture as well as within the longer colonial history of Puerto Rico's contradictory resistance against anything Anglo.

There are, nevertheless, already molded expectations regarding who plays or listens to salsa and who doesn't, attitudes formed partly because of the historical origins of salsa in New York's barrios as well as because of the racial and class myths created around the "bohemian" world of Latin popular music. A *Claridad* article on Tony Vega begins by asking the reader to put aside expectations of who is a salsero, for in Vega the myth of the black, drug-addict, working-class musician is dismantled.[7] Indeed, younger performers like Tony Vega, Alex D'Castro, and Gilberto Santa Rosa exemplify the recent professionalizing trend of salsa musicians. In contrast to the generation of Ismael Rivera and Cheo Feliciano, historically significant Puerto Rican black musicians and cultural heroes yet well known for their lifetime struggles with drug abuse, this younger generation of salseros exemplifies a group that has studied music in professional settings (e.g., la Escuela Libre de Música) and that rejects the myth and image of the bohemian, drug-using musician. As Andy Montañez has stated, "That vision has changed. Musicians are now interested in studying. In salsa orchestras now even the percussionists know how to read music, and this has improved the quality, thus the field has broadened, and that is why we are being invited to perform not only in Puerto Rico, but in Seville."[8] This example points out how fluidly these social dualities are negotiated within daily cultural practices and for the individual musician as well as across generations.

More important, however, these contradictory instances illustrate the shifting value of salsa as a marker of class and race in Puerto Rico. What are the implications of this shift from salsa as a cultural vehicle of oral tradition to its performance based on written notations? Will it lead to a higher level of standardization, to a diminution of its complex polyrhythmic structures, to more fixed arrangements and performances? The selection of salsa music as representative of Puerto Rico in Spain signaled the growing acceptance of this style among the island's dominant and official sector, an attitude that may have been nurtured by this racial and class-based shift in its new interpreters. Today's salsa scene is iconized by, among others, Luis Miguel, "El Príncipe de la Salsa" [The Prince of Salsa], and Gilberto Santa Rosa, "El Caballero de la Salsa" [The Gentleman of Salsa]. These singers and their bourgeois epithets encapsulate a more recent salsa sound that is not as strident as the original New York style and whose arrangements, instrumentation, and lyrics lend it a texture of soft, romantic music; thus, it is informally known as salsa romántica. While salsa musicians are becoming professionalized (read "whitened"), the musical repertoire shifts toward the individual, romantic relationship, thus diminishing the impact of its collective and political value. It is no coincidence, then, that official institutions are allowing it to be inscribed within the space of Puerto Rican official culture.

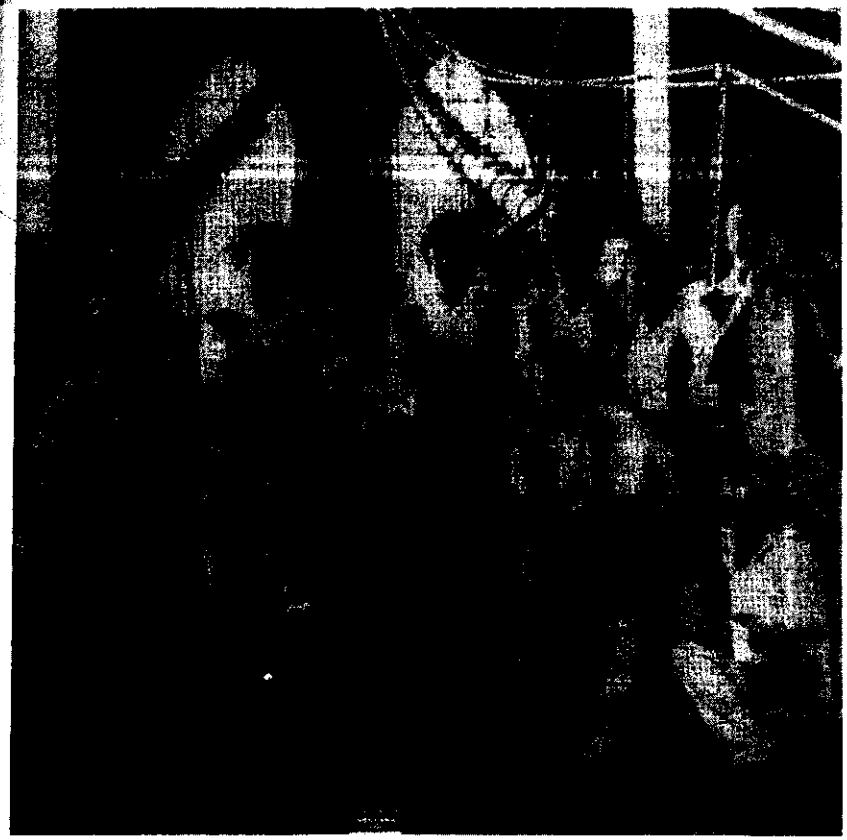
A simultaneous phenomenon, termed "validation through visibility,"[9] also helps to explain salsa's mainstreaming in Puerto Rico. Given the "globalization" of salsa music, its popularity and presence mostly mediated by the jazz tradition in Germany, Spain, Africa, and particularly Japan, it is much more acceptable now for the Puerto Rican dominant sector to validate this musical style as representative of the national culture.[10] In other words, once it acquires visibility—audibility, we may say—among European audiences, then it can be safely embraced locally. This reception, a posteriori, signals a colonialist structure of cultural circulation: the music is produced locally yet remains in the margins; then it is exported and mainstreamed by foreign audiences, to return with the endorsement of others. Like the transatlantic circulation of the tango and the analogous development of jazz, salsa music has been mainstreamed in Puerto Rico because of

