

THE CAPITAL OF CARNIVAL:  
ALIBABÁ CARNIVAL MUSIC AND DANCE IN SANTO DOMINGO AS  
SOCIAL ENTERPRISE AND PERFORMANCE COMPLEX

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## ABSTRACT

Every February and August, carnival groups known as “Alibabá” parade in the streets of Santo Domingo, giving a spectacular performance with equal elements of sonic and visual display. Unlike other carnival groups in the capital, Alibabá groups perform unison dance routines while dressed in stylized Middle-Eastern inspired costumes that are accompanied by a unique marching rhythm on percussion and brass instruments. This rapid-fire rhythm is referred to as “el ritmo llamativo” (the attention-getting rhythm) because of the incessant wall of sound that draws people toward it. The popularity of Alibabá among its fans is not surprising, as Alibabá musicians have been deeply influenced by the varieties of musical and environmental sound that have permeated Santo Domingo over the past four decades. Alibabá has remained so vital to the neighborhood groups who continue to perform year in and year out that daily rehearsals now take place from August until February in advance of the parades and competitions. Moreover, its music has found its way into other realms outside of carnival activities—including at baseball games, political events, and birthday parties. Nonetheless, Alibabá has not gained significant attention outside of its immediate neighborhood surroundings and many in Santo Domingo are still relative strangers to the practice. This is true in spite of a desire on the part of Alibabá leaders to be accepted as executors of Dominican culture and a concerted effort by the Ministry of Culture in presenting Alibabá as a central genre of carnival music.

My dissertation is a social history of the performance of Alibabá music and dance during carnival in Santo Domingo’s working-class neighborhoods. At a theoretical level, my dissertation considers the social, political, and economic choices of everyday Dominicans living

in inner-city neighborhoods, in relation to intersecting local and regional policy and economic structures, and a larger world. I show that Alibabá is essential to these communities because it represents one of the few opportunities for some of the city's residents to learn to play music and to dance, and because it is capable of meaningful change in the lives of its performers and fans. This is because the social cohesion and sense of belonging generated by participating in Alibabá is an important way that these residents overcome economic shortages and youth delinquency and cope with the daily risk of accidents, health crises, and death. In doing so, I demonstrate that performance practices like Alibabá can remain vital to the neighborhood groups who continue to perform year in and year out even without the intervention of commercial artists, government policy makers, or folklorists at the national level.

At a theoretical level, my dissertation analyzes the production of perceptions of music and sound that determine the politics of everyday musical life. I ask, how do negative perceptions of life in inner-city neighborhoods in the local context of Santo Domingo impact the social life of its residents within the city's public realm in the twenty-first century? At a national level, how do social, political, and economic processes dictate what has historically been heard in Santo Domingo? What role could CD recordings, social media, and Alibabá groups in New York City play in reshaping these perceptions in the capital? The answers to these questions may reveal that Alibabá's story is the key to understanding how Dominicans within the urban environment find a voice within an ever increasing national and global dialogue.

As an application of my research, I recommend various strategies so that cultural organizations and government entities in Santo Domingo could adapt their cultural policies and inclusion strategies to better address the needs and goals of performers, organizers, and the audience. I demonstrate that encouraging cultural practices like Alibabá is one way to challenge

common negative perceptions of inner-city social identity by offering alternatives to both the realities of and anxieties about the urban environment.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |      |
|--|------|
| LIST OF FIGURES .....  | xi   |
| LIST OF TABLES.....  | xvii |
| CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION .....  | 1    |
| 1.1 Understanding Santo Domingo Carnival as a Field Site.....  | 4    |
| 1.2 Theorizing the Capital of Carnival: An Ethnomusicological Intervention .....   | 17   |
| 1.3 In Search of Alibabá: Seven Voyages to Santo Domingo and One Thousand and One Dominican<br>Nights.....   | 26   |
| 1.4 Chapter Outline .....  | 31   |
| CHAPTER 2. ALIBABÁ AS A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE: IMPERIO CLÁSICO REHEARSALS IN<br>EAST SANTO DOMINGO AND SOCIAL LIFE IN THE BARRIO.....  | 34   |
| 2.1 The Elements of Alibabá: Doing the Dance, Making the Music .....   | 37   |
| 2.2 Alibabá Rehearsal Space: Dance and Music in Bodies, Time, and Place.....   | 57   |
| 2.3 Perceptions of Alibabá Rehearsals in the Public Sphere: Discourses of Poverty and Crime<br>Concerning Young Males in Santo Domingo.....                                      | 78   |
| 2.4 Alibabá as a Social Enterprise.....  | 91   |
| CHAPTER 3. THE GENEALOGY OF THE RHYTHM AND INSTRUMENTATION OF ALIBABÁ<br>AND THE SOUNDSCAPE OF SANTO DOMINGO (1976-2001) .....   | 95   |
| 3.1 The Origins of the Alibabá Rhythm and Instrumentation: The Cocolo Dance Drama Tradition and<br>Fradique Lizardo’s Folkloric Projects in Santo Domingo .....                  | 98   |
| 3.2 The Modernization of the Alibabá Rhythm and Instrumentation (1980s-2001): The Impact of<br>Merengue as Nationalist Project and Commercial Endeavor .....                     | 113  |
| 3.3 A Genealogy of Sound for the First Generation of Alibabá Performers: Takeaways from Cuco<br>Valoy’s “La Cuca de Cuco” (1997) and Alex Boutique’s “Mambo Alibabá” (2001)..... | 141  |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| CHAPTER 4. REGULATING AND EVALUATING MUSICAL PERFORMANCE AT CARNIVAL IN SANTO DOMINGO: PERFORMING ALIBABÁ AT PARADES AND COMPETITIONS ..... | 148 |
| 4.1 Regulating Diversity: Carnival Parades in Santo Domingo and the Emergence of Alibabá .....  | 152 |
| 4.2 Evaluating Prize Allocation: Reaffirming Identity or Motivating Musical Performance in Santo Domingo’s Carnivals .....                  | 164 |
| 4.3 A Confluence of Regulatory and Evaluating Practices: Judging Music and Dance at Santo Domingo Competitions and Festivals .....          | 206 |
| 4.4 The Presence of Musical Performance at Carnivals in Santo Domingo .....   | 226 |
| Chapter 5. MEDIATING MAMBO: INCLUDING ALIBABÁ AS A TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY SPECTACLE .....   | 228 |
| 5.1 Overcoming Social Exclusion: Santo Domingo’s Social Geographies and Carnival Audience Politics .....                                    | 232 |
| 5.2 Advocating for Mambo: Developing Inclusion Strategies through Applied Ethnomusicology .....   | 239 |
| 5.3 Carnival Anthem Recordings on CD and Facebook: Implications for Inclusivity .....   | 261 |
| 5.4 The Capital of Carnival: Alibabá Music and Dance as a Social Enterprise and Performance Complex .....                                   | 276 |
| GLOSSARY .....  | 278 |
| WORKS CITED .....   | 283 |
| MEDIAGRAPHY .....   | 300 |
| LIST OF INTERVIEWS.....   | 304 |

## LIST OF FIGURES

|   |    |
|---|----|
| <b>Figure 1.1</b> Alibabá group “Los Faraones de Los Alcarrizos” (The Pharaohs of Los Alcarrizos) warming up in costume before the National District carnival parade: (a) the dance and (b) the music (photos taken at the San Francisco Ruins, National District, 26 February 2011) .....  | 2  |
| <b>Figure 1.2</b> Informative sheet with the calendar for carnestoladas and cimarrón carnival parades throughout the Dominican Republic in 2016, beginning on 21 February in Santiago and finishing 13 May in Salcedo (published by the National Directorate of Folklore of the Ministry of Culture) .....  | 8  |
| <b>Figure 1.3</b> Political map of the macroregions and regions of the Dominican Republic (North: North Cibao, South Cibao, Northeast Cibao, Northwest Cibao, Southwest: Valdesia, Enriquillo, El Valle, Southeast: Yuma, Higuamo, and Ozama or Metropolitan) (ONE 2012, 16) .....  | 11 |
| <b>Figure 1.4</b> Political map of urban zones in (a) Santo Domingo Province (shaded dark gray), with the urban zones of East Santo Domingo, West Santo Domingo, North Santo Domingo, and Los Alcarrizos, and municipal district of Pantoja outlined in bold (adapted from ONE 2015b, 510) and (b) the National District (shaded dark gray)—note that the entire municipality is comprised of urban zones (ONE 2015b, 30) ..... | 12 |
| <b>Figure 1.5</b> Political map of Santo Domingo urban zones, with names of the neighborhoods with active Alibabá or Fantasy-Alibabá groups (shaded black) in (a) the National District and (b) East Santo Domingo (adapted from Morillo Pérez 2013a, 36 and 2013b, 32) .....   | 16 |
| <b>Figure 1.6</b> Advertisement for the 2017 National District Carnival Parade, featuring images representing the malecón and King Califé, with the slogan “The Capital is Carnival” (published by the National District City Council [ADN]).....   | 21 |
| <b>Figure 2.1</b> All three blocks (boys, women, and men) from “Imperio Clásico” rehearsing the routine together. This photo is taken from the vantage point of the judges’ stand, with the dancers moving from left to right down the street and facing the stationary musicians (photo taken in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo, 20 February 2015).....  | 48 |
| <b>Figure 2.2</b> Male captain (center-right, facing camera) of “Imperio Clásico” signaling number five while rehearsing the women’s block (photo taken in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo, 23 February 2015) .....  | 49 |
| <b>Figure 2.3</b> A different male captain (center-right, back facing camera) of “Imperio Clásico,” signaling number one while rehearsing the men’s block and also dancing. The previous captain (left, with hat and backpack) is now participating as a dancer (photo taken in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo, 23 February 2015).....  | 49 |
| <b>Figure 2.4</b> Basic Alibabá mambo rhythmic groove as performed by snare drum, tambora, güira, and bass drum, performed by “Imperio Clásico” (full score) (♩ = flam; ♪ = buzz roll) .....  | 51 |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <b>Figure 2.5</b> Two examples of possible repique rhythms of the primero (1o) snare drums, while the segundos (2o), tambora, güira, and bass drum maintain the mambo groove performed by “Imperio Clásico.” In example (a), the primero drummer plays a different groove rhythm (full score); in example (b), the primero drummer articulates only certain on and off beats (full score) (♩ = flam; ♩ = buzz roll) .....  | 53 |
| <b>Figure 2.6</b> Several examples of cortes: (a) call-and-response corte – the corneta cues the band before playing the call-and-response corte between corneta and drums (full score), (b) call-and-response corte based on the song “El Hombre del Palo” (The Man with the stick) – the leader cues the band verbally before stating the corte call, the snare/bass drums respond in unison (reduced score), and (c) snare drum solo corte while the band rests (reduced score), performed by “Imperio Clásico” (full score) (♩ = flam; ♩ = buzz roll; ♩ = double-stroke open roll; ♩ = rim shot) ..... | 54 |
| <b>Figure 2.7</b> Musical director César Carvajal (center, back facing camera) signaling a number to the musicians during a rehearsal of the Alibabá group “Fantasía Tropical” (Tropical Fantasy) (photo taken in Villa Duarte, East Santo Domingo, 21 November 2014).....   | 56 |
| <b>Figure 2.8</b> Diagram of “Imperio Clásico’s” typical instrument line-up during the 2015 spring carnival season.....  | 57 |
| <b>Figure 2.9</b> Captain from “Dinastía Oriental” (Oriental Dynasty) (center) directs a musician’s rehearsal as other group captains and leaders from “Imperio Clásico” (right) assist (photo taken in Villa Faro, East Santo Domingo, 26 February 2015).....   | 63 |
| <b>Figure 2.10</b> The Alibabá group “El Imperio Veneciano y Sus Titanes” (The Venetian Empire and its Titans) from Villa Consuelo performing a music/dance interactive choreography, sliding left to right as the trombones glissando up and down during the 2010 National Carnival Parade (photo taken on George Washington Avenue, National District, 7 March 2010) .....   | 64 |
| <b>Figure 2.11</b> Drummers from (a) the Alibabá group “Imperio Clásico,” carrying their instruments attached at the waist by a strap and a typical (photo taken in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo, 20 February 2015) and (b) the Curaçao brassband “Melody Makers,” carrying his instrument with a shoulder harness (photo taken in Juan Barón Plaza, National District, 27 February 2015) .....  | 66 |
| <b>Figure 2.12</b> Performance stance of corneta player, demonstrating a high demand of physicality and endurance, from the group (a) “Los Reyes del Carnaval del Distrito” (Carnival Kings from the National District) (photo taken in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo, 10 August 2014) and (b) “Imperio Clásico” (photo taken in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo, 7 June 2015), plus examples of (c) bass drum and homemade mallet (left), corneta fina (center), and corneta aguda (right) (without boquillas) (photo taken in Villa Faro, Santo Domingo Este, 26 February 2015) .....                        | 67 |
| <b>Figure 2.13</b> Musicians from “Imperio Clásico” performing maintenance by ironing drumheads on the (a) snare drum (photo taken in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo, 23 June 2015) and (b) bass drum (photo taken in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo, 6 June 2015) .....   | 73 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <b>Figure 2.14</b> A cartoon depicting a young Dominican male being accosted by a police officer, illustrating how a common sentiment of their felt experience of unfair criminalization at the hands of the National Police and as a result of programs like Barrio Seguro—while the perceived real criminals (the clergy, politicians, etc.) are unhindered in the background (English translation provided below) (original artist unknown, posted by Twitter user Dr. Molecula, 1 April 2013).. | 87  |
| <b>Figure 3.1</b> Alibabá photo on display as a part of the Ministry of Culture’s 2010 “Carnaval Dominicano” that was on display in Independence Park, National District during the 2010 spring carnival season (photograph by Miguel Peralta)  | 99  |
| <b>Figure 3.2</b> Examples of (a) the guloyas costume and (b) Wild Indian costume (photos taken in San Pedro de Macorís, 22 July 2009)  | 101 |
| <b>Figure 3.3</b> Guloya marching band instruments (from left to right): fife, redoblante, bombo, and steel (photo taken in San Pedro de Macorís, 22 July 2009)   | 102 |
| <b>Figure 3.4</b> Fundamental guloya snare drum rhythm (composite of momis, masquerade, and Wild Indian rhythms) and two variations   | 103 |
| <b>Figure 3.5</b> Images from the “Dominican Folklore Spectacle” at the 1977 Miss Universe Pageant including (a) Spanish zapateo, (b) Taíno invocation, and (c) Afro-Dominican Wild Indian dance performed by the Folkloric Ballet (screenshots taken from YouTube video posted by user Andriago Lopes, 12 July 2013)   | 105 |
| <b>Figure 3.6</b> First generation Alibabá percussion ensemble, with bass drum (Luís Emilio Váldez Medina), snare drum (Domingo Velásquez Ramírez, aka Pichilo), and botella (unidentified woman) at the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Ali-Banda Festival in Santo Domingo (photo taken in Juan Barón Plaza, National District, 1 March 2013)   | 108 |
| <b>Figure 3.7</b> Typical syncopated rhythm performed on bottle   | 108 |
| <b>Figure 3.8</b> Difference in tambora performance techniques (instrument circled) between (a) an unidentified merengue conjunto who play for tourists in Columbus Park (photo taken in the Colonial Zone, National District, 21 June 2009) and (b) an Alibabá band performing with the group “El Nuevo Roba La Gallina del D.N.” (The New Robalagallina from the National District) in a local carnival parade (right) (photo taken in Villa Consuelo, National District, 9 August 2014)          | 122 |
| <b>Figure 3.9</b> Comparison of tambora rhythm patterns performed in (a) Cibao-style merengue variants, (b) maco-style merengue, and (c) the Alibabá rhythm   | 124 |
| <b>Figure 3.10</b> Images of Alibabá groups from Días’ video for “Baila en la Calle” including: (a) “los Doctores” (the Doctors), (b) “los Califas” (the Caliphs), and (c) “los Babi de Alibabá” (the Alibabá Babies) (screenshots taken from YouTube video posted by Robert Lizardo, 16 April 2011)  | 129 |
| <b>Figure 3.11</b> Corte based on the song “El Hombre del Palo” by Dolcey Gutiérrez (interpreted by Marcos Caminero), performed by “Imperio Clásico” (score reduction)  | 133 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>Figure 3.12</b> Corte based on the song “Este Se Encendió” by Diómedes Núñez and Grupo Mío, performed by “Imperio Clásico” (full score) (♩ = flam; ♪ = buzz roll) .....   | 134 |
| <b>Figure 3.13</b> The “backwards mangulina” repique for primero snare drum, performed by César Carvajal (excerpt, reduced score) (♩ = rim shot) .....   | 136 |
| <b>Figure 3.14</b> Batumbalé group from Cristo Rey, directed by Tony Estrella, featuring (a) female twirlers and (b) marching band performing in the 2010 National Carnival Parade (photos taken on George Washington Avenue, National District, 7 March 2010) .....   | 138 |
| <b>Figure 3.15</b> Corte based on the song “Baila en la Calle” by Luís Días (interpreted by Fernando Villalona) as performed by Los Reyes del Carnaval’s “Mambo Alibabá” (2001) (full score) (♩ = flam; ♪ = buzz roll) .....   | 139 |
| <b>Figure 3.16</b> Album cover art of Valoy’s Caliente: La Cuca de Cuco (1997).....  | 143 |
| <b>Figure 4.1</b> Example of the fantasy-Alibabá costume for Sandy Coco’s group from the 2015 National Parade, with a stylized version of a Venetian carnival eye mask (photo taken on George Washington Avenue, National District, 1 March 2015) .....  | 176 |
| <b>Figure 4.2</b> Two examples of Alibabá groups, (a) one from Los Farallones featuring a more traditional-Alibabá costume style (photo taken on España Avenue, East Santo Domingo, 24 February 2013) and (b) another from Villa Maria featuring a fantasy-Alibabá costume style (photo taken in Plaza España, National District, 26 February 2011). Although both feature carnival masks, note the difference between the costume overall (especially the abundance of feathers and sequins in the photo on the right)..... | 177 |
| <b>Figure 4.3</b> Carnival group “Califé” (#175) from Villa Francisca, accompanied by an Alibabá band performing at the 2010 National Parade (photo taken on George Washington Avenue, National District, 7 March 2010).....   | 184 |
| <b>Figure 4.4</b> 2015 East Santo Domingo carnival judges, from left to right: Vidal de la Cruz, José Ricardo Ventura, and Maritza Silverio (screenshot taken from YouTube video posted by user Ciudad Oriental, 17 February 2015).....  | 189 |
| <b>Figure 4.5</b> Route of the first two Años Dorados Parades of 2015: (a) in Los Mina (2 August) and (b) in the National District (9 August) (posted by Joselito Gil to the Facebook group “CARNAVAL ORIENTAL”) .....   | 198 |
| <b>Figure 4.6</b> Two Alibabá leaders participating in the Años Dorados, (a) Alberto “Beto” Fernández (photo taken on España Avenue, East Santo Domingo, 10 August 2014) and (b) Enrique “Momón” Scharbay (circled) with members of “Imperio Clásico” (photo taken by Joselito Gil in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo, posted by Joselito Gil to the Facebook group “CARNAVAL ORIENTAL”) .....  | 201 |
| <b>Figure 4.7</b> Example of crowd density at an Años Dorados outing, note how the narrow streets within the barrio constrict the flow of pedestrians (photos taken in in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo, 10 August 2014).....   | 205 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>Figure 4.8</b> Promotional materials for the 1st Festival of Alibandas and Percussion Ensembles, published by the National Directorate of Carnival, Ministry of Culture (and English translation) .....   | 211 |
| <b>Figure 4.9</b> The two obelisk monuments dressed as carnival characters in advance of the 2013 National Carnival Parade, with (a) the “female” obelisk dressed as a robalagallina (a female character) and (b) the “male” obelisk dressed as Califé (a male character) (photos taken on George Washington Avenue, National District, 2 March 2013).....   | 214 |
| <b>Figure 4.10</b> Numerous representatives of the winning groups from the Grand Carnival Gala 2010 riding atop the National Brewery’s Presidente Beer Float during the National Carnival Parade (photo taken on George Washington Avenue, National District, 7 March 2010) .....  | 219 |
| <b>Figure 4.11</b> Publicity for (a) the Urban Parade and (b) Alibaba Dance Competition on 18 October 2015 (designed by Joselito Gil, posted by Joselito Gil to the Facebook group “CARNAVAL ORIENTAL”) .....  | 224 |
| <b>Figure 5.1</b> “Biomega de Mambo” (Biomega Mambo) warming up before a crowd of Dominican youths at the 1st Festival of Alibabá Choreography (photo taken in the Plaza of Spain, National District, 28 February 2015).....   | 238 |
| <b>Figure 5.2</b> Images from the music video “Taboo” by Don Omar starting in Rio de Janeiro with (a) Copacabana Beach, followed by scenes shot in Santo Domingo with (b) a capoeira group on a beach, (c) Don Omar singing with an Alibabá band and dancer in the background, (d) kids playing soccer in the barrio, and (e) an Alibabá group parading in the street (screenshots taken from YouTube video posted by DonOmarVEVO, 12 April 2011)..... | 247 |
| <b>Figure 5.3</b> Luis Roberto “Chachón” Torres dressed in a fantasy-Alibabá costume at the awards ceremony for the 2012 National Carnival Parade (photo taken in the Eduardo Brito National Theater, National District, 9 March 2012) .....   | 249 |
| <b>Figure 5.4</b> Images from “Bailando” by Enrique Iglesias featuring (a) Chachón (circled) and (b) Chachón (left) with Roclan García (right) (both circled), filmed on Paris St. in the San Carlos barrio of the National District, Santo Domingo (screenshots taken from YouTube video posted by EnriqueIglesiasVEVO, 11 April 2014).....   | 250 |
| <b>Figure 5.5</b> Select members of Imperio Clásico accompanying political marches for various deputy candidates, including (a) Adriano Rojas, PRM (photo taken in San Luis, Santo Domingo Province, 3 July 2015), (b) Marlon Palaez, PRM/Frente Popular (photo taken in Villa Duarte, East Santo Domingo, 1 May 2016), and (c) Luis Alberto, PLD (photo taken in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo, 2 May 2016).....                                       | 252 |
| <b>Figure 5.6</b> Select members of the Alibabá bands “Imperio Clásico” and “Los Rebeldes de Mambo” playing for a friendly basketball competition between two Alibabá groups (photo taken in Villa Duarte, East Santo Domingo, 4 May 2016).....  | 254 |
| <b>Figure 5.7</b> Select groups participating in the 2015 Bronx Dominican Day Parade, including (a) the Alibabá group Unión Carnavalesca and Alibabá band “Mambo 809,” (b) a political group “Consejo de Campaña PRM” (PRM Campaign Council), and (c) dembow artist Mozart la Para (photo taken in the Bronx, New York, 26 July 2015) (photos taken in the Bronx, New York, 26 July 2015) .....  | 256 |