its newly found international and westernized legitimacy, a sort of de-Africanization ascribed to by the gaze/ear of the dominant Other.

Some of that international visibility has been due to the popularity of salsa in Japan, a truly multicultural phenomenon represented by Orquesta de la Luz and its performances. Orquesta de la Luz, composed of Japanese musicians who do not speak Spanish but sing in Spanish and who discovered salsa through the music of Tito Puente and of another Japanese salsa band, has turned out to be a wonderful exponent of this musical tradition, of its singing styles and its performance rhythms. While their 1989 performance at the Madison Square Garden Salsa Festival guaranteed them a warm acceptance on the part of the New York Latina/o community, their most recent recording, "La aventura," has not met with as favorable a sales record as their first. Initially, many Puerto Ricans on the island and on the mainland did not react favorably to what was, to them, a Japanese appropriation of their musical tradition. To be sure, I still know many Puerto Ricans who boycott their CDs for nationalist reasons, notwithstanding the fact that musically Orquesta de la Luz has rendered a most impressive collection of salsa songs and repertoire. Its large size reproduces the big band sound of 1940s Latin music, and its main female singer and male instrumentalists elicit as much energy and rhythmic coordination as any Caribbean would be expected to, singing in a clearly enunciated Spanish that belies the visual markers of their Japanese identities. This is a group that, by its very presence, has destabilized the value of salsa music as nationalist marker and as product of cultural essentialism. The experience of watching Orquesta de la Luz perform, particularly in its concert appearance at the Madison Square Garden, was truly new for most Caribbeans, including myself. Their onstage performance obliges us to recognize our assumptions about expected submissive Asian gestures, manners, and behavior. That Orquesta de la Luz thrives on this double-edged destabilizing of national/cultural constructs, on the self-tropicalizing of Japanese musicians, is most salient in some of their arrangements and lyrics.

"Somos diferentes," from their album of the same title, constitutes a rewriting of a traditional Mexican bolero authored by Pablo Beltrán Ruiz.[11] The original lyrics, in which the voice addresses the irreconcilable differences that two individuals cannot bridge despite their love, are repeated by Orquesta de la Luz and indeed sung like a bolero, respecting the original text:

Ya me convencí que seguir los dos es imposible.
Qué le voy a hacer
si al buscar tu amor me equivoqué.
Debes de saber que ni tú ni yo nos comprendemos



Orquesta de la Luz's group photo included in the album cover for *Somos diferentes* (We are different), released by BMG Victor, Japan, in 1992. Photo by Yukio Yanagi of Drago Artistic Designs, Inc. Reproduced with permission of BMG Victor, Japan.

y este es el error que ahora con dolor
pagamos los dos.
Tenemos que olvidarnos de este amor
porque un amor así no puede ser.
Somos diferentes ya lo ves
esta verdad destroza el corazón.
Hoy te digo adiós
me alejo de ti serenamente.
Todo es por demás
no lo quiso Dios
somos diferentes.

[I am now convinced
it is impossible for you and me to continue.
What can I do
if I was mistaken to search for your love.