**Figure 5.8** Bebe Timbal (front left) leading a rehearsal of “Los Abusadores del Mambo” (The Strongmen of Mambo) (photo taken in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo, 26 November 2014)..... 265

**Figure 5.9** Images showing barrio setting and position of the artist vs. Alibabá band in the videos for (a) Black Jonas Point “El Vejigaso,” (b) El Chima en la Casa “Y Ahora,” Yulissa la Gata “El Pito,” (d) Bacanito “Tu No Va Bebe,” (e) Malcriao “Bimbolo,” and (f) El Chuape “Dame Banda” .... 268



## LIST OF TABLES

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <b>Table 2.1</b> Basic Alibabá marking time two-step pattern (a) in place and (b) with forward motion (with key) .....  | 39  |
| <b>Table 2.2</b> Alibabá choreography (see key in Table 2.1).....   | 41  |
| <b>Table 2.3</b> Mariposa choreography (see key in Table 2.1) .....   | 43  |
| <b>Table 2.4</b> Alisado choreography (see key in Table 2.1).....   | 45  |
| <b>Table 4.1</b> Alibabá groups from Santo Domingo participating in the National Carnival Parade (1985-1988) (Batista 2013, 44-66) .....  | 159 |
| <b>Table 4.2</b> Alibabá groups in 2015, including those representing the National District in local parades and those from around the country that registered for the National Parade from the National District (DN), Bayaguana (MP), West Santo Domingo (SDO), and East Santo Domingo (SDE) .....                                      | 163 |
| <b>Table 4.3</b> Prize Category genre-based definitions for the National District municipal parades, February 2015 (source unknown).....  | 175 |
| <b>Table 4.4</b> Document by East Santo Domingo City Council, Department of Culture and Folklore, describing the seven prize categories of the SDE Municipal Carnival Parade (provided by Gladys Olea, Head of Culture and Folklore).....   | 187 |
| <b>Table 4.5</b> Promotional posters advertising the locations of the Años Dorados outings, August 2015. Note the prominent focus on the traditional style of the diablo costume found in the capital 1970s-1990s (designed by Johnny Hernández and Joselito Gil, posted by Joselito Gil to the Facebook group “CARNAVAL ORIENTAL”) ..... | 199 |
| <b>Table 4.6</b> Rules for participating in the 1 <sup>st</sup> Alibabá Choreography Festival “Luis Roberto Torres (Chachón) 2015” (provided by the Carnival Directorate Office) .....  | 222 |
| <b>Table 5.1</b> Names and locations of Alibabá bands in Santo Domingo as of February 2017 .....  | 271 |

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Every February and August, carnival groups in Santo Domingo known as “Alibabá” parade in the street, giving a spectacular performance with equal elements of sonic and visual display. Unlike other carnival groups in the capital, Alibabá groups perform unison dance routines while dressed in stylized Middle Eastern-inspired costumes that are accompanied by a unique marching rhythm on percussion and brass instruments. This rapid-fire rhythm is referred to as “el ritmo llamativo” (the attention-getting rhythm) because of the incessant wall of sound that draws people toward it (see Figure 1.1). The popularity of Alibabá among its fans is not surprising, as Alibabá musicians have been deeply influenced by the varieties of musical and environmental sound that have permeated Santo Domingo over the past four decades. Alibabá has remained so vital to the neighborhood groups who continue to perform year in and year out that daily rehearsals now take place from August to February in advance of the spring and summer carnival parades and competitions. Moreover, its music has found its way into other realms outside of carnival activities—including baseball games, political events, and “hora loca” (crazy hour) festivities at birthday parties and weddings. Nonetheless, Alibabá has not gained significant attention outside of its immediate neighborhood surroundings and many in Santo Domingo are still relative strangers to the practice. This is true in spite of a desire on the part of Alibabá leaders to be accepted as executors of Dominican culture and a concerted effort by the Ministry of Culture to present Alibabá as a central genre of carnival music.

**Figure 1.1** Alibabá group “Los Faraones de Los Alcarrizos” (The Pharaohs of Los Alcarrizos) warming up in costume before the National District carnival parade: (a) the dance and (b) the music (photos taken at the San Francisco Ruins, National District, 26 February 2011)<sup>1</sup>



(a)



(b)

<sup>1</sup> All photos taken by author, unless otherwise specified.

This dissertation is a social history of the performance of Alibabá music and dance during carnival in the working-class neighborhoods of Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic. Using Alibabá music and dance as a case study, I examine the production of perceptions of music and sound that govern the politics of everyday musical life. I ask, how do negative perceptions of life in inner-city neighborhoods in the local context of Santo Domingo impact the social life of its residents within the city's public realm in the twenty-first century? At a national level, how do social, political, and economic processes inform what has historically been heard in Santo Domingo? On a larger scale, what role could CD recordings, social media, and Alibabá groups in New York City play in reshaping these perceptions in the capital? The answers to these questions reveal that Alibabá's story is essential to understanding how Dominicans within the urban environment find a voice within an ever increasing national and global dialogue.

At a theoretical level, my dissertation considers the interplay of music, public attitudes, and cultural policy in shaping Santo Domingo's sonic geography. In this case, I focus on the political and economic choices of everyday Dominicans living in inner-city neighborhoods, in relation to intersecting local and regional policy and economic structures, and a larger world. I further contend that encouraging cultural practices like Alibabá is one way to challenge common negative perceptions of inner-city social identity by offering alternatives to both the realities of and anxieties about the urban environment. In doing so, I demonstrate that performance practices like Alibabá can remain vital to the neighborhood groups who continue to perform year in and year out even without the intervention of commercial artists, government policy makers, or folklorists at the national level.

### *1.1 Understanding Santo Domingo Carnival as a Field Site*

With a modicum of relief, the heat of the afternoon abated as the sun finally passed its zenith on Sunday, 1 March 2015. It was the day of the National Carnival Parade in Santo Domingo, which was dedicated to the National District by the Dominican Ministry of Culture. As part of my research, I joined up with an Alibabá group from East Santo Domingo that, according to the program, was slated to process as number 191 out of 197. We passed the time with a mix of waiting around, goofing off, and inching towards our positions at the end of the line of themed *comparsas* (carnival groups). Finally, we squeezed through the first checkpoint single file to enter the carnival parade route at the intersection of Máximo Gómez and George Washington Avenue (the latter which snakes along the capital's *malecón* sea wall). As we made it about half way down, the street opened up to this year's group-to-beat called "Imperio de los Cuatro Elementos" (Empire of the Four Elements). I was awestruck as I strolled past the massive group, which featured four separate groups each dressed in costumes representing one of the four elements—earth, water, air, and fire. For a moment, I was drawn to what I saw, and I—like many others—was quickly converted from carnival participant to spectator. I stopped and began taking pictures of Romer Pérez Vargas atop his float as "El Señor de los Cielos" (Lord of the Skies). Suddenly, a drummer from my group noticed that I had fallen behind. My friend suddenly appeared behind me, and placed his hand on my back to guide me forward. "Don't take a picture here," he said, "there is too much *coro*."<sup>2</sup> I only later realized that he had come back just in time to scare off someone who had been trying to get into my backpack.

---

<sup>2</sup> In the Dominican Republic, the word "*coro*" (or "chorus") is often used innocuously to refer to groupies, fans, or lackeys of either a certain individual, or a group. In this case, my friend was using it in its negative sense, in reference to loiterers, pick-pocketers, and other opportunists that are also drawn to large crowds of people for more nefarious reasons.

A casual reader may interpret and imagine this carnival scene as something akin to the celebration of Mardi Gras in New Orleans, Louisiana or more adventurously as carnival parades and samba dancers in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. I shared the brief anecdote above to highlight two of the most central narratives that inform Alibabá as cultural expression. First and foremost, Alibabá is a carnival practice from Santo Domingo. Carnival celebrations here are the most diverse in the entire country in terms of the variety of groups that participate—a fact that residents in the capital are very proud of. Like many Dominican cities, one central character in Santo Domingo carnival celebrations is the *diablo cojuelo* (limping devil). For example, nearly half of the seventy-one groups that participated in the 2015 carnival parades in the National District were diablos. The remainder of the groups were more evenly distributed across other common themes, such as “fantasy,” “traditional,” “historical,” and “popular creativity.” Santo Domingo is also home to the category of “Alibabá,” which is found nowhere else. Second but equally important, as an urban cultural practice associated with the working-class neighborhoods of the capital, Alibabá performers have had to contend with an uptick in crime and insecurity over the past few decades. My experiences at the 2015 parade suggested to me that, as the principal genre of live-music performed at Santo Domingo carnival celebrations, Alibabá’s story could reveal as much about the capital city and its residents as it could reveal about its carnival practices.

Much of what is known about the history of Alibabá stems from the work of Dominican carnival scholar Dagoberto Tejeda (2008), a recent memoir (Batista 2013), informative material published by the Dominican Ministry of Culture, and oral testimonies of Alibabá performers. According to these sources, Alibabá emerged in the mid-1970s in several adjacent neighborhoods within the heart of the National District, including San Carlos, Villa Francisca,

Villa Maria, Villa Consuelo, Villa Juana, and Villas Agrícolas. The Alibabá are so named because of the internationally renowned story “Alibabá and the Forty Thieves,” with costumes originally meant to evoke Arab imagery—including beards, robes, and turbans or head scarves. In addition to the costume, performers from this era established a repertory of group choreography and adapted an Afro-Antillean marching folk rhythm from the neighboring region of San Pedro—performed on snare and bass drum.

Any discussion of Alibabá must take into account the complicated discourses of local, regional, and national identities and tastes that comprise “Santo Domingo carnival”—as contemporary carnival practices in the Dominican Republic can best be described as an amalgam of performance events that take place during a roughly four-month period, February-April and August. Moreover, these events feature a mix of performance contexts, including celebrations in the form of parades and competitions at the level of neighborhoods, municipalities, towns, and cities in addition to the National Carnival Parade held annually in Santo Domingo. Prior to the 1980s, popular carnival celebrations in Santo Domingo were primarily neighborhood affairs in February and August, which provided the motivation for the first Alibabá groups to emerge in the National District. More importantly, these early intra-neighborhood processions are in part responsible for the spread of Alibabá in the capital. Today, my Dominican colleagues and I estimate that there are around twenty Alibabá groups with 30-60 core members each (but upwards 100 or more participants for parades) that now operate in and around the entire city, including in the National District and Santo Domingo province.

Unique to the Dominican Republic, there are two general categories of carnival celebrations. These include the *carnevoladas* (those relating to the Catholic calendar—such as Shrove Tuesday or the Feast of the Assumption—and patriotic holidays that occur in the spring

and summer throughout the country) and the *cimarrón* (those relating to traditions of populations of African descent that occur during Holy Week after Mardi Gras and take place primarily in Santo Domingo and western border towns) (see Figure 1.2). In particular, the carnestoladas celebrations each emphasize a particular marquee holiday: Independence Day on 27 February in the spring and Restoration Day on 16 August in the summer.<sup>3</sup>

Spring carnival, also referred to as “February Carnival” or “Independence Day Carnival,” is comprised of carnival parades that take place on Sunday afternoons in almost every town. Spring carnival is celebrated around the country from February until April, with every city, town, or sector hosting its own celebration(s) in addition to the National Carnival Parade held in Santo Domingo (established in 1983). Many of the biggest cities host carnival parades every Sunday throughout February and, in the case on La Vega, on Independence Day itself.<sup>4</sup> Following this, many other spring carnivals take place in other smaller cities and resort towns in March and early April in order to invite the winning carnival groups from the National Parade to perform and compete again for spectators who may have been unable to attend the parade along the malecón.

---

<sup>3</sup> Dominican Independence Day on February 27 celebrates the country’s independence from Haiti, who occupied the country from 1822-1844. After ending the Haitian occupation, the Dominican Republic returned to the status of a colony of Spain, until being restored as an independent state on August 16, 1865. Prior to 1822, the celebration of carnival followed the Catholic calendar.

<sup>4</sup> On Independence Day, Santo Domingo hosts a Military Parade rather than a carnival parade.



**Figure 1.2** Informative sheet with the calendar for carnestoladas and cimarrón carnival parades throughout the Dominican Republic in 2016, beginning on 21 February in Santiago and finishing 13 May in Salcedo (published by the National Directorate of Folklore of the Ministry of Culture)

*Órgano de difusión de la cultura tradicional*

# Hoja Informativa **DINAFOLK**

Santo Domingo, República Dominicana | Febrero 2016  
Año 8 | Número 9

## Calendario de carnavales 2016

| Lugar                   | Fecha  | Lugar                    | Fecha   |
|-------------------------|--|--------------------------|---|
| Moca                    | Domingo 6 de marzo   | Santiago                 | Domingo 21 de febrero   |
| Bani                    | Domingo 10 de abril  | Puerto Plata             | Domingo 13 de marzo   |
| Mao                     | Miércoles 13 de abril  | Salcedo                  | Domingo 13 de marzo   |
| Bonao                   | Domingo 13 de marzo  | Samaná                   | Sábado 27 de febrero  |
| Cabral, Barahona        | Desde el Sábado de Gloria hasta el lunes después del Domingo de Resurrección (26 al 28 de marzo) | San Francisco de Macorís | Sábado 27 de febrero  |
| Constanza               | Sábado 27 de febrero   | Santo Domingo Oeste      | Sábado 27 de febrero  |
| Cotuí                   | Sábado 27 de febrero   | Santo Domingo Este       | Domingo 28 de febrero   |
| Dajabón                 | Domingo 3 de abril   | Santo Domingo Norte      | Domingo 13 de marzo   |
| Neiba                   | Domingo 13 de marzo  | Esperanza, Valverde      | Domingo 21 de febrero   |
| El Seibo                | Sábado 27 febrero  | Distrito Nacional        | Domingo 28 de febrero   |
| *Elías Piña             | Domingo 13 de marzo  | Punta Cana, Bávaro       | Sábado 12 de marzo  |
| La Vega                 | Sábado 27 de febrero   | Azua                     | Domingo 20 de marzo   |
| Santiago Rodríguez      | Viernes 11 de marzo  | Jimaní                   | Domingo 13 de marzo   |
| *San Juan de la Maguana | Domingo 28 de febrero  | *Guerra, Provincia       | Desde el Sábado de Gloria hasta el domingo de Resurrección (26-27 de marzo) |
| Nagua                   | Sábado 27 de febrero   | Santo Domingo            | Desfile Nacional de Carnaval Domingo 6 de marzo                             |

\*También tienen manifestaciones rituales de Semana Santa



### Desfile Nacional Carnaval

#### Muestra Nacional Infantil 2016




MINISTERIO DE CULTURA  
¡MARCHA A LA GRAN!

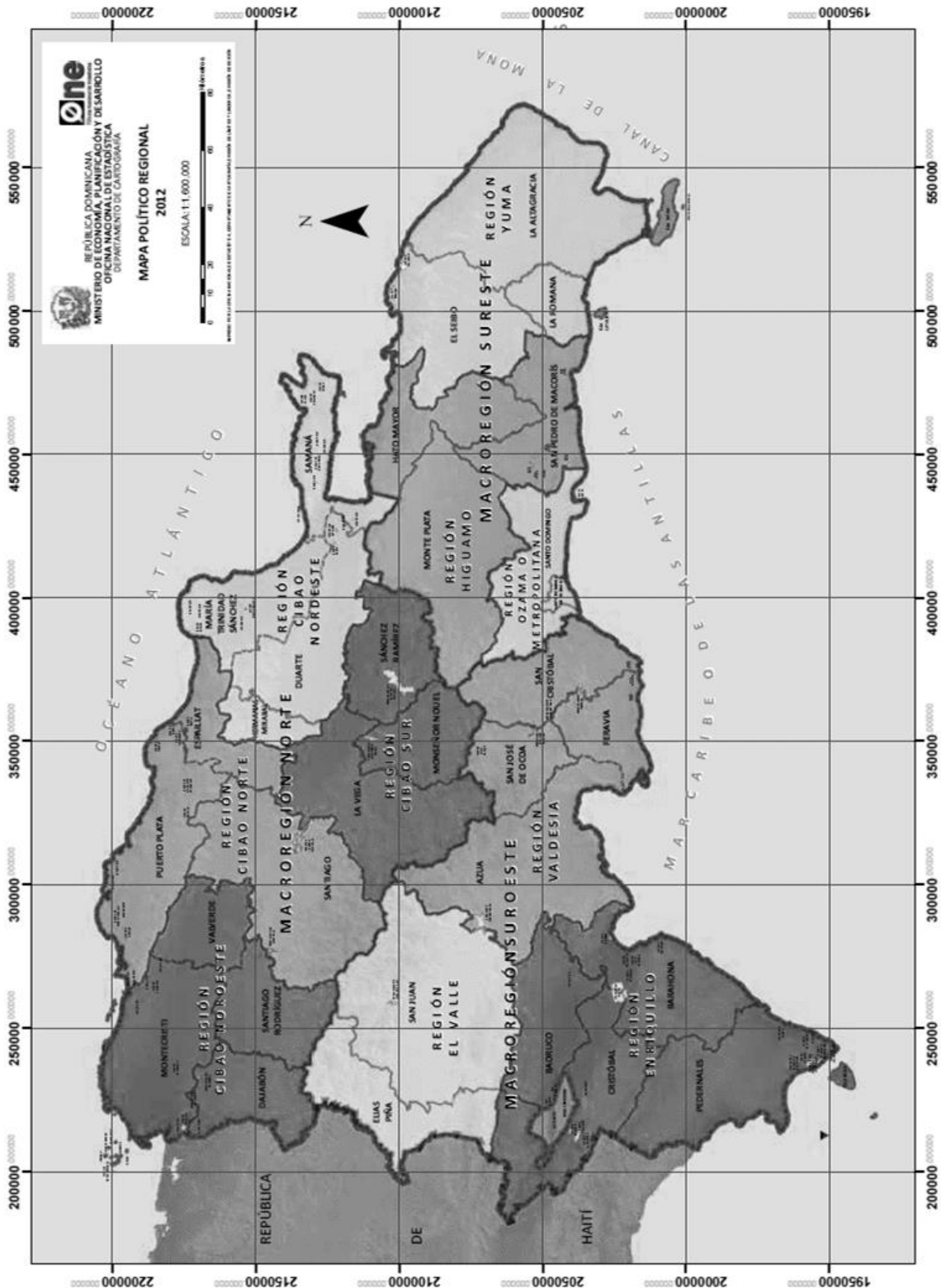


During the spring, Santo Domingo also hosts multiple, separate carnival celebrations in each of its municipalities. For instance, local carnival parades in the National District (DN) and East Santo Domingo (SDE) occur on the first three Sundays in February, with the final parade receiving the most amount of attention and energy. The North Santo Domingo (SDN) and West Santo Domingo (SDO) each organize one carnival parade, with the SDO carnival parade occurring on Independence Day and the SDN carnival parade occurring later in March. As the capital of the country, the National District also hosts a National Carnival Parade held on the first Sunday after Independence Day (ranging from February 28 to March 6). Following this, several other Santo Domingo neighborhoods hold their own smaller carnival celebrations in March in order to invite National Parade winners to perform, such as in Herrera (SDO), Manoguayabo (SDO), Villa Mella (SDN), and Cristo Rey (DN).