You must know that you and I did not understand
each other
and that was the mistake that we both
pay for with pain.
We must forget this love
because such a love cannot be.
We are different, as you can see,
this truth destroys the heart.
Today I say good-bye
I walk away from you serenely.
All is useless
it is not God's will,
we are different.]

Significantly, this lyrical, romantic song of despair, fatalism, and loss becomes, in the arrangements of Orquesta de la Luz, a pretext anticipating a broader definition of "difference" that allows for a double, allegorical reading: the cultural, racial, and national differences represented by the group itself. After the initial bolero section, the group adds a montuno rhythmical section; in other words, the bolero is transformed into a salsa song that articulates an analogous "difference" deployed to highlight issues of cultural difference and musical authenticity. This second part of the song, in which difference is marked musically by the change from slow to faster rhythms, replays difference as a social construct. The lyrics invoke a Latina/o audience that, despite rejection and criticism by others, still follows and embraces the Asian others' performance and musical production: "Aunque nos critiquen, somos diferentes, cantamos con amor / al público que nos quiere" [Despite criticism, we are different, we sing with love to those who love us].

By placing their own difference in the foreground, explicitly calling Latinas/os to question their own centrality as sole producers of Latin music, Orquesta de la Luz contributes to the (de)construction of popular music as a site for negotiating national identity. Their constant articulations of a potential cultural hybridity between the East and the West but most poignantly between Japan and the Caribbean allow listeners, mostly Caribbean-based, to begin to create new modes of conceptualizing popular music. These two key ideologemes or culturally charged phrases, "Arroz con Salsa" [Rice with Salsa] and "Son del Este" [Cuban Son from the East/they are from the East], suggest doubled multicultural readings on the convergence of East and West in cultural practices. If the mention of rice signals the East, it also simultaneously plays off the local Caribbean staple; "del Este" tries to orientalize the Cuban *son*, it doubly remits us to the geographical origins of the *son*, Santiago, the "Oriente" of Cuba, the eastern part of the island.[12]

For each musical genre (salsa, boleros, merengues, rancheras, etc.) there exists a constellation of undergirding myths; social, racial, and class values; and associations that have been historically produced by dominant sectors and social institutions. As an integral part of a long tradition of Afro-Caribbean rhythms and music, born in the Latino barrios of New York during the 1960s, salsa music has been simultaneously rejected and embraced by diverse social sectors in the United States and in Latin America.

Although salsa in the 1990s has become palatable and acceptable to the Latin American bourgeoisie, it was rejected as vulgar, too sensual, and trivial because of its black working-class origins, just like the plena in the past. The Left at times has pointed out the hegemonic and repressive aspects of many of its lyrics particularly in the context of gender and in the perpetuation of violence as a social message.[13] Salsa historian César Miguel Rondón has defined it as "a music whose values are disperse, irregular and contradictory, like its characters, like the reality that produces and nurtures it,"[14] thus explicating salsa's diverse values as the unidirectional effect of realism-based art. As popular culture, John Fiske would add, salsa is contradictory, positioned between hegemonic interests and expressions of resistance.[15]

Yet to listen to Ismael Rivera's song "Mi música" (My music) is to recognize the musicians' attempts to trascend partisan politics in order to express the human reality common to the marginalized black urban sectors. When Ismael sings these words by Tite Curet Alonso, one of Puerto Rico's most renowned salsa composers, and asks that his music not be identified as either right or left, but that it stands at the center of "a very lawful drum," we know we have to resist ideological categorizations. Here I want to propose approaching salsa music also as plural ideological sites. Given the sociohistorical development of this music, its antecedents in folklore and in black counterplantation culture, and its strong contestatory stance on classism and racism, its ideological value of resistance and oppositionality continues from its origins to the present. Even when Ismael Rivera refuses to pigeonhole his music as that of the political Right or Left, a whole history of oppositionality and resistance on the part of the black sector in the Caribbean surfaces through the ironic image of the "very *lawful* drum." Even when I recognize salsa as a conglomerate of ideologies, a result of the diverse individual subject positions assumed by composers, producers, and performers, its historical continuity as the sociocultural practice and production of a marginalized community consistently illustrates this oppositional positioning.