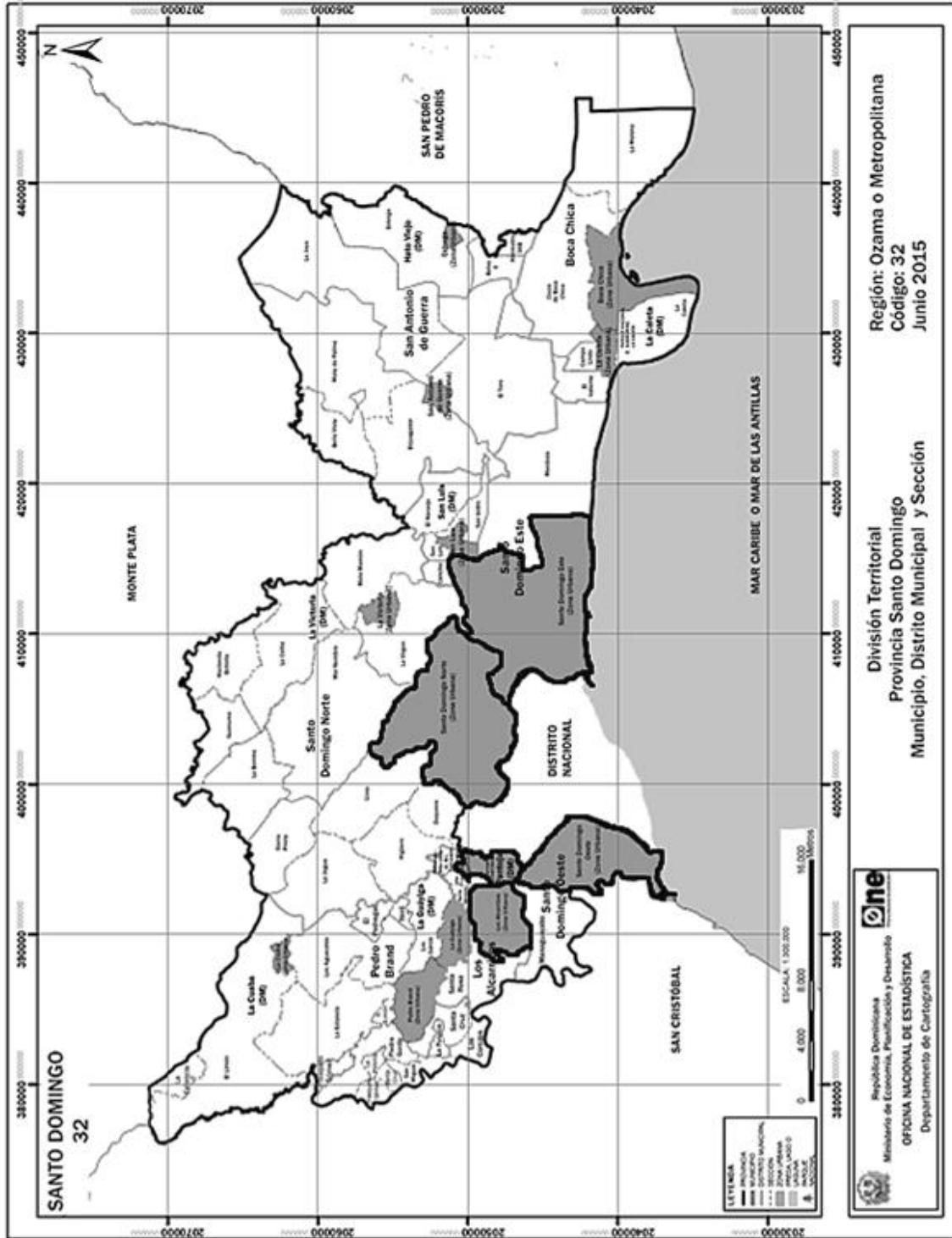
Conversely, summer carnival is primarily celebrated in the largest cities only, including Santo Domingo, La Vega, Santiago, and San Pedro de Macorís. Although summer carnival activities revolve around the celebration of Restoration Day, in Santo Domingo it also subsumes the celebration of the founding of the city on 4 August. During the summer, neighborhoods like Villa Consuelo (DN) and Villa Faro (SDE) host their own carnival parades, on top of the weekly parades celebrating “Los Años Dorados de los Diablos Cojuelos” (“The Golden Years of the Diablo Cojuelo”) throughout the urban zones of Santo Domingo. In this way, summer carnival activities highlight regional and local interpretations of carnival celebrations in support of tradition and folklore. As the carnestoladas are linked to public holidays celebrated nationally by many of Santo Domingo’s residents, February and August carnival activities bring together Dominicans of different classes, races, and backgrounds. This makes the spring and summer carnival seasons more suitable for examining the performance of music.

Outside of carnival, the story of Alibabá is also reflective of social changes in Santo Domingo's urban environment during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries as a result of increased poverty and crime. As a fairly small country sharing the island of Hispaniola, the Dominican Republic is divided into three macroregions (North, Southwest, and Southeast) and ten regions based on climate, topography, and cultural attributes (see Figure 1.3). These ten regions are further divided into thirty-one provinces and the National District, 153 municipalities, over one thousand sectors, and countless barrio neighborhoods. During the course of my research for this project and others between the years 2009 and 2016, I traveled between various parts of the country, to cities like Santiago and Dajabón in the North, and La Romana, San Pedro de Macorís, and Santo Domingo in the Southeast. During the majority of my specific research on Alibabá music and dance from 2014 to 2016, I focused primarily on the urban zones of the Ozama or Metropolitan Region in the Southeastern part of the country. This region is home to Santo Domingo de Guzmán, the largest city and capital of the Dominican Republic, and the province of Santo Domingo (see Figure 1.4).

**Figure 1.3** Political map of the macroregions and regions of the Dominican Republic (North: North Cibao, South Cibao, Northeast Cibao, Northwest Cibao, Southwest: Valdesia, Enriquillo, El Valle, Southeast: Yuma, Higuamo, and Ozama or Metropolitan) (ONE 2012, 16)

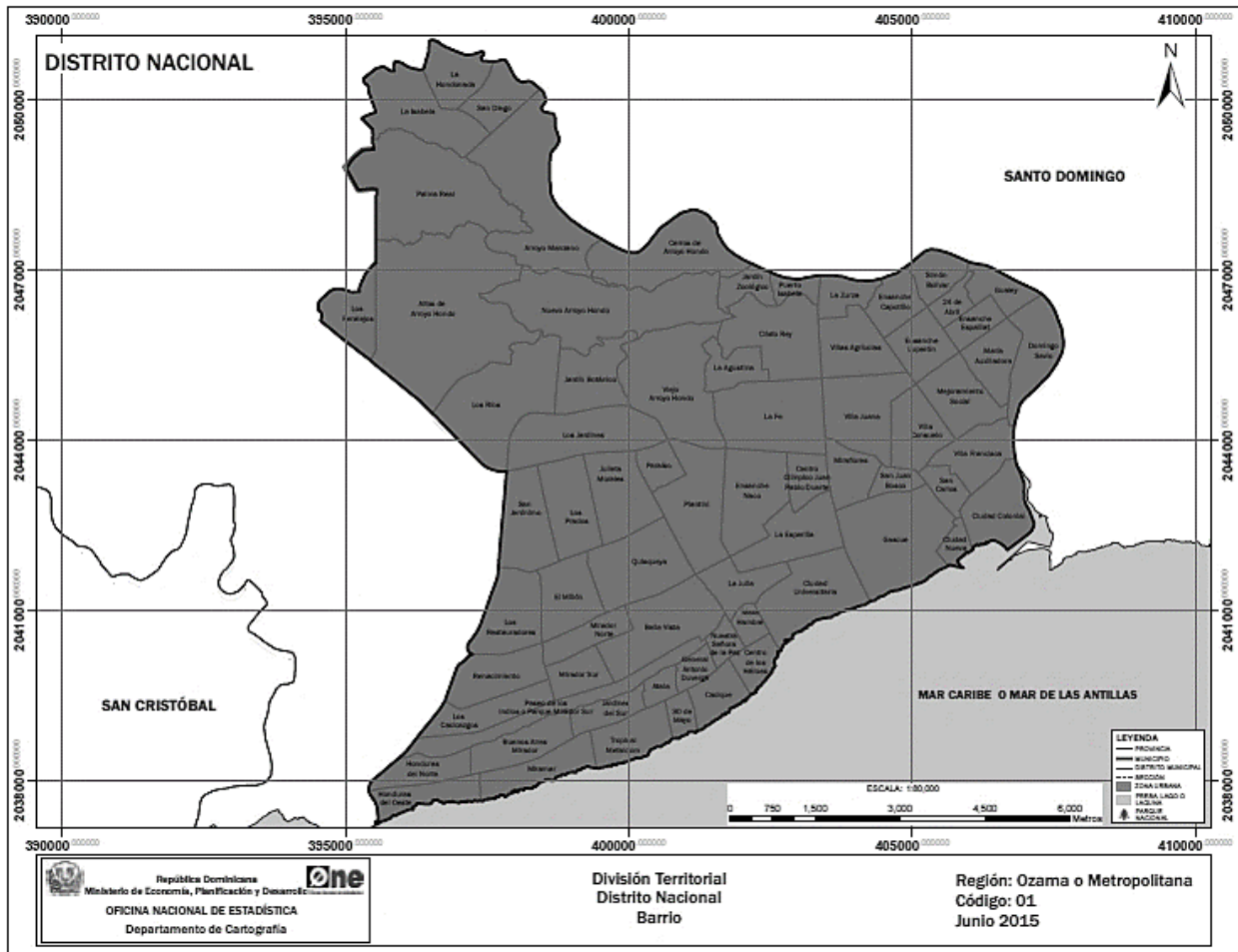


**Figure 1.4** Political map of urban zones in (a) Santo Domingo Province (shaded dark gray), with the urban zones of East Santo Domingo, West Santo Domingo, North Santo Domingo, and Los Alcarrazos, and municipal district of Pantoja outlined in bold (adapted from ONE 2015b, 510) and (b) the National District (shaded dark gray)—note that the entire municipality is comprised of urban zones (ONE 2015b, 30)



(a)

Figure 1.4 cont. (caption shown on previous page)



(b)

As defined by the Dominican Constitution of 1844 and redefined by President Rafael Trujillo in 1934, the Ozama or Metropolitan Region of Santo Domingo was originally comprised solely of the National District—the official seat of government and central authority of all other provinces. In 2001, Santo Domingo was split into two provinces, with a central National District and the new Santo Domingo Province (referred to together as “Greater Santo Domingo”). Since 2005, Santo Domingo Province has included seven municipalities—East Santo Domingo, West Santo Domingo, North Santo Domingo, Boca Chica, San Antonio de Guerra, Los Alcarrizos, and Pedro Brand (ONE 2012, 522). The current population of Santo Domingo Province is around 2

million inhabitants (521). The current National District is the only Dominican province with one municipality—the city of Santo Domingo de Guzmán—that hosts a population of nearly 1 million people (27).<sup>5</sup>

The National District and Santo Domingo Province are further divided into smaller neighborhoods referred to as *sectores* (sectors), *barrios*, and *sub-barrios*. Economically, the commercial center of the National District is referred to as the *polígono central* (central polygon). This area is geographically bounded within the four main thoroughfares in the city: John F. Kennedy Ave. on the north, Winston Churchill Ave. on the west, Máximo Gómez Ave. on the east, and 27 of February Ave. on the south. Using the *Atlas Nacional de Pobreza* (National Atlas of Poverty) (2013c) *Mapa de la Pobreza* (Map of Poverty) (2014) prepared by the Dominican Ministry of Economy, Planning, and Development (MEPyD) as a reference, greater economic prosperity in the National District is found among those neighborhoods in the western part of the city, near the most prestigious parks such as *Mirador Sur* and the Botanical Garden. These include neighborhoods like Arrondo Hoyo, La Julia, Bella Vista, and Naco (Morillo Pérez 2013a, 19).

Moving outside of the center and into the province, neighborhoods are also qualified by the government and residents as “*popular*” (poor or working-class) because of the number and density of households living in moderate to extreme poverty near the Ozama River in the eastern part of the National District, and radiating outwards into East Santo Domingo, North Santo Domingo, and West Santo Domingo (Morillo Pérez 2014a, 19 and 2014b, 31).<sup>6</sup> According to

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<sup>5</sup> For clarity, in the remainder of this dissertation I use the term “Greater Santo Domingo” to refer to the entire Ozama or Metropolitan Region, “Santo Domingo” to refer to the urban zones within the National District, East Santo Domingo, West Santo Domingo, North Santo Domingo, and Los Alcarrizos, and I use “the National District” to refer to Santo Domingo city. When referring to a specific area inside Santo Domingo or the National District, I use the name of the municipal district, sector, or *barrio*/sub-*barrio*.

<sup>6</sup> According to the *Mapa de la Pobreza*, one can measure “poverty” either using a country’s poverty line or poverty threshold (referring to monetary poverty), insufficient basic needs, and quality of life, or a multidimensional method

Erin B. Taylor, popular sectors and barrios are those which, along with their residents, have historically lacked legal status in terms of land ownership or housing titles or which were once squatter settlements (these initially formed in the 1960s as rural migrants poured into the city looking for work) (2009, 140). The majority of Alibabá groups are currently concentrated in several popular neighborhoods in the National District (San Carlos, Villa Francisca, Villa Consuelo, Villa Juana, Villas Agrícolas, Cristo Rey, and Guachupita) and East Santo Domingo (Los Mina, Villa Duarte, Villa Faro, Ensanche Isabelita, Tamarindo, Invivienda, and Los Frailes) (see Figure 1.5).<sup>7</sup> There are also two groups active in the popular barrios of North Santo Domingo (Sabana Perdida) and one each in West Santo Domingo (Herrera), Los Alcarrizos, and Pantoja. I spent the most time working with the Alibabá group “Imperio Clásico” (Classical Empire) located in the popular sector San Lorenzo de Los Negros de Mina, more affectionately known as Los Mina.

---

(that considers ten different social factors). For his study, Morillo Pérez determined poverty levels in the Dominican Republic using measurements of quality of life and insufficient basic needs (2014, 4-30). The reported Quality of Life Index for metropolitan areas like Santo Domingo (converted to a scale of 0-100) was: extreme poverty (0-71.8), moderate poverty (71.8-83.07), middle class (83.07-91.13) or upper class (91.13-100) (24). Based on this scale, the percentage of households in the National District living in poverty is 26.7%, with 4.7% living in extreme poverty. The percentage of households in the urban zones of Santo Domingo Province living in poverty is 38.5%, with 9.2% living in extreme poverty (65).

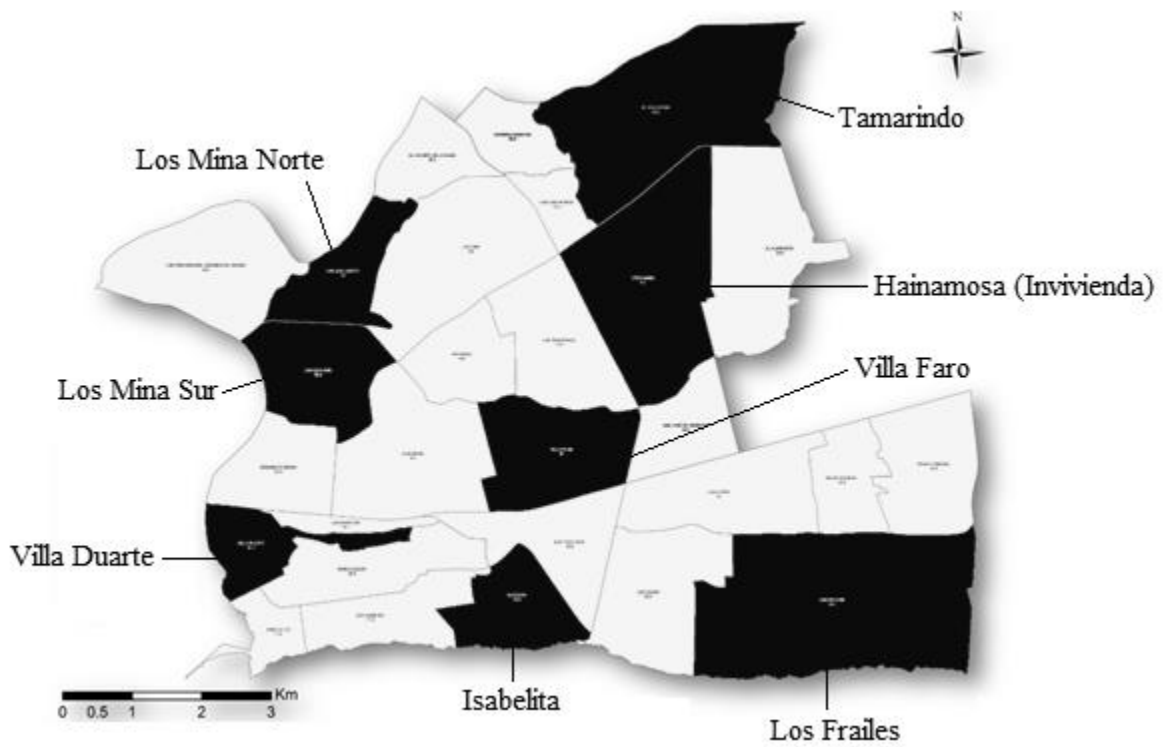
<sup>7</sup> The neighborhoods in which Alibabá groups are currently active seem to have at least two characteristics in common: (1) high population density (urban zones) and (2) around 20%-40% of households living in poverty (but typically less than 10% living extreme poverty) (Morillo Pérez 2013a, 19 and 2013b, 31). As will be discussed in later chapters, mobility also seems to be a factor in where new Alibabá groups have formed, either spreading through proximity (from an adjacent neighborhood) or internal migration (when a group leader or performer moves to a new neighborhood and establishes a group).



**Figure 1.5** Political map of Santo Domingo urban zones, with names of the neighborhoods with active Alibabá or Fantasy-Alibabá groups (shaded black) in (a) the National District and (b) East Santo Domingo (adapted from Morillo Pérez 2013a, 36 and 2013b, 32)



(a)



(b)

## *1.2 Theorizing the Capital of Carnival: An Ethnomusicological Intervention*

As a recently established genre, Alibabá is significant in the context of not only ethnomusicology, but also the broader scholarship on performance and sound studies, Dominican studies, and critical social theory in a Latin American and Caribbean context. Although in many ways Alibabá is a highly-localized practice, it also engages with scholarship of carnival practices, media narratives, and circulation/mobility in the West Indies and Antilles islands (e.g., Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, the Bahamas, Trinidad, Jamaica, and St. Kitts), along the Caribbean coast of the Americas (e.g., Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico), and among the Caribbean diaspora in the United States. In particular, scholars of New World spectacles (including carnival) have focused on the emergence of costumed dancers accompanied by percussion-dominated marching bands among marginalized populations within an urban setting. This includes groups like samba schools playing *samba enredo* (story samba) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (Raphael 1981 and 1990; Araujo 1992; Hill 1993; Vianna 1999; Moehn 2005) and steel bands playing calypsos in Port of Spain, Trinidad (Dudley 2004 and 2008; Green and Scher 2007; and Guilbault 2007).