Precisely because of the politics of its liminality, salsa music has become a target for articulation and co-optation on the part of the industry and of dominant sectors. I have just discussed the whitening of salsa in Puerto Rico, a clear case of "articulation" as Richard Middleton defines it.[16] The

predominance of an individualizing salsa romántica in the 1990s accords new meanings to Felipe Luciano's words in the 1980s: "There's always a danger. Music is a double-edged sword. It is escapist, it is trendy, it is faddish . . . but it is also revolutionary, dynamic and progressive."[17] Our role as cultural critics, then, is to identify and trace the shifting ideological values of popular music. Assuming blanket statements about the contradictory nature of popular music, mostly because it is situated within the music industry and mass media, leads us to neutralize each music's sociocultural complexities and specificity, leaving no space for the importance of both musicians' and listeners' agency. The overdetermined use of "contradiction" in cultural studies has saturated how we read popular music or other texts in popular culture. As a result, a static binary has been created: hegemony equals mass media, and resistance can be located only in the subaltern musicians. While this power dynamic continues to be central to salsa music and other postcolonial contexts, particularly in the 1990s with the increasing monopoly of transnational corporations, it seems that cultural criticism has turned this binary into a fixed assumption.

By examining salsa music simultaneously as a site for negotiating national identity among Cubans and Puerto Ricans, where hegemony and resistance are dialectical forces, and where social practices like dancing allow individuals to produce relevant meanings to their own cultural displacement, I hope to go beyond the facile paradigm of "contradiction" in salsa. Ultimately, salsa's ideological plurality (not pluralism) and multiple meanings can be located in the multiple texts and discourses that the music itself produces and provokes and in its circulation as cultural text. Contradiction, then, is not inherent to the music itself but rather is located in the experience of listening, in audience response, and in the shifting values of its circulation. Like other forms of popular music, salsa has developed historically and has been subjected to social, class, race, and gender value transformations, particularly in the past ten years. Its ideological plurality needs to be examined in relation to its sociohistorical development and in terms of its geocultural location, for salsa's reception practices and, ultimately, its multiple meanings shift according to the individual musicians, its audience, its modes of production and dissemination, and its performative context.

Salsa as a Marker of National Identity

The Cuban musicologist Leonardo Acosta argues that to insist on identifying the genesis of salsa music is to erase this music as historical process. Given this caveat, I have chosen not to engage in a traditional genealogy of salsa, mainly because it tends to reify or essentialize it.[18] Through the discussions and voices of critics, writers, and musicians, salsa's contested genesis reveals itself as a site for deploying music as a marker of national identity. This systematic discursive strategy among Cubans and Puerto Ricans in particular has to be understood as another instance of the struggle for discourse and cultural authority that underlines the marginality of colonized subjects. Without attempting to do musical history or to reconstruct the chronological development of salsa in all of its diverse elements,[19] I will discuss here some of the most salient elements that particularize salsa as a sociomusical practice. Because of its multilocality (in the Caribbean, Latin America, the United States, and internationally) and because of both the heterogeneous and homogeneous uses for which the term salsa has been deployed, it is imperative to summarize what has already been presented on the development of this music.

Indirectly, salsa music is one of those unacknowledged results of the Cuban revolution. As a specific historical-cultural expression, salsa was first produced during the 1960s in the Latina/o (mostly Puerto Rican) barrios of New York City. Puerto Rican working-class musicians had been avid listeners and students of the Latin popular music mostly performed by Cuban and Puerto Rican musicians during the 1950s at the Club Palladium: among others, Arsenio Rodríguez's mambo, Machito's Cubop, Mario Bauzá's wrongly labeled Latin jazz, the Puerto Rican Tito Puente's timbales, and the voice of the other Tito, Tito Rodríguez. While Latin music in New York during that decade had been heavily Cuban, after 1959, with the success of the Cuban revolution and with Fidel Castro's taking of Havana, Latin music in New York "would never be the same."[20] The embargo on Cuba and the censorship of Cuban music in the United States led to some years of void and confusion among Latin musicians in New York, creating the need to mix musical forms. It is this syncretic tendency in Latin popular music that characterizes salsa's historical genesis.[21]

It is this clearly identified Cuban influence or pretext for the emergence of salsa music that has led most Cuban musicians and artists—and Puerto Ricans like Tito Puente—to deny the existence of salsa as a music independent of Cuban rhythms and genres. Mario Bauzá, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Pérez Prado, Jarrín, Tata Güines, and Olga Navarro, among others, define salsa as *only* an imitation of old Cuban music.[22] Moreover, Cuban musicologist Mayra Martínez denounces salsa music's commercialization as a capitalist strategy that benefits the U.S. musical industry given the isolation and commercial blockade imposed on Cuban musical products. In other words, salsa was the strategic international marketing of Cuban rhythms by an industry whose government purposefully obstructed the marketing of Cuban music internationally.[23]