While the focus within the cannon has obscured the fact that these internationally-celebrated genres tend to share the carnival soundscape with other less-studied genres, the presence of live music has nonetheless become synonymous with the New World carnival experience. In contrast, in Santo Domingo, some carnival groups are accompanied by pre-recorded music amplified by giant speakers, but more surprisingly, many groups are accompanied by no music at all; Alibabá groups are the sole performers of live music at carnival events in the capital. As my dissertation will show, as an outlier, Santo Domingo carnival

compels us rethink how we have conceptualized carnival music and draws into question the interplay between the social and economic goals of event organizers, participants, and spectators.

In some respects, the anomalous reputations of Santo Domingo and the Dominican Republic in general have been tied to the processes of forging *dominicanidad* (“Dominicanness,” or the characteristics of being Dominican)—a central trope in much of the literature on the Dominican Republic. As defined by Carlos Ulises Decena, *dominicanidad* is “a contested repertoire of meanings, practices, and institutional arrangements that...[are] associated with being Dominican” (2011, 70). Throughout its long history, scholars have looked at various aspects of contestation in defining what is and is not Dominican. First and foremost, scholars have looked at *dominicanidad* as a contestation of race, between racialized systems in the Dominican Republic and those in Spain (Moya Pons 1995), Haiti (Derby 1994), Puerto Rico (Duany 1998), and the United States (Hoffnung-Garskof 2008). Additionally, Dominican scholars like Silvio Torres-Saillant (1999) have analyzed *dominicanidad* as a contestation of class between the hereditary elite in Santo Domingo and new middle class Dominicans living in New York City. More recently, scholars like Decena (2011) have turned to *dominicanidad* as a contestation of gender and sexuality in the face of heteronormativity, machismo, and homophobia. No matter the approach one takes, Teresita Martínez-Vergne reminds us that Dominicanness is an “invention”—a discourse that is “predicated on the material context in which human beings [interact] and thus [straddles] the ideological plane...and the lived experience” (2005, xii). Somewhat radically, Martínez-Vergne suggests that Dominicanness is better conceived not just in terms of physical traits or characteristics, but as a power struggle between mutable systems of value in time and space (xvi)—values that I will show include inclusivity, diversity, and tradition.

What could Dominican carnival's musical practices, therefore, reveal in terms of this power struggle between shared and contested values that canonical studies of Dominican national musics (Pacini Hernández 1995; Austerlitz 1997) have not? A number of Dominican scholars have published on the topic of carnival in the Dominican Republic, focusing on the origin and history of carnival practices in different parts of the country, such as Santo Domingo (del Castillo et al. 1987; Tejeda Ortiz 2002), Santiago (Morel, n.d.; Khouri Zouain and López Cabral 2005), La Vega (Valdez 1995; Tejeda Ortiz 2010; Abreu, Estrella Guzmán, and Tejeda Ortiz 2011), Cotuí (Guerrero 2005), San Cristóbal (Güigni 2003) and the province of Sánchez Ramírez (Hernández and Bautista Orozco 2000). The majority of these studies focus on the importance of carnival folklore and Dominican identity—with a particular emphasis on various versions of the diablo costume that is found throughout the country. As a first step toward a more critical interpretation of Dominican carnival, Laura Derby examines the roles that public rituals like carnival and international fairs played in promoting Dictator Rafael Trujillo's special brand of Dominicanness. More recently, American ethnomusicologist Sydney Hutchinson (2012) provides an analysis of convergent choreographic values in the form of a limp that is characteristic to dancing styles in Santiago—including in merengue and among the *lechón* (pig devil) carnival character. Following in the footsteps of these efforts, the primary objective of my research is to question how certain values regarding the constitution of Dominicanness have impacted public performance, social and economic goals, and the performance of live music at carnival in Santo Domingo since the 1970s.

Within the field of Latin American sound studies in particular, there has also been an increasing interest in aurality, or what Ana María Ochoa calls an “intensification of the aural...[due to] the revalorization, resignification, and increased circulation of what historically

have been considered ‘traditional’ musics as well as the rise of new forms of popular music” (2012, 388). Thus far, scholars engaged in such sound studies have been concerned with analyzing the role that outside agents (e.g., folklorists, anthropologists, the music industry, etc.) have played in determining what constitutes noise and what is considered music within the public realm (see also Ochoa 2014). For instance, Ruth Hellier-Tinoco (2011) and Katherine Hagedorn (2001) suggest that the careful selection and incorporation of dance and music practices as part of a national public repertory is the domain of intellectuals or institutions rather than the performers themselves (Hellier-Tinoco 2011, 39-42; Hagedorn 2001, 310). While folklorists, anthropologists, and cultural organizations are often responsible for deciding who will be included, who will be excluded, and why, I argue that listening audiences and performers also participate in these processes by embracing, adapting, or ignoring these efforts. My work on Alibabá dance and music at Santo Domingo carnivals seeks to incorporate the vantage points of performers, outside cultural agents, and the audience in order to discuss how different contexts have affected individual and group meanings of “being Dominican” over time.

As the capital city of the Dominican Republic, Santo Domingo is host to several local carnivals within its districts and neighborhood in addition to the annual National Carnival Parade, which draws the participation of representative carnival groups from around the country. The connection between Santo Domingo and its carnivals is strong. The National District City Council’s (ADN) 2017 advertisement campaign touted its carnival parade as “the first in America” and offered “La Capital es Carnival” (the capital is carnival) as that year’s slogan (see Figure 1.6). Previously, the Union of Ibero-American Capital Cities (UCCI) declared Santo Domingo as the “Capital of Ibero-American Carnival” for the 2014-2015 carnival season in honor of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of carnival in the New World. Over the course of the

previous five centuries, residents of Santo Domingo (and the Dominican Republic overall) have had a complicated relationship with creating a sense of unified nationalism, especially with regard to the folklorization and incorporation of Afro-Dominican cultural elements into their national discourse and sentiment. This is most evident in one of Santo Domingo’s central carnival characters, *Califé*—the king of Dominican carnival—who is portrayed in blackface (see Hajek 2010). Despite this, carnival in Santo Domingo now represents a mosaic of Dominican carnival traditions, of which Alibabá is one.

**Figure 1.6** Advertisement for the 2017 National District Carnival Parade, featuring images representing the malecón and King Califé, with the slogan “The Capital is Carnival” (published by the National District City Council [ADN])



As a public performance practice, carnival spectacles like Alibabá combine social, theatrical, and commercial elements that create a visually and sonically striking display. From a critical and literary theory perspective, I interpret Alibabá’s position within Santo Domingo carnival celebrations as a site of contestation between the formation and evolution of the public

realm (or “spectacle”) and the constitution of a performance practice (“the carnivalesque”). According to Marxist and media theory interpretations following Guy Debord (1967), the “spectacle” represents the domination of social life by mediated images, consumer society, and official culture in the shaping of public discourse. At the same time, literary theorists influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin (1968, 1981) have interpreted these mass celebrations as “carnavalesque,” a performative act that, through linguistic action, subverts the world order through humor and chaos. The distinction I make between “spectacle” and “the carnivalesque” is similar to what ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino describes as the “Actual” and the “Possible” (2008). In his book *Music as Social Life*, Turino writes, “Most of us live firmly in the day-to-day, the Actual. We have our routines and act out of habit...[but] we also need the Possible—dreams, hopes, desires, ideals: these are the elements of life that add dynamism and challenge and that make us want to keep living” (17). In this sense, carnival enjoys a special status as a popular celebration that embodies the “Actual” in the form of governing institutions and guidelines that regulate the celebration. Carnival also embodies the “Possible” in the form of individual creativity and defiance of social norms by the people. As the capital, carnival practices in Santo Domingo presents an ideal opportunity to investigate the process of meaning-making within such competing system of values, such as when the theatrics of the carnivalesque come face to face with a spectacle that seeks to control spontaneity and creativity (Gotham and Krier 2008, 165; Boje 2001, 448).

In order to determine the social and economic goals of various actors involved in Alibabá, I examine how individuals engage via music with different value systems in Santo Domingo. From an economic perspective, an analysis of such systems of value revolves around two other kinds of capital: financial capital (money) and human capital (labor). In his critique of

the political economy of labor in capitalist societies, Karl Marx (1867) defines capital in general as the results of the accumulation of surplus-value stemming from the circulation of commodities. In a similar vein, economist Gary S. Becker (1964) more specifically describes human capital as the abilities of individuals to produce labor that has monetary value. These ideas were later expanded by sociologists, including Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1986) and political scientist Robert Putnam (2000), who were interested in the potential for other forms of capital and how they pertained to social mobility and civil engagement. In particular, Bourdieu focused on cultural capital (e.g., resources stemming from education and lifeways), social capital (e.g., resources from relationships and social networks), and symbolic capital (e.g., prestige and authority), and how they can be derived from economic capital (e.g., material resources and money).

In this dissertation, I focus specifically on Alibabá music and dance as a form of capital in order to identify and evaluate the social and economic goals within the value systems of various actors (namely performers, organizers, and the audience), their impact on music at carnival in Santo Domingo, and how they overlap. Based on her work on indigenous Canadian music and urban poverty in Vancouver, ethnomusicologist Klisala Harrison (2015) suggests a model that uses ethnographic research to evaluate musical choices within a society with multiple value systems that are sometimes in conflict with each other. According to Harrison, musical practices make good case studies for such an evaluation because they embody nested and intersecting systems of value between performers, organizers, and audience in terms of identity (e.g., class, race, gender, tradition, diversity, and popular culture) and scale (e.g., local, regional, national, and globalizing processes) (100-104).



In the case of Santo Domingo, there are several competing value systems that merit a brief discussion here, including official cultural policy, the desires of carnival performers, and the perceptions of the audience. In line with UNESCO, former Dominican Sub-Secretary of Culture Mateo Morrison discusses cultural policy in the Dominican Republic and defines it as “the conjunction of operations, principles, practices, and procedures of administrative and budgetary management that serve as the State’s base of action” (2009, 35).<sup>8</sup> Since 2000, the National Culture System in the Dominican Republic, including its programs and projects, has been directed by the Secretary of State for Culture, renamed the Ministry of Culture (MINC) in 2010, and its subsidiary offices. As a government entity, MINC’s present objectives are: “Recover, promote, and develop the cultural processes and manifestations that reaffirm the national identity” (MINC 2017, para. 23).<sup>9</sup> In the case of Santo Domingo carnival, MINC has historically enacted policies that promote diversity and innovation in terms of costumes, but do not necessarily encourage the performance of live music—including Alibabá. For example, in 2015, several traditional carnival groups in East Santo Domingo included Alibabá music as a part of their parade display even though it resulted in their eventual disqualification. This incident (discussed further in Chapter 4) and others like it also reveal the defiant relationship that often exists between performers on the ground and those cultural agents charged with their regulation.

This project is therefore crucial because, as a part of the urban soundscape, the residents of Santo Domingo’s working-class neighborhoods still struggle for validation and acceptance of their cultural identity and musical practices. Many residents of Santo Domingo consider the

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<sup>8</sup> “el conjunto de operaciones, principios, prácticas y procedimientos de gestión administrativo y presupuestaria que sirven de base a la acción del Estado.”

<sup>9</sup> “Recuperar, promover y desarrollar los procesos y manifestaciones culturales que reafirman la identidad nacional.”

sound of Alibabá to be little more than urban noise, complicated by the fact that one of its primary instruments (the PVC-pipe trumpet called the *corneta*) is literally constructed out of semi-truck air horns. Moreover, like hip-hop in the United States (Rose 1994 and 2008), Alibabá's association with specific bodies (predominantly young males) and in a specific part of the city (the eastern barrios) has shaped the awareness and interpretation of the practice within Santo Domingo. At one end of the spectrum, it seems that Alibabá has for the most part remained unnoticed and underappreciated by Dominicans outside of these neighborhoods. At the other end, many group leaders and performers feel that Alibabá has also been subsumed within the negative perceptions of urban life regarding poverty and crime.

Scholars in the fields of sociology, social policy, and geography have increasingly focused on the corollaries between perceptions of crime, feelings of insecurity, and the urban environment (see Bannister and Fyfe 2001; Body-Gendrot 2001; England and Simon 2010). For example, Lucia Dammert and Mary Fran T. Malone conducted a survey of the public perception of crime in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, and found that such insecurities are most commonly linked to other insecurities as well—such as economic, political, or social insecurity (2006, 27; see also Dammert 2012). In the case of Santo Domingo, Erin B. Taylor (2009) explores how the barrio has become a locus of danger in the city due to the spatialization of poverty and especially the criminalization of young males.

As a result, customs commonly found throughout the poorest neighborhoods of the city (and especially among its young male residents) are recast as potentially criminal behavior—including the local dialect, reggaetón music, and carnival celebrations (Quiroz 2010; *Listín Diario* 2014b; ONE 2013; *Departamento de Estadísticas Culturales* 2009). For many, the large crowds of young males attracted by the increasingly popular Alibabá performances within the

barrios have also resulted in their negative association with delinquency, debauchery, and pick-pocketing. Dammert and Malone provide some evidence from other Latin American contexts that community participation in religious, environmental, or other group activities can help encourage trust and reduce the fear of crime within a neighborhood (2006, 32). It remains to be seen if community participation in an activity like Alibabá could also reduce the fear of crime not just in the neighborhoods where these groups are found, but throughout Greater Santo Domingo as well.

### *1.3 In Search of Alibabá: Seven Voyages to Santo Domingo and One Thousand and One Dominican Nights*

The title of this section is a bit of a literary nod to the *Arabian Nights*, an allusion to both the tales that inspired the name for the practice of Alibabá and my path to this project (which was shaped by my personal travels to the Dominican Republic). In reality, I have actually made a total of thirteen short trips between 2002 and 2016, spending more or less a combined 300 days in the country as both a tourist and a scholar. I traveled to the country as a sophomore for the first time in 2002 as a part of a Millikin University Wind Ensemble trip to the southeastern town of La Romana to volunteer at a local fine arts community center known as the BoMana Foundation. There, we split our time between playing free concerts and giving lessons in town and touring the colonial zone of Santo Domingo and lounging on the beaches of the Punta Cana resort. While my experiences with the country itself left something to the imagination, my experiences with the people were unforgettable, and I relished the opportunity to return to La Romana with the wind ensemble again in 2005 after I had already graduated. These early trips set a precedent for my approach to conducting research in the Dominican Republic—as I continually relied on happy accidents and the people I met for help.

This dissertation primarily builds on field and archival research that I conducted over the course of three trips in 2009 and 2010 for my master's thesis on the topic of Dominican carnival music, thanks in part to two Tinker Field Research Grants from the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies at the University of Illinois. In thinking about how to get this project started, I contacted BoMana's founder and director Luisa María Ortiz, who was very happy to host me in exchange for organizing and leading music activities at her summer camp. It was also during my first trip over the summer of 2009 when I came across a CD in Ms. Ortiz's office called *Carnaval Dominicano* (Dominican Carnival), published by the Dominican Secretary of State for Tourism (now the Ministry of Tourism) in 2006. I returned to La Romana for two weeks on my own in February 2010 when, again, it was Ms. Ortiz who invited me to participate in the La Romana delegation for the National Parade that year, and later, introduced me to Mr. Ramón Lachapelle at the Carnival Directorate Office in Santo Domingo. During my next trip in the summer of 2010, I focused on collecting carnival programs and other literature published by the Ministry of Culture in addition to all the CD and DVD recordings of carnival music that I could find.

I returned to the Dominican Republic periodically between 2011 and 2013, spending more time in Santo Domingo. When possible, my trips coincided with carnival and especially with carnival activities outside the National Parade. By 2012, the friend I had most often rented a room from in La Romana had moved to the capital—serendipitously in time for me to attend that year's Society for Ethnomusicology Southeast Chapter Meeting, organized by Dr. Martha Davis and held at the Academy of Sciences in Santo Domingo. Once I was fully engaged in my dissertation research in 2014, I was fortunate enough to stay in the capital with the family of my former Dominican roommate (who had come to the University of Illinois on a Fulbright

scholarship to study engineering). None of my dissertation research would have been possible without these experiences, my advanced proficiency in Spanish, or the help of my established connections in Santo Domingo.

In preparation for my first in-depth research endeavor in August 2014, I joined a Facebook group called “CARNAVAL ORIENTAL” (Eastern Carnival) and connected with its administrator Joselito Gil. Mr. Gil gladly agreed to meet with me, and once I arrived in the country, he accompanied me to meet with the leaders of multiple Alibabá groups in the National District and East Santo Domingo. During this time, Mr. Gil introduced me to Mr. Deyvis “Guara” Martínez Ozuna of Villa Duarte and Mr. Enrique “Momón” Scharbay of Los Mina. I returned to Santo Domingo in November 2014 to observe Guara’s group “Fantasía Tropical” (Tropical Fantasy), and again in February 2015 to get hands-on experience with Momón’s group “Imperio Clásico”—with whom I have worked intensively ever since.

In addition to the qualitative ethnographic research that I conducted with Alibabá groups, I analyzed my observations over the last fifteen years and used the primary sources I gathered to identify and evaluate various value systems on music at carnival in Santo Domingo. I found that the nature of the carnival seasons in Santo Domingo in particular made periodic, short-term trips an ideal way to conduct this research over a period of time. For my first research trips, I explored new lines of inquiry and recorded oral histories of current and past leaders of Alibabá groups. In between trips, I analyzed my recorded data, discovered trends, and refined my interview protocol to better focus on certain themes, then followed up and verified my findings during subsequent trips. Moreover, short trips also lessened the burden I placed on my Dominican colleagues, while also creating more opportunities for me to bring needed equipment from the United States and other gifts as tokens of my gratitude.

While in the field, I recorded over ten hours of Alibabá rehearsals and performances, transcribed dance choreography and the rhythms of various instruments, and conducted more than forty interviews with performers and leaders of different carnival groups. I also attended and observed four National Carnival Parades, six local carnival parades throughout Santo Domingo, and four Alibabá music/dance festivals. Thanks in part to a Dissertation Travel Grant from the Graduate College of the University of Illinois, I took lessons in basic snare rhythms and dance steps with Maestro César Carvajal and members of “Imperio Clásico” for a period of six weeks during summer 2015. These lessons were particularly useful for transcribing dance steps and rhythms. I returned to Los Mina one final time in April 2016 in order to share some of the interpretations of my data with my colleagues, fill in some remaining gaps, and clarify some questions that had emerged during the process of drafting my dissertation.

This research necessitated in-depth interviews conducted in Spanish that were recorded. I conducted some of my interviews one-on-one; other times, I conducted group interviews with two leaders at the same time. The benefit of group interviews in this case was that, since my lines of questioning focused on their activities in the 1970s and 1980s, these leaders often cross-checked each other in order to reach a better consensus regarding the past. For all interviews conducted in August 2014, I was also accompanied by Mr. Gil. Not only did he help me recast questions when my interlocutors were confused, but he also assisted in creating a more comfortable environment and confidence between me and these leaders.

In order to provide the voice of my interlocutors, I extensively cite from the dialogues I recorded and unsolicited Facebook posts throughout my dissertation. With the help of my field notes taken during the interviews, I transcribed the spoken conversations using spelling conventions established by the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE)—making only minor editorial

interventions (such as omitting false starts, interjections, word repetitions, etc.), but otherwise retaining any original grammar as recorded. I later verified these transcriptions with native Spanish speakers in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese and the Writer's Workshop at the University of Illinois. In order to translate the transcripts into English, I relied on my own interpretations of Spanish as spoken in the Dominican Republic that I cross-checked with Orlando Inoa's *Diccionario de Dominicanismos* (Dictionary of Dominicanisms) (2010), internet discussion forums (including wordreference.com and diccionariolibre.com), and my Dominican friends. When quoting my interlocutors, I present my faithful translations from Spanish to English in the text, directly followed by any idiomatic phrasing in brackets (for example, "a complete mess [*arroz con mango*]" ) where necessary.<sup>10</sup> Correlated excerpts of my interview transcripts are included in the footnotes for additional context.

As a final note, currently, there is no standardized spelling of "Alibabá." In my previous work, I primarily used "Alí-Babá" to more closely approximate a typical spelling of the name Ali Baba in Spanish (Hajek 2010 and 2012). In this dissertation, I have chosen rather to spell the practice as "Alibabá" to both more clearly distinguish it from the literary character while still reflecting the way it was pronounced by my interlocutors, with a prominent acute accent (*acento agudo*) stressing the final syllable of the word.

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<sup>10</sup> In general, there are two kinds of translations strategies that either are communicative-based and emphasize the target language (e.g., adaptive, free, or idiomatic translations) or are semantic-based and emphasize the source language (e.g., word-for-word, literal, or faithful translations) (Newmark 1988, 45). For my faithful translations, I use my experiences and perspective to interpret my interlocutors' words into English along with their implied meanings and contexts when necessary and/or useful.

#### 1.4 Chapter Outline

As an overarching structure to this dissertation, I use Alejandro Madrid and Robin Moore's (2013) concept of the "performance complex" to frame my study of Alibabá and Dominican value systems. In their case, Madrid and Moore use this term in their discussion of Cuban and Mexican *danzón* as a way to unpack various perceptions of this practice in both participatory and performance events, and to better focus on music-making and human action rather than categories. For their analysis, Madrid and Moore suggest that one can better approach the act of music making as a performance complex, "a complex amalgam of elements taken from a diversity of sources, local and global, and the creative ways individual artists compose or perform that transcends genre categories," rather than as a fixed and final product (9-10). As such, Alibabá—a name that encompasses both a carnival group and the dance and music that they perform—can be found in a variety of places (both in the streets and on stage) and is driven by collective action and changing tastes rather than a prescribed structure. To unpack the processes, performance choices, and individual agency that inform Alibabá, I have selected four different performance contexts of this practice—rehearsals, parades, competitions, and mediated performances on television, CDs, and social media.

I begin Chapter 2 during the height of my field research (2014-2015) in order to present the performatic context of the Alibabá rehearsal setting as a lens for everyday life in the barrios of Santo Domingo during the twenty-first century. Here, I look at the competing perceptions of barrio social life among Alibabá performers, for whom the practice generates important social resources, and among the city's residents, who often associate the barrio with poverty and crime. I contend that these groups' popularity is due in part to the fact that they offer community



activities for their members and that the Alibabá rehearsal in particular is helping to address these problems.

In Chapter 3, I shift to a historical perspective in order to present an ethnography of listening within the soundscape of Santo Domingo at the end of the twentieth century. Using primary sources and interviews with key actors from the 1970s and 1980s, I discuss the interdependent nature of the political and social agendas of outside agents and Alibabá performers as listeners. By focusing on the importance of media technology in capturing, curating, and circulating certain kinds of musical activity throughout the city, I argue that both outside agents and the listening audience are essential to understanding the articulation of sound as music within Santo Domingo.

Moving back toward the present in Chapter 4, I examine how policy decisions have shaped the regulation of carnival groups and the judging of “musicalness” at carnival activities in Santo Domingo from the mid-twentieth century until 2015. Along with comparative case studies from Brazil, Colombia, and Trinidad, I look primarily at the competing social and economic goals of carnival event organizers and Alibabá performers in order to question the current discourse regarding live musical performance at carnival and some of the assumptions it presents. I suggest that the extent to which decisions that regulate public performance practices align with the social and economic goals of the various stakeholders involved (e.g., carnival organizers and judges, carnival participants, and audiences) is a good indicator of the presence of live music-making at carnival celebrations.

As a conclusion, Chapter 5 represents a culmination of the previous three chapters. Here, I use applied ethnomusicological methods to discuss what the value of Alibabá is, could be, and to whom. By positioning myself as an advocate for Alibabá, I use interviews and audience

analysis to propose a small-scale project in the future that would promote mediated performance of Alibabá on Facebook or YouTube and potentially appeal to the social and cultural values of performers, organizers, and their audiences. In following with the objectives of other activist ethnomusicological research, I position Alibabá alongside other prominent Dominican cultural expressions in order to draw attention to its apparent value as a carnival music and in other social realms outside of the barrios.

## CHAPTER 2

### ALIBABÁ AS A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE: IMPERIO CLÁSICO REHEARSALS IN EAST SANTO DOMINGO AND SOCIAL LIFE IN THE BARRIO

I was rarely ever by myself for most of my field research in and around various neighborhoods of Santo Domingo's urban zones. This was half by design for security and half by necessity—as I would not have otherwise known where to go, and it was the best way to make sure I was in the right place at the right time with the right people. On a hot afternoon in late July, I made a trip across the National District with a female colleague so that she could try on her costume for the upcoming summer carnival celebration. In the meantime, I waited for her in the living room of a house bustling with carnival activities. One man was sculpting clay molds to make devil masks; another was sewing bells and ribbons onto a costume. Others, like me, were simply sitting around the house relaxing, enjoying the company and camaraderie within an environment steeped in carnival.

On this occasion, I happened to be sitting across from a young man lounging on the couch who went by the nickname “El Niño.” Assuming that he too was a carnival enthusiast, I took the opportunity to pose the most driving question of my field research—why have Alibabá groups become so successful and popular within the barrios of Santo Domingo? Fortuitously, El Niño not only had a deep appreciation of carnival, but a keen awareness of larger social phenomena garnered during his university studies in Public Health. With very little prompting, he began explaining that the popularity of Alibabá could be attributed to the practice's nature as a social enterprise. Over the course of twenty minutes, he then proceeded to support his claim by outlining the three main concepts of what he believed constituted a social enterprise:

One is that the guys are invested, right?...The second phenomenon is that it can generate resources along the way...The final factor is the most interesting to me, and is the one that has to do with an association how society views the guys, how they are looked at...

[Therefore,] the first has to do with the theme of formation [of Alibabá]. The second has to do with how that formation impacts the individual and his environment. The third is the perception that society has for the individual and the formation...that it is seen as a social instrument to generate change.<sup>11</sup>

Although El Niño included the caveat that many kinds of carnival groups satisfy the first two criteria, he emphasized that Alibabá was special because it embodied all three qualities—and especially because of its potential to generate social change.

This chapter is primarily an analysis of various perceptions of Alibabá music and dance, using the performatic context of the Alibabá rehearsal setting as a lens for everyday life in the barrios of Santo Domingo. My discussion is primarily situated during the 2014-2015 carnival season in the National District, East Santo Domingo, and North Santo Domingo.<sup>12</sup> I present specific details of the activities involving the Alibabá group “Imperio Clásico” (Classical Empire), general observations taken from other specific groups in the area (including Villa María, National District; Villa Duarte, East Santo Domingo; and Sabana Perdida, North Santo Domingo), and the opinions of Alibabá group leaders from throughout greater Santo Domingo. I begin by cataloguing the formation of the practice and its most popular elements—choreography and rhythm—using “Imperio Clásico” rehearsals in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo as my

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<sup>11</sup> “Uno es los muchachos se invierten, ¿verdad?...El segundo fenómeno es que puede generar recursos en el proceso...El último factor es el más interesante para mí y es el que tiene que ver una asociación cómo la sociedad ve a los muchachos, cómo se enfoca...[Por eso,] la primera tiene que ver por el tema de formación [de Alibabá]...El segundo tiene que ver cómo esa formación impacta al individuo y su entorno...El tercero es la percepción que tiene la sociedad del individuo y la formación...[que] se vea como un instrumento social para generar cambio” (José Beltré, interview, 31 July 2014).

<sup>12</sup> In *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003), Diana Taylor defines “performatic” as “the adjectival form of the nondiscursive realm of performance” in an attempt to avoid “[reducing] gestures and embodied practices to narrative description” (6, 16). In a similar way, I use “performatic” to refer to the attributes of performance practice (whether a staged event or the process involved in carrying out such events).

contexts. I then detail the kinds of social resources generated as an extension of group members' dedication to dance and music at the Alibabá rehearsal. In framing the rehearsal as creating a performatic space that is both embodied (involving human bodies in time) and inscribed (in a very specific place), I discuss how this activity parallels two important characteristics of barrio social life—inclusivity and “convivencia” (a term used by many of my interlocutors to describe an interdependence among families, friends, and neighbors in their communities). Following this, I turn to the public attitudes of the barrio in relation to feelings of insecurity. In particular, I consider how insecurity has shaped both the visibility of Alibabá groups and the discourse regarding their members. I also present evidence of how the Alibabá rehearsal addresses two problems affecting the barrio at its young male residents in particular—namely poverty and *delincuencia* (crime).

More broadly, I offer this study of the Alibabá rehearsal as a way to counter some entrenched stereotypes regarding musicians as criminals, and the ways that poor communities engage in music as a coping strategy. Based on my experiences (like those with El Niño) throughout Santo Domingo between 2010 and 2015, I make three claims as to why Alibabá has taken on such an important dimension within these communities. First, Alibabá has, if nothing else, been enormously successful in getting people from barrio neighborhoods together in one place at one time. Second, the equal prominence of choreographed dances and music routines requires that these groups spend more time together year-round than other carnival groups. This sustains a sense of belonging and social cohesion rooted in their community and amplified by their communal experiences of barrio life.<sup>13</sup> Third, this deep social bond found among Alibabá

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<sup>13</sup> Social cohesion is commonly used to describe solidarity, norms, and a sense of order within a finite group of individuals (Forrest and Kearns 2000, 2001; Giddens 1984). My definition of social cohesion is adapted from Forrest and Kearns (1999, 2001) and Stafford et al. (2003) and refers to the integration of a social behavior of

groups is providing a source of the discipline and training necessary to excel at dancing and playing music. Through this training, Alibabá groups are also successfully confronting and combating many of the negative stereotypes associated with barrio life by offering community activities and support that extends beyond the rehearsal.

### *2.1 The Elements of Alibabá: Doing the Dance, Making the Music*

Admittedly, it may be a little disconcerting to begin a discussion of the performatic elements of Alibabá by situating it in its rehearsal setting. To this, I counter that one must consider the rehearsal as an important part of any performance complex; as they take place in preparation for performances, rehearsals present a much clearer opportunity to focus on process, rather than product. Moreover, in the case of Alibabá, the rehearsal is often the only setting in which many participants and audience members experience this music and dance. For those members who cannot afford to make costumes and spectators who cannot take time off from work to attend parades, the “rehearsal” becomes the “performance.” Therefore, using my observations and experiences at “Imperio Clásico” rehearsals during the spring and summer carnival seasons 2014-2015, I catalogue the various elements of Alibabá choreography and rhythm in an attempt to understand production choices and the ideologies behind them that inform Alibabá music and dance in a variety of other contexts. In other words, focusing on the rehearsal setting offers us insight as to what happens when Alibabá happens.

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individuals and groups within a social setting (i.e., neighborhood) that is created through a combination of: social interaction, a sense of community, social networks, participation in outdoor activities, and a feeling of safety.

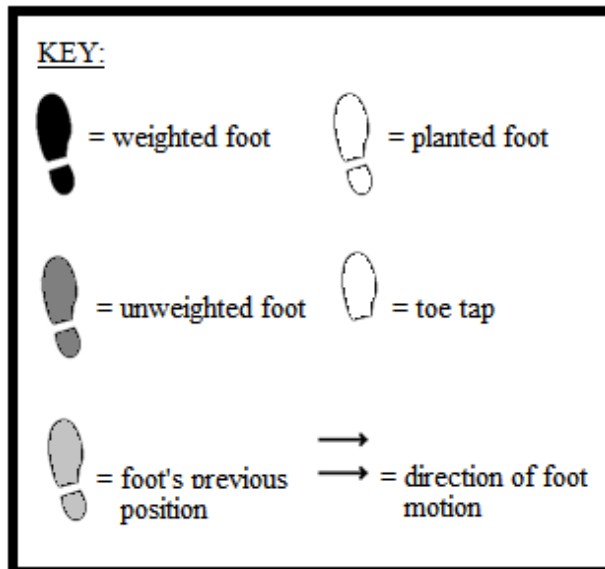
## Alibabá Choreography: Doing the Dance

The most prominent element of the Alibabá rehearsal is the dance. In general, Alibabá choreography is primarily performed in unison. The footwork tends to alternate between right and left foot, with one in place, while the other foot carries out the step. The most basic Alibabá step has no name, but I will refer to it here as “marking time.” There are two versions of this pattern that create the dance step used to mark time and (a) stay in place or (b) to move or change position. The dancer marks time in a pattern that repeats every four beats, with an emphasis on each step on beats one and three (see Table 2.1). The upper body emphasizes beats two and four, rotating from the torso to swing the shoulders forward on the same side as the stepping foot. The basic step can be transformed into a moving step by simply stepping forward or backwards instead of in place.

In addition to the basic step, there are three essential fundamental dance patterns that are common to all groups—the “*Alibabá*,” the “*mariposa*,” (“butterfly”) and the “*alisado*” (“smooth). The first two are original choreography that emerged in the 1970s. The Alibabá begins with a cross-step forward on beat one, a step in-place on beat two with the opposite foot, and a close step in place on beat three. This is followed by a cha-cha-cha pattern (called a “*chacachá*” in Santo Domingo) in place on beats three and four (see Table 2.2). In order to move forward, the dancer begins with the forward cross-step, but does not step in place on beat two—rather, closing the rear foot forward, followed by the *chacachá* on beats three and four. In order to move backwards, the dancer performs the forward cross-step but does not step in place on beat two—rather, stepping backwards with the rear foot so that the opposite foot must close a greater distance in order to carry out the *chacachá* step on beats three and four.

**Table 2.1** Basic Alibabá marking time two-step pattern (a) in place and (b) with forward motion (with key)<sup>14</sup>





| (a) Marking Time |  |               |   |               |
|------------------|--|---------------|---|---------------|
| Step             | Lower Body Description   | Feet Position | Upper Body Description  | Musical Count |
| 1                | Feet shoulder-width apart; step L foot in place; transfer weight to L foot |               | Torso/L shoulder begins to rotate clockwise   | 1             |
| 2                | Close R foot to L foot; touch R foot with R knee slightly bent             |               | Torso/L shoulder arrives at 45°   | 2             |
| 3                | Step right with R foot; transfer weight to R foot                          |               | Torso/L shoulder rotate counterclockwise to return to place; Torso/R continue rotating counterclockwise | 3             |
| 4                | Close L foot to R foot; touch L foot with L knee slightly bent             |               | Torso/R shoulder arrives at 45°   | 4             |






<sup>14</sup> A video of a demonstration of the basic Alibabá dance two-step pattern can be viewed on YouTube in “Ensayo de Chachon” (0:00-0:12), posted by Jessica Hajek, 7 August 2014 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDn8Lff2ITM>).



**Table 2.1 cont. (caption shown on previous page)**




| (b) Marking Time, with Forward Motion |   |   |   |               |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|---------------|
| Step                                  | Lower Body Description  | Feet Position   | Upper Body Description  | Musical Count |
| 1                                     | Feet shoulder-width apart; step with L foot forward; transfer weight to L foot          |    | Torso/L shoulder begins to rotate clockwise   | 1             |
| 2                                     | Close R foot to L foot; touch R foot with R leg bent                                    |   | Torso/L shoulder arrives at 45°   | 2             |
| 3                                     | Step with R foot forward and to the right, diagonally at 45°; transfer weight to R foot |  | Torso/L shoulder rotate counterclockwise to return to place; Torso/R continue rotating counterclockwise | 3             |
| 4                                     | Close L foot to R foot; touch L foot with L leg bent                                    |  | Torso/R shoulder arrives at 45°   | 4             |

**Table 2.2** Alibabá choreography (see key in Table 2.1)<sup>15</sup>

| Alibabá |   |   |  |               |
|---------|---|---|--|---------------|
| Step    | Lower Body Description  | Feet Position   | Upper Body Description   | Musical Count |
| 1       | Feet shoulder-width apart; cross-step R foot forward to the left, shift weight to R foot; lift L heel by bending L knee |    | Elbows bent, arms parallel to the ground; wrists flexed, hands at center; torso and shoulders rotate counterclockwise; arms propel to create 'L' shape (R arm straight forward, L arm straight up) | 1             |
| 2       | Step L foot in place, shift weight to L foot; lift R foot in place  |   | Arms and hands return to starting position, elbows bent  | 2             |
| 3       | Close R foot to L foot; cha-cha-cha in place (R, L, R)  |  | Elbows lift slightly, return to place, hands clap in center  | 3, &, 4       |

<sup>15</sup> A video of a demonstration of the Alibabá step can be viewed on YouTube in “Fantasia de Ali Baba - 2nd Place in ‘Fantasia’” (0:05-0:10), posted by Jessica Hajek, 19 March 2013 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAuTr1ZKg54>).


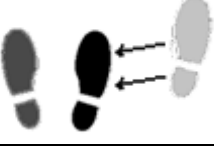


**Table 2.2 cont. (caption shown on previous page)**

| Step | Lower Body Description   | Feet Position   | Upper Body Description  | Musical Count |
|------|--|---|---|---------------|
| 4    | Cross-step with L foot forward to the right, shift weight to L foot; lift R heel by bending R knee |    | Arms propel to create 'L' shape (L arm straight forward, R arm straight up) | 1             |
| 5    | Step R foot in place, shift weight to R foot; lift L foot in place                                 |   | Arms and hands return to starting position, elbows bent                     | 2             |
| 6    | Close L foot to R foot; cha-cha-cha in place (L-R-L)   |  | Elbows lift slightly, return to place, hands clap in center                 | 3, &, 4       |

For the “mariposa” pattern, the out-in motion of the arms creates a butterfly-like effect. When performing the mariposa in place, the feet move side to side in a semicircle (see Table 2.3). The mariposa is especially advantageous for quickly moving forward (generally preferred over the more leisurely “marking time with forward motion”). To do so, the dancers propel themselves forward or backward diagonally rather than in a semicircle—changing directions every four beats with a pause on beat four to prepare for the directional change. This footwork is often used by groups if carnival staff are hurriedly ushering the performers past judges’ stands





during carnival parades in an attempt to speed things along. One variation of the mariposa that I observed among female dancers involves the dancers rolling their arms in the center on beats one, two, and three rather than extending them. Another variation that I observed among male dancers involves reaching the arms upwards rather than clapping on beat four.

**Table 2.3** Mariposa choreography (see key in Table 2.1)<sup>16</sup>

| Mariposa |  |   |   |               |
|----------|--|---|---|---------------|
| Step     | Lower Body Description   | Feet Position   | Upper Body Description  | Musical Count |
| 1        | Feet together; step L foot backwards at 45°; transfer weight to L foot; rotate hips clockwise to 12 o'clock      |    | Hands at center, elbows bent; unbend elbows outwards, arms parallel to the ground | 1             |
| 2        | Close R foot to L foot; shift weight to R foot; rotate hips clockwise to 6 o'clock                               |   | Bend elbows; return to starting position  | 2             |
| 3        | Step with L foot forward 45°; rotate hips clockwise to 12 o'clock  |  | Unbend elbows outwards, arms parallel to the ground                               | 3             |
| 4        | Close R foot to L foot; touch R foot with R leg bent; shift weight to L foot; rotate hips clockwise to 6 o'clock |  | Bend elbows; return to starting position; clap hands in center                    | 4             |






<sup>16</sup> A video of a demonstration of the mariposa step can be viewed on YouTube in “Fantasia de Ali Baba - 2nd Place in ‘Fantasia’” (0:22-0:45), posted by Jessica Hajek, 19 March 2013 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAuTr1ZKg54>).

**Table 2.3 cont. (caption shown on previous page)**

| Step | Lower Body Description   | Feet Position  | Upper Body Description   | Musical Count |
|------|--|--|--|---------------|
| 5    | Step R foot backwards at 45°; transfer weight to R foot; rotate hips counterclockwise to 12 o'clock                      |   | Unbend elbows outwards, arms parallel to the ground            | 5             |
| 6    | Close L foot to R foot; shift weight to L foot; rotate hips counter-clockwise to 6 o'clock                               |   | Bend elbows; return to starting position                       | 6             |
| 7    | Step with R foot forward 45°; shift weight to R foot; rotate hips counterclockwise to 12 o'clock                         |   | Unbend elbows outwards, arms parallel to the ground            | 7             |
| 8    | Close L foot to R foot; touch L foot with L leg bent; shift weight to R foot; rotate hips counter-clockwise to 6 o'clock |  | Bend elbows; return to starting position; clap hands in center | 8             |




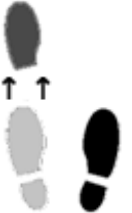

The “alisado” emerged later than the other patterns and was incorporated into Alibabá choreography in the mid-1980s as a transition step but now ubiquitous to all groups. The name comes from the Spanish for “smooth,” describing the function of the step in allowing the dancers to transition smoothly from one type of choreography to another and is repeated as many times as necessary without stopping. The alisado is a nine-count, ten-step pattern that begins on beat one (see Table 2.4). In order to compensate for beat nine (which would otherwise conflict with the four-beat ostinato rhythmic accompaniment), step ten falls on the offbeat of beat one so that the step two still lands on beat two in subsequent repetitions. The alisado step is the only one of the four basic choreographies that is done solely in place, and not used to move directionally.