Respectful of the Cuban perspective and sensitive to the harmful economic repercussions of U.S. embargos on the island, it is important, however, to indicate that these observations by Cubans about salsa tend to conflate this music exclusively with its original Cuban rhythms. By defining salsa as a marker of Cuban national identity and cultural production, these voices erase the participation of other Latin American national groups in the historical development of the music. In fact, if salsa music was born in New York in the early 1960s, then we must also credit a group of second-generation U.S. Puerto Rican musicians (Willie Colón, Héctor Lavoe, Ray Barretto, the Palmieri brothers) with some innovations and changes to the Cuban legacy as well as Venezuelan (Oscar De León), Colombian (Grupo Niche), Dominican (Johnny Pacheco), and Panamanian (Rubén Blades) musicians who have had a central impact on its development. According to Félix Padilla, the Puerto Rican musicians from the New York barrios not only continued and developed the legacy left by the Cuban musicians, they also renovated the old forms to express more adequately the reality of barrio life.[24] In fact, there was a recontextualization of Latin popular music from spectacle (that of the big band orchestras at the Palladium) to a music produced on the street corners of New York City's Latino barrios. The musicians as artistic subjects changed, as did the location of this music and its originally intended and ideal audience.

Salsa has been defined as syncretic music, "an amalgamation of Afro-Caribbean musical traditions centered around the Cuban son."[25] The *son*, described by Cuban writer Guillermo Cabrera Infante as the "phantom that traverses America," has constituted the musical style with most impact on U.S. Latin(o) music. The *son* has been traced to a secular musical dance form that originated in the rural areas of eastern Cuba (Oriente); it is characterized by a vocal melody independent from the percussive rhythm, and it was usually performed by a tres, a botija, and a marímbula. Cabrera Infante attributes the first *son* to a 1560 song by an African woman slave named Ma Teodora, whom he deems "the first female composer in America," although this original assumption by Alejo Carpentier has been refuted by musicologists.[26] Comparable to the African American blues, the *son* has served as the basic structure for future developments in Afro-Caribbean music and salsa. For Cabrera Infante, salsa orginated in the Cuban *son;* he traces the term *salsa* to "Echale salsita," an early *son* by Ignacio Piñeiro,[27] thus modifying Rondón's thesis of salsa's origins in New York to that of a "renaissance."[28] However, Cabrera Infante's reduction of salsa music to the Cuban *son* is corrected by Willie Colón, who asserts that "while the son has a specific structure, salsa is all freedom" [mientras el son tiene una estructura específica la salsa es todo libertad],[29] an observation that is more symbolic than descriptive of the particular structures of the *son* and of salsa music.

Cabrera Infante's disputable proposal in his article "Salsa for a Salad" defines salsa exclusively as the structural presence of the *son*, rendering invisible a myriad of other genres that constitute it: other traditional Afro-Cuban dance rhythms (the guaracha and the rumba), the African musical folklore of Puerto Rico (the bomba and the plena), and the harmonies, the improvised solos, and the metal instruments borrowed from African American jazz and blues. In contrast, Rondón has indicated the specific transformations that salsa musicians achieved vis-à-vis the music of the 1950s, which can be explained by the addition of the trombones to the salsa band, a change (already in place in Mon Rivera's music) systematized by Eddie Palmieri in his album *La Perfecta*. That particular salsa sound, a bitter, aggressive and hoarse texture changed Latin music from being "ostentatious to being war-like, aguerrida, there was no more pomp but violence; the thing, was definitely different."[30] In addition, Peter Manuel enumerates other stylistic distinctions, such as the use of the timbales, the "higher pitch range" of salsa vocal lines, the style of playing congas, and the elasticity of the clave rhythm.[31]

Unlike earlier Cuban music, the lyrics of salsa have documented the *visión de mundo* of the Latina/o (mostly Puerto Rican) working-class sector in New York City in the 1970s.[32] In the Caribbean, as César Miguel Rondón has documented, salsa also has functioned as the music of the urban poor, from Cuba to Puerto Rico to Cali and Cartagena, Colombia. That salsa originated in New York City is evidence that it was a social result of the gradual industrialization and migratory movements from rural areas to urban centers that have characterized many Latin American countries throughout the second half of the twentieth century.[33] In fact, the upsurge and boom of Latin music in the United States during the 1940s and 1950s would not have been possible without the configuration of a larger Latina/o audience and market made possible by the largest migratory wave among Puerto Ricans during World War II. The movement was organized by the U.S. and Puerto Rican governments to mitigate the economic stagnation of the island at the time and provide cheap labor for U.S. industries and factories.