**Table 2.4** Alisado choreography (see key in Table 2.1)<sup>17</sup>

| Alisado |   |   |  |                     |
|---------|---|---|--|---------------------|
| Step    | Lower Body Description                                    | Feet Position   | Upper Body Description   | Musical Count       |
| 1       | Feet together; step L with L foot; shift weight to L foot |    | Hands at center, elbows bent; unbend elbows outwards 90°, parallel to ground | 1 (first time only) |
| 2       | Cross step behind with R foot; shift weight to R foot     |    | Bend elbows; return to starting position                                     | 2                   |
| 3       | Cross step close with L foot; shift weight to L foot      |   | Unbend elbows outwards 90°, parallel to ground                               | 3                   |
| 4       | Close R foot to L foot; shift weight to R foot            |  | Bend elbows; return to starting position                                     | 4                   |
| 5       | Touch behind with L foot                                  |  | Unbend elbows outwards 90°, parallel to ground                               | 1                   |

<sup>17</sup> A video of a demonstration of the mariposa step can be viewed on YouTube in “El Carnaval de Villa Maria es una Fantasia - 2nd Place in ‘Ali Baba’,” (0:00-0:20), posted by Jessica Hajek, 19 March 2013 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVYTQhhmkq8>).

**Table 2.4 cont. (caption shown on previous page)**

| Step | Lower Body Description  | Feet Position   | Upper Body Description  | Musical Count |
|------|---|---|---|---------------|
| 6    | Close L foot to R foot; shift weight to L foot  |    | Hold position   | 2             |
| 7    | Touch in front with R foot  |    | Hold L arm in place; rotate R arm 90° upwards from the shoulder | 3             |
| 8    | Close L foot to R foot; place weight evenly between feet  |    | Hold position   | 4             |
| 9    | Touch in front with L foot  |   | Return to starting position; clap hands in center               | 1             |
| 10   | Step L with L foot so it is parallel with R foot, shoulders-width apart; shift weight to L foot |  | Unbend elbows outwards 90°, parallel to ground                  | &             |

In addition to the four basic dance patterns shared by all groups, each Alibabá group also invents its own unique choreography involving footwork, hand movements, and body rolls (i.e., undulating the chest and/or pelvis). To do so, group leaders or dance captains (high-ranking individuals in the group that assist in leading the rehearsals) will often recombine dance patterns used in the past with new ones. It is then the responsibility of the captains to teach the choreography to the “blocks” of dancers. Each block may have anywhere from four to sixteen

members, including children as young as seven and adults up to around age 30. However, the blocks are differentiated by age and gender, which is essential to heighten the uniformity between dancers—pairing similarly sized bodies, with unison choreography and coordinating costumes. In doing so, leaders and captains of an Alibabá group take advantage of the physical capabilities of the body to the fullest. For instance, women tend to dance Alibabá and marisposa more than men. The reason for this is that the stylization of movement of the upper and lower body is highly gendered. Men’s choreography is danced aggressively, with more attention paid to footwork and upper body styling. For hand positioning among men, the momentum of the swing emphasizes forward motion, with the range kept relatively small, and arms kept bent and close to the body in order to move quickly and with ease. Conversely, women’s choreography is danced more fluidly, with more attention paid to the lower body and arms. For hand positioning among women, arms are often fully extended and the momentum of the swing emphasizes backward motion. Women are also more likely to shake their hips, execute “body rolls,” and use other moves to highlight their buttocks and mid-sections.

In the case of “Imperio Clásico,” the choreography is designed collaboratively by all the captains and the group leader Enrique “Momón” Scharbay at the start of the summer carnival season. Each captain contributes ideas and suggestions for improvements, based on small dance pattern conventions that exist in both the group’s own repertory and that are borrowed/adapted from others. These patterns are then assembled into either short dance “numbers” or a longer “routine.” A “number” is one of many short dance sets that are designed to be performed either in unison or mirrored with a partner (for approx. 10-30 seconds). For a “routine,” all members of the different blocks dance and interact for a more significant period of time (approx. 3-4 minutes) (see Figure 2.1).



**Figure 2.1** All three blocks (boys, women, and men) from “Imperio Clásico” rehearsing the routine together. This photo is taken from the vantage point of the judges’ stand, with the dancers moving from left to right down the street and facing the stationary musicians (photo taken in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo, 20 February 2015)



The numbers are unique for each block of dancers, with each block featuring five to ten different dance patterns. The numbers are rehearsed in no specific order, and a captain will repeat numbers as necessary. The numbers are called by the captain in quick succession, signaled first by a long whistle blow followed by the number in the form of fingers on either one or two hands. The captain will almost always be located at the front of the block of dancers in order to give the signal; however, he may move within the group in order to give suggestions for improvements (see Figure 2.2). Based on my experience, the only exception to this is when the dance captain is the same age and gender as the block being rehearsed. If this is the case, the captain will still be located at the front of the block, but may turn around to dance with the block—signaling dance numbers with his/her back to the dancers (see Figure 2.3).

**Figure 2.2** Male captain (center-right, facing camera) of “Imperio Clásico” signaling number five while rehearsing the women’s block (photo taken in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo, 23 February 2015)



**Figure 2.3** A different male captain (center-right, back facing camera) of “Imperio Clásico,” signaling number one while rehearsing the men’s block and also dancing. The previous captain (left, with hat and backpack) is now participating as a dancer (photo taken in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo, 23 February 2015)



In general, dance routines are an important element of many other kinds of carnival groups in Santo Domingo—including fantasy, popular creativity, and even *diablos* groups (to a lesser extent). The routine is performed during parades, while the Alibabá group is in front of the judges' stand. For the 2015 spring carnival season, “Imperio Clásico” had a routine that lasted a little over three minutes. All three of the group's blocks participated, starting with the boys, continuing with the women, and finishing with the men (see Figure 2.1). Like Alibabá, other groups dance their routines in front of the judges' stand. However, Alibabá groups may forgo part or all of the routine in favor of marking time, the mariposa, or a shorter dance “number” when carnival organizers force groups to keep moving. Therefore, it is the existence of the number, in terms of choreography, that sets Alibabá groups apart from other carnival groups because of the emphasis on being able to dance the entire length of the parade route. Not only do dance numbers set Alibabá apart from other types of carnival groups in general, they also distinguish each Alibabá group from other Alibabá groups.

### Alibabá Rhythm: Making the Music

Another aspect that separates Alibabá group from others is their preference for playing live music during parade performances—whereas fantasy, popular creativity, and *diablos* groups primarily dance to prerecorded music or even no music at all. Playing music live at carnival parades requires that Alibabá musicians perform alongside dancers at the rehearsals. When I say “Alibabá music,” I am referring first and foremost to a rhythmic groove known as mambo (see Figure 2.4).<sup>18</sup> The mambo rhythm is based on a four-beat ostinato that repeats in order to create a

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<sup>18</sup> The rhythm is not related to the mambo that emerged in New York City during the 1940s-1950s among Latin salsa players. The name comes from the Dominican colloquial use of “mambo” to mean anything that has a fast beat (which can also be referred to as “*flow*” or “*swing*”).

foundation for dancers. The main function of the musicians is to play the mambo as long and as loudly as possible. Collectively, the Alibabá musicians are referred to either as an *Alibanda* (a play on words combining Alibabá and the Spanish word for “band”) or as a mambo (named after the rhythm). “Imperio Clásico” has an arsenal of around fifteen musicians, many who specialize in a single instrument—such as snare drum, *tambora* (traditional double-headed drum), or corneta (PVC-pipe trumpet)—and others who can play auxiliary instruments as needed— such as bass drum, cowbell, or *güira* (metal scraper). At full capacity, the group features four snare drums, two bass drums, two cornetas, one *tambora*, cowbell, *güira*, and timbales—or perform with as few as two or three snare drums and bass drum only.

**Figure 2.4** Basic Alibabá mambo rhythmic groove as performed by snare drum, *tambora*, *güira*, and bass drum, performed by “Imperio Clásico” (full score) (♩ = flam; ♪ = buzz roll)

♩ = 200

The musical score is written for four instruments in 4/4 time, with a tempo of 200 beats per minute. The Snare Drum part begins with a flam (half note) followed by a buzz roll (quarter note) with the notation 'RL R R L R R'. The Tambora part features a series of eighth notes with accents. The Güira part consists of a continuous eighth-note pattern. The Bass Drum part has a simple quarter-note pattern.

As a whole, “Alibabá music” is also a combination of the mambo with short rhythmic interludes. There are two primary kinds of interludes—playing *repiques* (hitting the center of the drumhead or playing rim shots) and playing *cortes* (cuts or breaks)—that create rhythmic contrast, add interest, and show off the skill of the musicians. Repiques are a technique played

almost exclusively by snare drummers that adds density to the basic rhythmic texture. When playing repiques (or *repicando*), one lead snare drummer, known as the “primero” (first-part player), embellishes the basic mambo rhythm or improvises variations, but most importantly does so while striking the center of the head or the rim-and-head simultaneously to differentiate their tone in a way that rings out over the groove. So that the fundamental mambo groove is not lost, it is important that only one snare drummer (the primero) plays repiques at any given time and that all other snare drummers (the segundos, or second-part players) maintain the basic rhythm (see Figure 2.5). Based on what I observed among the snare drummers of “Imperio Clásico,” if more than one drummer feels comfortable playing repiques, they must take turns playing as primero and segundos. In this case, a snare drummer may simply make eye contact or lift his head to signal that he will be play a repique.

Alternatively, Alibabá musicians use cortes as a break from the mambo groove. A majority of cortes are call-and-response rhythms between the lead drum or corneta and the rest of the band, with some played by a solo snare drum or in loose unison (see Figure 2.6). Because of this, cortes must be coordinated by the captain or the de facto lead musician. If the captain is one of the musicians, it is most often the lead snare drummer or a corneta player for rehearsals or parades and the timbal player for staged performances. The captain or leader will indicate the transition from the mambo groove to a corte in one of several ways.

**Figure 2.5** Two examples of possible repique rhythms of the primero (1o) snare drums, while the segundos (2o), tambora, güira, and bass drum maintain the mambo groove performed by “Imperio Clásico.” In example (a), the primero drummer plays a different groove rhythm (full score); in example (b), the primero drummer articulates only certain on and off beats (full score) (♩ = flam; ♪ = buzz roll)

♩ = 200

(a)

♩ = 200

(b)

**Figure 2.6** Several examples of cortes: (a) call-and-response corte – the corneta cues the band before playing the call-and-response corte between corneta and drums (full score), (b) call-and-response corte based on the song “El Hombre del Palo” (The Man with the stick) – the leader cues the band verbally before stating the corte call, the snare/bass drums respond in unison (reduced score), and (c) snare drum solo corte while the band rests (reduced score), performed by “Imperio Clásico” (full score) (♩ = flam; ♪ = buzz roll; ♪♩ = double-stroke open roll; ♩ = rim shot)

The musical score is written in 4/4 time and consists of five staves: Corneta, Snare Drum, Tambora, Güira, and Bass Drum. The Corneta part begins with a 'Corneta cue' section at a tempo of 200, followed by a 'Corte' section. The Snare Drum part includes rhythmic notation and drum letters (RL, RRLR, R) indicating specific drumming techniques. The Tambora, Güira, and Bass Drum parts provide accompaniment. A 'Transition back to mambo' section is indicated at the end of the score.

(a)

Figure 2.6 cont. (caption shown on previous page)

Este es el hombre  
del palo,  
del palo,  
del palo...

Snare Drums  $\text{♩} = 200$

Voice el pan-ta-lón el pan-ta-lón el pan-ta-lón

Transition back to mambo

(b)

Snare Drums  $\text{♩} = 200$

Transition back to mambo

RRRRLRLRRR RRLRLR RRLRRRLRRRLRRRLR R LRLR LRRRRL

(c)

First, as many standard cortes borrow from popular songs of the 1980s and 1990s, the captain can cue a corte by singing lyrics from the original song (see also Chapter 3.3). Second, a corte may also be cued by the corneta player, whose rhythmically influenced melody can be played over the mambo ostinato to indicate an upcoming corte. Third, a corte can be cued by the lead snare drummer by simply breaking the rhythmic groove, which signals to the other players to stop playing until the corte is complete. Finally, the captain (especially if he is not playing an instrument) can signal the upcoming corte in the same way as a dance captain—by holding up the corresponding number of fingers, followed by a long whistle (see Figure 2.7). Typically, only new cortes have numbers. The signaling is necessary here as the group will be much less familiar with the anticipated call and the appropriate response to it.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> According to most of the Alibabá musicians with whom I spoke, the vast majority of the cortes are standard and almost all groups use the same cortes that were added to the rhythmic repertoire in Villa Francisca, San Carlos, and Villa María (all within the National District) during the 2000's. These include cortes invented by two prominent snare drummers from the first generation (Beto and César, see Chapter 3) taken from popular merengue songs from the 1980s and 1990s. Often, the cortes are based on part of the chorus of the song, but rather than repeating the exact melody or rhythmic accompaniment, utilize some salient feature of the song to invent a new short rhythm. Other longer, and more complex cortes include those invented by musician Alex Boutique in the 2000s.

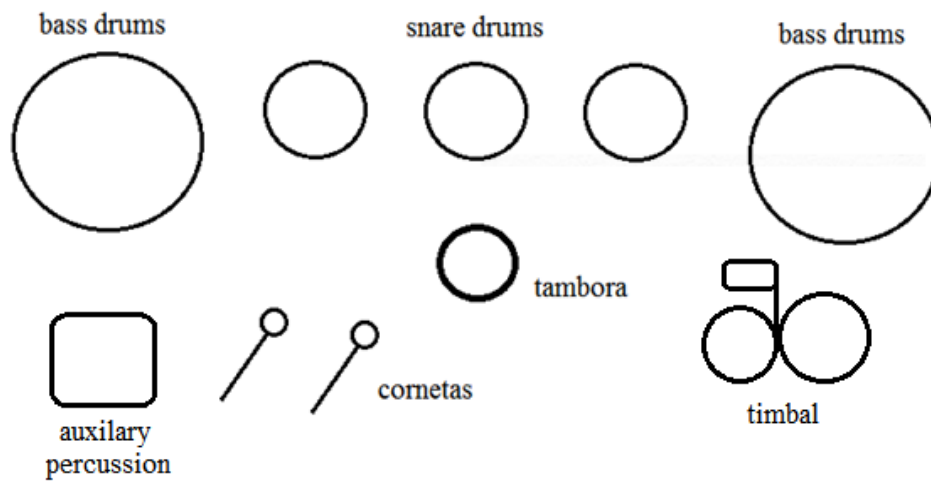


**Figure 2.7** Musical director César Carvajal (center, back facing camera) signaling a number to the musicians during a rehearsal of the Alibabá group “Fantasía Tropical” (Tropical Fantasy) (photo taken in Villa Duarte, East Santo Domingo, 21 November 2014)



As illustrated in Figure 2.7, Alibabá musicians are almost always men aged 18-30. As with the blocks of dancers, Alibabá musicians also tend to have a captain to help dictate the order of rehearsal. If the group has a captain who is directing (i.e., not playing an instrument), the entire group faces forward towards the captain. If the group captain is playing an instrument, the front line will turn around to face the back line in order to facilitate communication. During rehearsals, musicians stand in a linear formation, with the timbal (if present) and tambora players in front and the snare and bass drum players in back. Other players—including the cowbell, güira, corneta, or trombone—will either stand in front or in back of the drummers depending on space, quantity, and what the leader is doing (see Figure 2.8).

**Figure 2.8** Diagram of “Imperio Clásico’s” typical instrument line-up during the 2015 spring carnival season



My point in presenting the basic elements of Alibabá choreography and rhythm is to set the stage for a deeper analysis of these performance groups in action. Together, Alibabá music and dance work to both attract people with the voluminous sound of the band and hold their attention with the visual spectacle of the dancers. Of course, the significant amount of coordination that is necessary to bring Alibabá music and dance together requires a massive amount of preparation in advance. In continuing to build on this line of inquiry, I assess the individual investment required to participate in Alibabá in relation to the environment where music, dance, and social life in the barrio converge.

## *2.2 Alibabá Rehearsal Space: Dance and Music in Bodies, Time, and Place*

In order to understand the individual and community resources that have helped support Alibabá groups, but also propelled their popularity and importance, I turn now to a phenomenological discussion of the “embodied” and “inscribed” rehearsal space. According to Setha Low and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga, “embodied space is the location where human

experience and consciousness take on material and spatial form...underscoring the importance of the body as a physical and biological entity, as lived experience, and as a center of agency, a location for speaking and acting in the world” (2003, 2). In a similar way, the rehearsal is a location that combines human bodies and their experiences in time. Thinking of the rehearsal as making space in this way allows us some insight into the popularity of Alibabá as it pertains to both the individual biological costs and social benefits of dancing and playing music together. It also allows some insight into external factors driving Alibabá’s success due to the fact that these rehearsals take place in a very specific location—namely within the barrios of Santo Domingo.

In the case of Alibabá, group members must dedicate their time and bodies in the hopes of achieving success in the form of prize money during the competitive carnival season. In discussing the many hours that Alibabá groups spend dancing and playing music almost non-stop, El Niño asked me rhetorically:

How did they end up? They ended up tired [and] in finishing up tired, they went home. [Someone should] do a study to see the physical impact that it has. How many calories are burned in a succession of rehearsals [*prácticas*]? They spend five, six months practicing sometimes three times a week, four times a week before they are in carnival time [when] they practice daily [for] five, six hours.<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, I begin by quantifying the physical demands required to participate in an Alibabá group in terms of time and effort. Then, using my observations and experiences as a participant in “Imperio Clásico’s” rehearsals, I discuss several examples of group benefits that result from this dedication and sacrifice—specifically social synchrony.

I continue by looking not only at Alibabá as bodies moving in time, but also looking at the setting in which the Alibabá rehearsal occurs (i.e., the barrio) and how that connection to

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<sup>20</sup> “¿Cómo terminaban? Terminaban cansados [y] a terminar cansado, ellos iban a pasar por la casa. [Alguien debe] hacer un estudio de ver el impacto físico que tiene. ¿Cuántas calorías se queman en una sucesión de prácticas? Se pasan cinco, seis meses practicando a veces tres veces a la semana, cuatro veces a la semana antes de cuando estén en carnaval [cuando] practican diario [por] cinco, seis horas” (José Beltré, interview, 31 Jul 2014).

place informs group cohesion (see Rodman 2003). In other words, the rehearsal's location as an "inscribed space" is another way to understand the many additional benefits from participating in Alibabá that stem directly from the positive elements of life in the barrios—including relative proximity, inclusivity, and even *convivencia*. Moreover, I will suggest how inclusivity and *convivencia* have helped "Imperio Clásico" survive and thrive for more than twenty years without having independently won any of the most prestigious carnival awards (or the prize money that comes with it) for their efforts. In doing so, I also demonstrate how Alibabá group members have developed a meaningful relationship between themselves and with their audience.

#### Alibabá Dance and Music: Time and Effort at the Rehearsal

As discussed in the previous section, the two most striking aspects of the Alibabá rehearsal are the synchronized blocks of dancers and coordinated percussion ensemble. While the end goal is for each group to present their final performance at one carnival event or another, this synchrony can only be achieved with significant time and effort spent together practicing in advance during the multitude of rehearsals. In being together, the rehearsal also provides the environment for group members and audiences to feel a sense of belonging together—similar to what Victor Turner (1970) describes as *communitas*. Thomas Turino calls this feeling "social synchrony" and asserts that it emerges among social dance participants as a by-product of dancing together in the moment (2008, 41-44). In scientific terms, it has been suggested that physical exertion stemming from simultaneous movement over time (like social dancing) creates self-other synchrony and releases neurohormones like oxytocin and endorphins that contribute to social bonding and group cohesion (Tarr et al. 2014, 1-2).

More importantly, the social bonding that occurs within Alibabá groups also lasts well beyond the moment of dancing and playing music together. According to Liisa Malkki, “People who have experienced such things together carry something in common—something that deposits in them *traces* that can have a peculiar resistance to appropriation by others who were not there” (1997, 92; emphasis in original). Anthony P. Cohen echoes this sentiment, stating that this is “a matter of feeling, a matter which resides in the minds of the members themselves” (2001, 21). In other words, the social closeness that Alibabá groups foster may start in the moment, but the experience of being together and doing together also informs their social lives outside of the rehearsal space.

In order to learn the dance/music, Alibabá groups must spend a significant amount of time together. Alibabá group rehearsals start in the evening (around 7 to 9 pm) when it is not as hot, but also after school and work. Rehearsals take place during the week for the most part, but occasionally occur on Saturday. Rehearsals for the spring carnival season begin during the second week of January and continue into the first few weeks of March. Rehearsals for the summer carnival season are more flexible. Alibabá groups in the National District primarily rehearse only in advance of the spring carnival season (January-March). The only exception to this is some of the top competitive groups (like Eduardo “Miky” Herrera Taveras’ group from Villa Consuelo), who begin rehearsing new members as early as April. Conversely, Alibabá groups in the Santo Domingo Province rehearse both during the spring and summer carnival season. In East Santo Domingo, groups like “Imperio Clásico” begin rehearsing their musicians in early July, with full rehearsals beginning in August and lasting until the third week of November. At this point, most East Santo Domingo groups stop rehearsing for an extended Christmastime holiday break until January. However, several newly formed groups without

stable personnel rehearse without this break—such as Octavio “Octavio Alibabá” Mercado’s group from Tamarindo, which rehearses from August to March, and Kiobalky Polanco’s group from Los Faraones, which rehearses October to February. For those groups that rehearse during the summer season, rehearsals are held three to five days a week for around two hours a day. Whether from the National District or East Santo Domingo, all Alibabá group intensify their efforts in January—when rehearsals become daily and double in length.

As discussed in Section 2.1, dance choreography is the most variable component of Alibabá as it changes every year, therefore making it the central part of the rehearsal. Dance is also the primary focus of rehearsal because there is less of a need to rehearse the rhythmic elements of the group separately, for these elements stay fairly consistent year to year. However, musicians will come together separately to rehearse before the summer carnival season (beginning May-July). This gives both returning members a chance to polish their skills and allows for new members to learn the mambo groove and cortes. The only time I ever saw the musicians being rehearsed outright and independently of the dancers during the regular season is when two groups combined together as a “fusion group” for a joint dance routine performance for a parade. The fact that basic Alibabá rhythmic conventions are now fairly standardized makes it easier for musicians to form fusions or switch between groups without having to relearn much of the repertoire.<sup>21</sup>

For spring carnival 2015, three Alibabá groups from East Santo Domingo joined together to form a fusion group in order to all qualify and participate in the National Parade. With only a

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<sup>21</sup> For example, among the musicians of “Imperio Clásico,” one snare drummer previously performed with the other Los Mina group “Los Abusadores del Mambo” (The Strongmen of Mambo), and the timbal player previously performed with a group from Sabana Perdida in North Santo Domingo. For example, before joining the group, the timbal player already knew that basic rhythm and cortes and the “Imperio Clásico” musicians only needed a few rehearsals to adjust minor rhythmic details to suit their preferred sound (such as when the timbal player should mimic or compliment the snare drums or when to play on the auxiliary instruments).

week to go before the National Parade, one of the captains made the decision to rehearse a new introduction that the group would play in front of the judges stand before transitioning into the standard groove and cortes. One of the captains from Raul “Cacucho” Mateo Montas’ group “Dinastía Oriental” (Oriental Dynasty) directed the mini-rehearsal for about fifteen minutes, first explaining to the drummers the basic rhythm they should perform in relation to the corneta ostinato, followed by a call-and-response section between the corneta and the rest of the musicians (see Figure 2.9). After repeating this pattern twice, the transition into the mambo groove was to be given by the lead snare drummer. At the beginning of the rehearsal, only about six musicians between the three groups were present for this explicit instruction. By the end, the remainder of the musicians had shown up, but there was no more time to dedicate to rehearsing the players—the rest would simply have to learn the parts from the other musicians while the dancers were being rehearsed instead.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> While the rhythmic introduction as played at the National Parade on 1 March 2015 was a success overall, the musicians had not yet perfected it. A video of their performance in front of the final judge’s stand can be viewed on YouTube in “Desfile Nacional - #191 Dinastia Oriental, 3er Jurado,” posted by Jessica Hajek, 4 March 2015 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ZGz3JwcUUI>).

**Figure 2.9** Captain from “Dinastía Oriental” (Oriental Dynasty) (center) directs a musician’s rehearsal as other group captains and leaders from “Imperio Clásico” (right) assist (photo taken in Villa Faro, East Santo Domingo, 26 February 2015)



This time that Alibabá group members spend together over the course of so many days and so many months is only intensified by the incredible amount of energy that is consumed while dancing and playing music. Although rehearsals tend to emphasize the dance, the rhythm of the Alibabá musicians is the constant that holds the rehearsal together. Rehearsals always begin with the musicians, who usually warm up with a few numbers before establishing the groove. Once the Alibabá mambo rhythm is in full swing, the group leaders and captains can start rehearsing the blocks of dancers. The musicians play continuously because dancers often practice by themselves off to the side until it is their turn to rehearse with the captains. Therefore, it is essential that the musicians play for the entire rehearsal in order to provide a rhythmic backdrop for any block of dancers who may be practicing—even if the block primarily being rehearsed takes a break.

Interestingly, there is little coordination between the musicians and the dancers. Despite the importance of having a wall of sound present at the rehearsal, the dancers rarely interact with or react to what the musicians play. The only exception is a corte that came out of Villa



Consuelo around 2009, where the corneta and/or trombones perform repetitive glissandos up and down (or by imitating this via a Doppler effect achieved by moving a single-note corneta side to side), to which the dancers react by moving also side to side (see Figure 2.10).

**Figure 2.10** The Alibabá group “El Imperio Veneciano y Sus Titanes” (The Venetian Empire and its Titans) from Villa Consuelo performing a music/dance interactive choreography, sliding left to right as the trombones glissando up and down during the 2010 National Carnival Parade (photo taken on George Washington Avenue, National District, 7 March 2010)<sup>23</sup>



While dancing requires a substantial amount of energy, playing music at the rehearsal requires even more because the musicians are expected to play the entire time. To mitigate this intense effort, there are typically more musicians in any given group than instruments available to play. This way, musicians can switch out and take breaks whenever possible as individual performers tire. After surveying Alibabá groups in the National District and East Santo Domingo, I observed that each group will have a collection of two to five snare drums and one or two bass drums. The snare drum in particular requires an impressive amount of speed and stamina to perform for hours on end. Among current Alibabá groups, the preferred marching

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<sup>23</sup> A video of this performance can be viewed on YouTube in “#179 El Imperio Veneciano y sus titanes - Dominican Carnival National Parade 2010,” posted by Jessica Hajek, 2 April 2015 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U43BzCTAos0>).

snare drum is a 12" x 15" Ludwig or Slingerland brand vintage drum that was more common in the US during the 1970s and 1980s. Since a wood shell snare drum of those dimensions can weigh fifteen to twenty pounds, the groups will attempt to acquire metal shell drums whenever possible because they weigh less. Musicians will also remove any extraneous pieces that are attached to a drum (including stand holders) in order to reduce the weight as much as possible.

The snare drums must be made as light as possible because musicians carry them attached at the waist only by a mesh strap, meaning the bulk of the weight is carried in the lower body while the drummer is either standing in place during rehearsals or walking during parades. Somewhat surprisingly, this is also the case for how the bass drum is carried—which is most often a heavy 26" drum. This is in contrast to field drummers in the U.S. or carnival drummers from Curaçao (among other places) who carry their instruments using a shoulder harness or shoulder sling, which spreads the weight more evenly across their upper body (see Figure 2.11). Bass drummers also carry their instruments with a mesh strap around their waist. This causes them to play the drum rotated on its side, striking an upward facing drum head with (often homemade) drum mallets.

**Figure 2.11** Drummers from (a) the Alibabá group “Imperio Clásico,” carrying their instruments attached at the waist by a strap and a typical (photo taken in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo, 20 February 2015) and (b) the Curaçao brassband “Melody Makers,” carrying his instrument with a shoulder harness (photo taken in Juan Barón Plaza, National District, 27 February 2015)



(a)



(b)

In addition to the drums, I observed that each group will have two to six cornetas and/or trombones. In contrast to the drums, the corneta is a very light instrument. The corneta is similar in construction and function to a South African *vuvuzela*, consisting of a silver or black metal bell from a truck horn soldered to a length of  $\frac{3}{4}$ "-diameter PVC pipe that is cut in order to create the desired pitch of the single-note trumpet. The *corneta fina* or *corneta chica* (small corneta) uses a 5"-diameter semi-truck air horn, whereas the *corneta aguda* or *corneta grande* (big corneta) uses an 8"-10" diameter horn. If present, the *boquilla* (mouthpiece) is made from a PCV pipe connector that is affixed to the instrument via electrical tape; however, many times there is no boquilla and the player buzzes directly into the PVC pipe to produce the sound. Not surprisingly, it is difficult to play the corneta with any kind of finesse. Luckily, the main function of the corneta is to create volumes of sound rather than an exact pitch. The lung capacity needed

to create the loudest sound possible means that either musicians with the biggest physical stature or the most seasoned captains tend to be the ones who play corneta (see Figure 2.12).

**Figure 2.12** Performance stance of corneta player, demonstrating a high demand of physicality and endurance, from the group (a) “Los Reyes del Carnaval del Distrito” (Carnival Kings from the National District) (photo taken in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo, 10 August 2014) and (b) “Imperio Clásico” (photo taken in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo, 7 June 2015), plus examples of (c) bass drum and homemade mallet (left), corneta fina (center), and corneta aguda (right) (without boquillas) (photo taken in Villa Faro, Santo Domingo Este, 26 February 2015)



(a)



(b)



(c)

While the time spent together and physical exertion associated with social dance and music-making in general helps to stimulate a feeling of social synchrony in the moment, what makes Alibabá special is that their dedication and effort continue beyond the moment of the rehearsal. During the summer of 2015, I took lessons and performed alongside members of “Imperio Clásico,” and had first-hand experience of the additional time and physical exertion required to make music in an Alibabá band. Although I was an outsider and I had only known these musicians informally since the previous February, I had several opportunities to briefly glimpse the sense of belonging and social comfort that my colleagues shared with each other on a much deeper level.

In June 2015, “Imperio Clásico” was just beginning its summer carnival rehearsal season and recruitment period—in which I had the opportunity to take part. This meant that the first few weeks of rehearsals were being carried out in the satellite neighborhoods for the dancers living in Sabana Perdida, North Santo Domingo. Each night, around ten musicians and their instruments needed to be transported between Momón’s house in Los Mina and the La Javilla neighborhood in Sabana Perdida about five miles away. For the first few nights, there was no one available to drive us, so we all had to walk the entire distance—traversing busy highways and lugging heavy instruments uphill on poorly paved streets. This arduous ritual was repeated on other occasions, such as when satellite rehearsals moved to Tres Brazos, East Santo Domingo (also approximately five miles away). While playing alongside the “Imperio Clásico” musicians at the rehearsal created a literal sense of me being a part of the group, spending time and energy with these musicians outside of rehearsal created a deeper feeling of actually belonging there. This sense of belonging was fed by the interdependence and sense of community that is necessary to overcome an insurmountable task together. For instance, during our long walks to rehearsals, everyone

would take turns carrying the heavier instruments and others would occasionally buy water or snacks for all members of the group to share.

This suggested to me that while the popularity of Alibabá can be attributed in part to the social synchrony that results from dancing and playing music together at rehearsals, it does not fully account for the success of Alibabá groups in the face of material costs and monetary losses. The reason that these groups must walk to rehearsals is because the cost of paying for public transportation for ten musicians and their instruments is often more than the groups can afford. Moreover, members took turns buying water and snacks because not every member had enough extra money to buy something for himself. With this in mind, I turn to how certain aspects of barrio social life inform the various strategies that Alibabá members use to survive and overcome economic hardship within their neighborhood communities.

#### Alibabá Dance and Music: Convivencia and an Inclusive Environment at Rehearsals

There are few places in the Dominican Republic that capture the essence of the struggle to survive more than Santo Domingo's barrios—whose residents live on the margins of the country's urban and political center. Teresita Martínez-Vergne (2005) and Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof (2008) argue that Santo Domingo's barrio residents have over time formed their own, more inclusive brand of belonging that is rooted in their proximity and interdependence as a local community first, before city or nation. This theme of barrio inclusivity is in contrast particularly to the political and intellectual elites, who have historically invested heavily in dictating who and what is *not* "Dominican" via what Erin B. Taylor calls "the politics of

exclusion”—or using top-down legislation on citizenship and cultural policy agendas to exclude African and Haitian cultural elements from the national discourse (2009, 210).<sup>24</sup>

Another recurring theme in the discussions that I had with anyone during my field research in the capital was the notion of *convivencia*. *Convivencia* is one way that barrio residents talk about daily survival by depending on social networking to overcome economic shortfalls and material shortages. As recounted in her work on squatter settlements in the La Ciénaga barrio in the National District, Taylor highlights the importance of the extended family for surviving hardships through the words of one of the barrio’s residents: “We are a very united family. If one of us is hungry and the other one can give him food we do so enthusiastically, and we always treat each other well... We’re a family that is totally united because we were brought up to respect home life” (2010, qtd. in English on 110).<sup>25</sup> By extension, I have interpreted *convivencia* as foundational to how Dominicans build social cohesion writ large. Based on my own observations from within the Los Mina barrio in East Santo Domingo, *convivencia* also exists between close friends and neighbors as a sort of rainy-day investment, with the mindset of sharing what one has today with the knowledge that he may be without tomorrow.

Likewise, carnival group members and leaders in Santo Domingo depend on *convivencia* within their communities for survival. Indeed, many Alibabá groups and other carnival groups throughout the Dominican Republic typically experience shortages of materials, equipment, and

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<sup>24</sup> Much has been written about Dominicans Haitian heritage and Haitian in the Dominican Republic (Wucker 1999; Turits 2002; Candelario 2007). Over the past few years, the Dominican government has sought to redefine legal citizenship: In 2010, the government stopped granting birth-right citizenship to any individual born within the territory; in 2013, the government revoked citizenship to some 200,000 Dominicans of Haitian descent; and in 2015, the government planned to systematically deport Haitians from the country.

<sup>25</sup> Erin B. Taylor also suggests that social closeness is an especially important part of barrio culture, and that residents construe “social distance” as the cost of economic progress (2013, 117-118). However, I also experienced *convivencia* as a close friend of several middle class Dominican families living within Santo Domingo neighborhoods like Naco, Evaristo Morales, and Bella Vista. To that end, I also observed that *convivencia* in the barrios is not without its limits—as the only member of a carnival group with a van stopped coming to rehearsals after two weeks because the stress of driving everyone around all the time became too great.

supplies. For instance, leaders depend on micro-loans from friends or businesses, borrow or rent instruments from other musicians, and share resources and skills in order to get all of the necessary materials to keep their group running. The members, in turn, depend on their group leaders to provide these goods and services, while paying them back in small allotments (a *cuota*) or in kind whenever possible.

With the themes of *convivencia* and inclusivity in mind, it is easy to understand how the Alibabá rehearsal provides an ideal space for social cohesion to emerge among group members. More interestingly, I also observed that this social cohesion is produced by pooling resources and labor, and maintaining a participatory dance/music environment. Therefore, I suggest that *convivencia* also exists between Alibabá group members themselves who must work together to make the most of limited resources—particularly in order to acquire and maintain their instruments. The fact that many members are friends to begin with only helps to deepen their connections within the group.

Although it is not impossible to buy instruments and parts from one of downtown Santo Domingo's music stores, the cost of buying new and/or imported items is prohibitive to many Alibabá groups. This is one of the circumstances that I found, as a foreigner, facilitated my relationships with various Alibabá groups. For example, Momón contacted me some two weeks in advance of my trip and asked if I could buy two drums to bring with me to use during the spring 2015 carnival season. His reasons were that he did not own any 15" snares and they were getting harder to borrow. I managed to find two used snare drums over the internet, and also one from a music shop in my home town.<sup>26</sup> Since then, other group leaders have also purchased

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<sup>26</sup> In general, 15" snare drums have not been commonly used in the U.S since the 1980's, when 14" snare drums became the new standard. This means that the few drums that are for sale are used. A 15" used snare drum costs between US\$100-\$150 depending on the seller (RD\$4,500-\$6750). I have been told that depending on the quality of



drums and parts through me, as waiting several months between my return trips outweighs the cost of buying equipment in the country. This includes snare wires, tension rods, lugs, throw offs/butts, drumheads, and drumsticks. Of these, snare drumsticks are perhaps the most readily available in the country; however, Alibabá drummers break sticks on a regular basis due to the duration and intensity of their performances. Thus, it is nearly impossible for groups to afford to replace them as often as they would like and resort instead to wooden rods or twigs that are fashioned to function in place of manufactured drumsticks. Bass drum mallets are never purchased and always fashioned by taping padding with electrical tape to a short wooden rod or tambora stick.

Once the group acquires all of the necessary instruments and parts, the musicians must perform all required maintenance themselves and often must be creative when doing so. When I arrived with the aforementioned drums in Los Minas four days in advance of the final qualifying East Santo Domingo carnival parade in February 2015, the musicians had precious little time to adjust the instruments to suit their aesthetic preferences. In general, drums are tuned tight to create a very crisp, crystalline sound. Moreover, the snares are fastened tight across the bottom head on the snare drum to add density to the sound. In this instance, when one of the snares could not be adjusted properly, the musicians had to improvise in order to keep the snare in place. At first, they tried to tie the snare down with a zip tie. When that broke, they used a string cord to forcibly tie the snare down to one of the tension rods. Drumheads are only replaced when they break. When drumheads cannot be purchased from one of the few music stores located downtown in the National District, a drum may go unused for several months. “Imperio Clásico” musicians prevented this from happening by periodically touching up the drumhead by placing a

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drums for sale in the Dominican Republic, these instruments can range in cost from RD\$7,000-\$35,000 (similar to the cost of a new snare drum).

sheet over the drum and lightly ironing the head. The heat from the iron helped to remove dents from the head and maintain the integrity of the sound (see Figure 2.13).

**Figure 2.13** Musicians from “Imperio Clásico” performing maintenance by ironing drumheads on the (a) snare drum (photo taken in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo, 23 June 2015) and (b) bass drum (photo taken in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo, 6 June 2015)



Convivencia is one way in which Alibabá group members form a sense of place amongst themselves. However, as *convivencia* requires a certain amount of social closeness to be reciprocal, it does not readily explain how Alibabá groups maintain social cohesion with their audience members. Instead, I suggest that a more general sense of inclusivity as a part of *barrio* life is what fuels Alibabá’s popularity among members and spectators alike. Part of this link between Alibabá groups and their neighborhood communities is due, in part, to the fact that rehearsals happen outside in the very streets of where these people live.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> While taking a tour of San Carlos with Luis Roberto “Chachón” Torres (the creator of Alibabá), he recounted how the most common rehearsal places for Alibabá (c.1970s-1990s) were parking lots or sport courts (interview, 2 August 2014). Today, rehearsal spaces for Alibabá are still held outside in well-lit locations—but rarely on private property. Most Alibabá groups now simply practice in the street closest to the nearest, brightest, and most reliable street light. For most groups, this means having to deal with live traffic—with people on motorcycles constantly

More importantly, Alibabá groups depend on the inclusive nature of barrio life in order to fill their roster. “Imperio Clásico” is comprised of around sixty core performers of men, women, girls, and boys from in and around Los Mina—although upwards of one hundred may participate at a carnival event in some way, shape, or form. Dancers and musicians hail from Los Mina and surrounding neighborhoods like Tres Brazos, Katanga, and Sabana Perdida. A majority of the group members are ethnically Dominican, whereas others are the children of one or more immigrant parents from Haiti. In barrios like Los Mina, Dominicans (i.e., legal citizens) and non-Dominicans (i.e., legal and illegal immigrants) are friends and neighbors who are unified more by their economic precariousness and shared life experiences than their ethnic heritages.<sup>28</sup>

Although I previously stated that group membership is rather inclusive, this does not mean that it is random. Based on my observations, the group’s recruitment strategies for dancers and musicians were minimal and new members are often recommended by siblings or friends who are already members of the group. Sometimes rehearsals are held in different neighborhoods, where the sound of rhythm is used to attract the interest of other individuals who may come to the rehearsal and ask to join the group. Of course, everyone who joins does not become a permanent member right away, as there is a certain amount of vetting for these unknown individuals. They must prove their capabilities and that they can get along with the established members.