Historically, then, salsa is the music of the immigrant and the urban working class. It is also the music produced mostly by black and mulatto musicians, and this racial definition ties it to the functions of the bomba and the plena in Puerto Rico as much as to the Afro-Cuban forms from which it also derives. As Rubén Blades has commented, "Salsa is urban folklore," for it constitutes itself as the oral tradition of life in the cities. Its

lyrics continue the traditional role of the Puerto Rican plena, the Cuban *son*, the Colombian *vallenato*, and the Mexican *corrido*—the role of narrating historical events, local situations, and stories from the point of view of the marginalized. Salsa songs of the 1970s and 1980s documented the social infrahistory of Latinas/os in the United States and of the poor urban sectors in the Caribbean and throughout Latin America. It is not surprising, then, to find a wide array of themes and issues in salsa, a diversity that helps ensure its vitality. While much commercialized salsa repertoire has been influenced by the romantic ballad since the 1980s, and as such it appeals to individual relationships, the most important salseros—El Gran Combo de Puerto Rico, Willie Colón, Rubén Blades, Celia Cruz, Ismael Rivera, Ismael Miranda, Cheo Feliciano, Ray Barretto, Héctor Lavoe—have consistently responded to historical events and social issues that affect Latina/o communities. Despite the ideological differences between, for example, Rubén Blades and Celia Cruz, both interpreters speak to the collective realities of Latinas/os in the United States and in Latin America. Their songs either address race, gender, and class conflicts or reaffirm cultural practices usually marginalized, such as santería and other African-based traditions (since religion and music converged as counterhegemonic expressions during the colonial past).[34]

In conjunction, the prevalent democratizing cultural role of salsa musicians regarding the marginalized and the urban poor continues the liberatory practices of the maroon societies during colonial slavery periods in the Caribbean. Thus, salsa's alternative values are reaffirmed as a music tied to the history of the counterplantation cultures, analogous to Jamaican reggae and African American jazz and from which the Puerto Rican bomba emerged. Salsa songs such as Eddie Palmieri's "La libertad: Lógico" (Liberty: Of course) in his album significantly entitled *Vámonos pa'l monte* (Let's go to the hinterland), Rubén Blades's and Willie Colón's "Cimarrón" (Maroon), and others reaffirm this historical continuity lucidly proposed by Angel Quintero Rivera.[35]

CHAPTER FIVE

Ideological Negotiations
Between Hegemony and Resistance

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Opposition in Form

Puerto Rican historian Angel Quintero Rivera has identified several structural elements of salsa music as symbolic sites of liberatory values and of freedom. First, the "free and significant combination of forms"[1] that salsa represents, as illustrated in Ruben Bladés's hit "Tiburón." This song is characterized by smooth transitions from a rumba form to harmonic elements of the seis, a Puerto Rican traditional country music form associated with a strong sense of community and friendship. Quintero Rivera believes that the diversity of the song's musical forms and the usage of the seis as a subtext for communal values are the elements that allow a strongly antiimperialist song such as this to have been a popular hit for so long in Puerto Rico. Second, the *descargas* (jamming sessions) typical in salsa performances, according to Quintero Rivera, may be constructed as an instance of freedom. Exemplified in the percussion "bursts" of "Tiburón," the *descarga* is followed by the trombone or brass section and the cuatro, also embracing the other instruments in this manifestation of virtuosity and creativity.[2] In literature, Víctor Hernández Cruz's poem "Descarga en cueros" articulates the transformative and liberating potential of a jamming session through the hyperbolic imagery of dancing: "at the bar people's drinks flew out they hands the vibrations knocked people to the floor / & the lights began to bust / & the floor to crack . . . the floor began to rock people fell off the balcony / t.p. was smiling / his face ready to rip / o.k. you win / hands in the air ready to fly / heads outside beyond the buildings."[3]

Cruz's poem plays with the blurred boundaries between dancing, jamming, and social disturbance or violence. The perceptions that many cultural outsiders have of this type of music—that it is primitive, loud, chaotic, and subversive—constitute historical repetitions of the same vesti-