For “Imperio Clásico,” standard rehearsals took place about two blocks from Momón’s house during the spring 2015 carnival season. In general, Momón’s house functioned much like a base of operations—as both a point of encounter and departure where everyone was welcome.

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zipping between dancers and even cars being ushered past carefully by wary captains so that the vehicles do not hit any children.

<sup>28</sup> Other significant ethnic minorities groups that are also present in Los Mina include people of Chinese and Middle-Eastern descent.

Core members typically appeared at Momón's house shortly before rehearsal started—usually the core members of the group, including the senior musicians and dancers. Although each group had a generally agreed-upon rehearsal schedule, attendance was neither required nor guaranteed. For “Imperio Clásico,” some members (especially the captains) of the group would arrive at the leader's house well in advance of the rehearsal, usually just to socialize with anyone else who was already there.

Once a significant portion of the core group had arrived, Momón relocated to the rehearsal site. Momón mentioned that having a rehearsal was predicated on enough of the group showing up ready to rehearse—even to the point that if enough members showed up looking to rehearse on a day off, Momón would go and rehearse with them anyway. As the rehearsals took place in public, a *coro* (a term figuratively meaning “fans” or “entourage,” used to describe the crowd that follows a group) was also typically in attendance. Many *coro* members were simply bystanders who were already present at the site (those who either know about the rehearsals or just happen to be there) and others who were later drawn to the rehearsal by its sound. The *coro* either mingled amongst themselves or with the group members, or simply stood off to the side and watched.

As soon as the majority of the group was present, the dancers started to break off into their respective blocks by age and gender. Although the music is a necessary component, I noticed that in rehearsal time was primarily dedicated to the dance. In order to practice the dance numbers, each block rehearsed one at a time, although other blocks often practiced in the background. Each block rehearsed their numbers for anywhere from five to twenty minutes—although the duration depended on how well they danced. The allotted time for each block never exceeded twenty minutes and stayed fairly consistent from the beginning of the summer carnival

season in August to the end of the spring carnival season in March. The dance rehearsals started with the youngest members, with the women often performing before the men of a similar age group. The only time that all dancers rehearsed together at the same time was while practicing a routine.

There is no specific wardrobe for rehearsing, and most dancers rehearsed in whatever they are wearing that day. This sometimes resulted in participants wearing clothing that was less than ideal for high-intensity dancing—short dresses tended to ride up and loose pants tended to fall down. Whereas some dancers rehearsed in sneakers, a number of both men, women, and children also rehearsed in flip flops. This resulted in shoes flying off the feet of dancers. Some dancers wearing impractical or uncomfortable shoes simply danced barefoot on the pavement. Members often duck in and out of the rehearsal as needed for a variety of reasons. In the same way, individuals of the coro sometimes joined the dance in their corresponding gender/age block as long as they were familiar with the choreography. When this happened, these individuals always stood at the very back of the block as it rehearsed in order to enjoy, but not interfere. Overall, this “come as you are” atmosphere among Alibabá groups helps to maintain and grow its membership by allowing any interested individual to participate in his or her own way. Allowing non-members to participate off to the side encourages young children to imitate the dance or rhythm, and provides a positive experience for the groups and their community. The inclusive nature of the rehearsals is balanced by the relative inclusiveness of the carnival parades—where coro members often walk side-by-side with their favorite group along the parade route.

While inclusivity plays an important part in how Alibabá groups are formed, *convivencia* is what keeps these groups going. The interdependence that *convivencia* creates between

members and leaders is particularly important for groups like “Imperio Clásico,” which do not generate much in the way of economic benefits from all of their hard work. For example, if their efforts each year do not result in victory at a carnival celebration, group leaders like Momón and others must pay back loans and for services out of their own pockets.<sup>29</sup> As another example, on the occasions that “Imperio Clásico” has won prize money (as a part of a fusion group combining three Alibabá groups from East Santo Domingo), the winnings are kept by the leaders to cover costs rather than shared among individual members.

The answer, then, to why these groups continue to perform in the face of such hardships lies in the individual and group benefits. Speaking to this, in July 2014, El Niño gave me this final piece of advice: “In the case of Alibabá, at the Alibabá rehearsal, I want you to not only observe the phenomenon of music and dance, but also the behavior before—when the rehearsal begins—during, and after...they transform into a single mind because coordination is essential.”<sup>30</sup> As Turino suggests, it is during the dance that “multiple differences among us are forgotten and we are fully focused on activity that emphasizes our *sameness*—of time sense, of musical sensibility, of common goals...[and] *that sameness* is all that matters, for those moments when the performance is focused and in sync, that deep identification is *felt* as total” (2008, 18; emphasis in original). While at the Alibabá rehearsal, I noticed not only social synchrony and social cohesion between performers, but also within the crowds who came to watch them. What I saw were dancing bodies entirely focused on the task at hand, musicians playing through the

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<sup>29</sup> This fact was corroborated even by group leaders with a history of winning on occasion, including Eduardo “Miky” Herrera in Villa Consuelo (interview, 13 June 2015).

<sup>30</sup> “En la práctica de Alibabá, quiero que observes no solamente el fenómeno de la música y baile, pero el comportamiento antes—cuando se empieza la práctica—durante y después...se convierten en una mente porque la coordinación es esencial” (José Beltré, interview, 31 Jul 2014).

pain, and spectators standing shoulder to shoulder completely transfixed. In other words, the rehearsal was a space within the barrio where everyone belonged together.

### *2.3 Perceptions of Alibabá Rehearsals in the Public Sphere: Discourses of Poverty and Crime Concerning Young Males in Santo Domingo*

While in the field, I found myself gravitating towards the male musicians of “Imperio Clásico,” which laid the groundwork for the study of a single Alibabá group during the carnival season in Santo Domingo. In her thought-provoking study of Dominican gendered identities and traditional *merengue típico* musicians from Santiago, ethnomusicologist Sydney Hutchinson (2016) proposes analyzing gender as a whole system built by the body, music, movement, and gesture. In particular, she uses the trope of the male *tíguere* and female *tíguera* (“tigers,” a local Dominican term for idealized, sensual, and gendered identities in the urban environment) to question how many of these artists disidentify with and actively confront their own Dominicanness.

Likewise, there is an indication that Alibabá is advancing the public profiles of two groups that are often socially invisible within the Dominican Republic – women and members of the LGBT community. Women’s roles in Alibabá groups have certainly changed the most over the last forty years. During the first years of Alibabá performance (1970s-1980s), women wore costumes as female characters from the story of “Alibaba and the Forty Thieves” (such as “Zayas” or “Juana,” or as “Arabian princesses”), but they did not dance. Blocks of women dancers were only permanently added to the Alibabá lineup in 1986 with the group “Los Doctores” (The Doctors), with women dressing and dancing in nurses’ costumes (Batista 2013, 52-53). Since then, the role of women in these groups has only continued to grow in the second generation of performers—taking on roles as dance captains for female blocks or even becoming

the leader of the entire group.<sup>31</sup> There are currently two female leaders of Alibabá groups. Marliuz Torres operates her group in Los Frailes, East Santo Domingo. She is also one of the former presidents of the carnival union of East Santo Domingo (UCOSDE). Along with her brother Roberto, she has run the group “Fantasía de Alibabá” (Alibabá Fantasy) since 2008 after her father Luis Roberto “Chachón” Torres retired. Emperatriz “Yua” Rodríguez operates her group “Yuatallón” (Yua’s Battalion) in Sabana Perdida in North Santo Domingo, while at the same time raising her young daughter and working as the director of Children’s Carnival in the Carnival Directorate Office, a subsidiary of the Ministry of Culture.<sup>32</sup> As a costumed performance, Alibabá is also creating a unique opportunity for gender and sexual minorities to belong by creating a space for both transgendered women and homosexual men in these groups. Despite facing discrimination and harassment on a societal level, I observed that there is an open tolerance for transgendered and/or homosexual members in Alibabá groups. Moreover, for Alibabá groups, this seems to offer some benefits and flexibility in terms of personnel because these individuals often can dance in either the men’s or women’s block. While these issues represent lines of future inquiry, in the discussion that follows I will focus primarily on perceptions of males as “tígueres” in relation to crime and poverty in Santo Domingo’s barrios.

As a performance practice, part of Alibabá’s popularity in the barrios of Santo Domingo can certainly be attributed to the combination of flashy dance, an attractive rhythm, and the sense of belonging that results. Despite these positive aspects of barrio life, in the words of El Niño, Alibabá still suffers from a problem of perception because of the attitudes regarding young males from the barrios propagated by the residents of Santo Domingo. One of the most important

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<sup>31</sup> There are also several prominent female leaders of other types of carnival groups, including *diablo* groups.

<sup>32</sup> In 2015, Rodríguez began outsourcing the management of her group’s day-to-day operations to one of her captains in order to concentrate more on her full-time employment and family.



takeaways from the carnival leaders that I interviewed was how often they cited their hard work and efforts to overcome their own personal economic shortfall and material poverty as positive traits that are underappreciated by Dominicans from other parts of the city. However, another important observation that I made is that some also expressed feelings of how unfairly carnival groups are treated despite trying to overcome other larger social factors that are out of their immediate control. When I asked acclaimed diablo carnival group leader Francisco “William-Dos” Arias if he thought that the negative perceptions of poverty in the barrio were deserved, he stated:

I don’t think so, and I think that they [barrio residents] are stronger because, even with crime that is in the barrio, and drug addiction, we are people that keep ourselves strong in preserving traditions....So, I don’t think so. We are rich in everything except delinquency. It is a factor that lamentably, with the economic crisis—where there is economic crisis in whatever country around the world, this level of crime increases—it is a [common] denominator.<sup>33</sup>

Whereas carnival groups in the barrio have historically had to overcome issues of poverty, William-Dos’s response touches on the fact that there are relatively new problems particular to the twenty-first century that carnival group must now also contend with—namely an increase in crime due to an economic crisis and drugs. However, his response also touches on a social subtext: that the people most blamed for what Dominicans refer to as *delincuencia* (or the increase in criminal acts and criminal behavior associated with these crises) are also the people most often affected by it, including those who live in poverty and particularly young males. The effects of these negative perceptions become more evident by examining how the discourse of *delincuencia* in Santo Domingo has affected the contemporary Alibabá rehearsal. On the one

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<sup>33</sup> “Creo que no, y creo que son más fuertes que aparte de la delincuencia que hay en los barrios, [y] la drogadicción, tenemos personas que nos mantenemos fuertes en preservar las tradiciones....Entonces, yo creo que no. Somos ricos en todo a parte de la delincuencia. Es un factor que lamentablemente con la crisis económica—donde hay crisis económica en cualquier país del mundo, sube ese nivel de delincuencia—es como un denominador [común]” (Francisco Arias, interview, 25 February 2015).

hand, many feel that attitudes about Alibabá rehearsals have been subsumed within the negative perceptions of barrio life regarding poverty and crime. On the other hand, many leaders also strongly feel that the Alibabá rehearsal is one strategy to tackle these issues in their communities.

As intimated by William-Dos, one of the most significant factors contributing to the changing perceptions of delincuencia among young male residents in the barrio was the economic recession of 2003. During a period of substantial growth and prosperity over the period of 1992-2002, the country enjoyed an expanding tourism industry, improved local manufacturing, and increased remittances from Dominicans abroad that kept inflation fairly steady with the Dominican peso valued against the US dollar—fluctuating between RD\$5 to \$8 against US\$1. This was coupled with the election of the Dominican Liberation Party (PLD) candidate Lionel Fernández in 1996, who began an extensive urban development program in Santo Domingo, focused on providing government housing projects and improving public transportation.

All of this came to a rather sudden end when the Dominican Republic's third largest bank *Banco Intercontinental* (Intercontinental Bank, or Baninter) collapsed in April 2003 and the Dominican peso devalued 200% in the span of a year. The subsequent rapid inflation caused food prices to soar to the point that the government enacted price ceilings on basic necessities like chicken, eggs, and bottled water (Hanke 2004, 2). According to a joint report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Latin America and the Caribbean Region of the World Bank, this period of high inflation coupled with the declining value of Dominican currency resulted in 1.5 million Dominicans falling into poverty and 670,000 falling into extreme poverty (2007, 25). In particular, youth unemployment rates rose from 23% to 31%, hitting the urban areas even harder (68). Although the currency has since stabilized at its current rate of

about RD\$45 to US\$1, wages continue to be low and many barrio residents are driven to work in the informal sector or remain unemployed.<sup>34</sup> The International Labor Organization (ILO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) also report that, even as labor productivity has grown consistently since the end of the crisis, wage earnings have actually declined. In 2010, the average hourly wage of a Dominican worker was RD\$73—which was actually on average 20% lower than it was in 2000 (2013, 12).

The second problem contributing to perceptions of delincuencia and crime mentioned by William-Dos is the fairly recent epidemic of drugs and drug trafficking in the city. Interestingly, it has only been within the last twenty-five years that international organized drug cartels have introduced large-scale drug trafficking to the Caribbean (and especially Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico) as other cocaine routes from Columbia to Miami became increasingly targeted by US drug enforcement agencies (U.S. Department of State 2015, 105). The Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) estimates that upwards of 6% of the global supply of cocaine now passes through either Haiti or the Dominican Republic before reaching its ultimate market (Ibid.). As a result of the logistics of shipping these drugs in and out of the Dominican Republic, paired with the desire for easy money and a penal system that prohibits minors from going to prison, gang activity and domestic drug addiction peaked during the years 2005-2010 (UNODC and WB 2007, 72). According to an article in the Dominican newspaper *Diario Libre*, Maj. Gen. Manuel Castro Castillo—the chief of the

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<sup>34</sup> The informal sector in Santo Domingo represents the part of the labor market which is neither taxed nor regulated by the government. These types of jobs are insecure and typically depend on cash transactions, including jobs like street vendor, freelance taxi driver, grocery bagger, shoeshine, etc. Although overall unemployment levels have fallen in the Dominican Republic since the 1990s, the percentage of informal sector jobs since the year 2000 continues to occupy around 50% of the Dominican labor force (ILO 2014, 6).

National Police force in the Dominican Republic—blamed up to 75% of violent crime and death in the country on drug use and drug dealing (Santiago Díaz 2013, para. 3).

In an attempt to reduce crime, the Dominican government implemented the *Plan de Seguridad Democrática* (Democratic Security Plan) in conjunction with the National Police (PN), National Directorate of Drug Control (DNCD), and other entities in April 2005 (Artiles 2009, 14). The Plan’s pilot program was named “Barrio Seguro” (Secure Neighborhood), which was first put into action in thirteen of the city’s barrios and currently operates in seventy-nine neighborhoods throughout the National District and Santo Domingo Province (Artiles 2009, 16; MIP 2015, 22).<sup>35</sup> It is important to note that the increase in policing has had some important successes in reducing violent crime. As a result, the number of homicides each year within the Dominican Republic has decreased significantly since 2011, and especially within the urban zones of Santo Domingo (ONE 2015a, 39-40). Moreover, with the help of other international drug agencies, the DNCD effectively ended drug flights into the Dominican Republic after the arrest of two of the most notorious Colombian drug lords operating in the country in 2010 (Urbáez 2010, para. 1-4). At the same time, it is necessary to point out that the Barrio Seguro program has done little to reduce other kinds of crime (such as robberies or assaults), nor residents’ anxieties, because it does not directly address the underlying social issues (including material poverty, unemployment, or lack of education) at the root of these problems.

Part of the 2005 Democratic Security Plan enacted curfews on the sale of liquor, outlawed the importation of firearms, and increased nightly police patrols of the barrios as an extension of the “Barrio Seguro” program (Artiles 2009, 16; see also MIP 2015). In 2012, the National “Anti-Noise” Commission and the National Police began enforcing noise ordinance

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<sup>35</sup> The “Barrio Seguro” program is also active in neighborhoods in the Santiago, San Cristóbal, and La Altagracia provinces (MIP 2015, 22).

violations after 9 pm. Furthermore, the Dominican Chamber of Deputies passed an initiative that outlawed the use of water pipes or the hookah in public places, including bars, clubs, and *colmados* (convenience stores) in 2013. None of these have affected Alibabá groups more than the “Anti-Noise” Commission, which otherwise targets loud music coming from car speakers or *colmados*. As recounted to me by many Alibabá leaders, rehearsals used to run until 10 or 11 pm but now end promptly at 9 pm. This is because under the “Barrio Seguro” program and in conjunction with Law No. 64-00, Article 115, citizens can call 9-1-1 Emergency Services to report loud noises in their neighborhoods (Congreso Nacional 2000, 49; MIP 2015, 11). For example, on one occasion on a warm night in June 2015, “Imperio Clásico” was rehearsing with a group of young children in Sabana Perdida around 8 pm when one of the neighborhood residents called 9-1-1 to report the disturbance. The police arrived around 8:15 pm to disperse the group despite the fact that this noise ordinance typically does not go into effect until 9 pm. Several of the group members successfully convinced the police to let them play a little while longer. However, after these police officers left, a different pair of Anti-Noise police returned at 8:45 pm. Since the group could not afford a fine, the rehearsal ended.

One of the most important factors driving this kind of legal discourse is public opinion (which work together to incriminate certain kinds of people and behavior as criminal and cast them as morally suspect). Among all residents of Santo Domingo, no single segment of the population has become more thoroughly associated with *delincuencia* and crime than young males living in the *barrio*. Of course, the discourse of the young male delinquent known locally as a “*tíguere*” is not a new one; in fact, the *tíguere* has been a concern to urban dwellers as a result of the waves of urbanization and migration to Santo Domingo since the 1960s. However, a more contemporary interpretation of the *tíguere*-type began to emerge as rural-to-urban

migrations gave way to external migration to cities like New York in the 1980s and 1990s. In the U.S., the tíguere took on dimensions of black hip-hop culture in terms of dress and demeanor among Dominican-American youth, including the valorization of gang and drug culture (Abreu 2004, 184; cited in Hutchinson 2008, 368). According to Taylor, many Dominicans began to blame return migrants for bringing these trends back to the country, which then ran rampant in Santo Domingo in the wake of the economic crisis and drug trade (2009, 141). With this shift, the image of the tíguere transformed from what Rita Ceballos calls an “intelligent and smart youth, and even protector of the barrio” to a “criminal youth, engaged in banditry, drug dealer, who has caused—provoked—and who damages the image of the barrio” (2004, 151).<sup>36</sup>

As a way to legitimize the contemporary discourse of the tíguere, the media presents aspects of barrio identity as evidence of the moral danger posed by young males. For instance, the local Spanish dialect prevalent throughout the barrios is labelled as the “language of delinquents.” As cited in an article for the Dominican newspaper *Listín Diario*, Judge Rafael Baéz (the chief sentencing judge of the Dominican Republic) considers barrio slang to be a reflection of social degradation—linked to drug trafficking, lack of education, gang activity, and incarceration (Quiroz 2010, para.5). As another example, José Antonio Molina (the director of the National Symphony Orchestra) expressed a similar opinion in 2014, endorsing the idea that urban musical genres like reggaetón are “a venom to society” and incite violence (qtd. in *Listín Diario* 2014b, para. 1).<sup>37</sup> Finally, several recent Dominican films have presented young men involved in drug trade within the barrios of Santo Domingo as their principal antagonists, including: “Oro y Polvo” (marketed in English as “Powder and Gold”) (2015), a retelling of

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<sup>36</sup> “joven astuto, inteligente, y hasta protector del barrio”...“joven ladrón, del bandidaje, vendedor de drogas, que ha causado—provocado—y que daña la imagen del barrio.”

<sup>37</sup> “veneno para la sociedad”

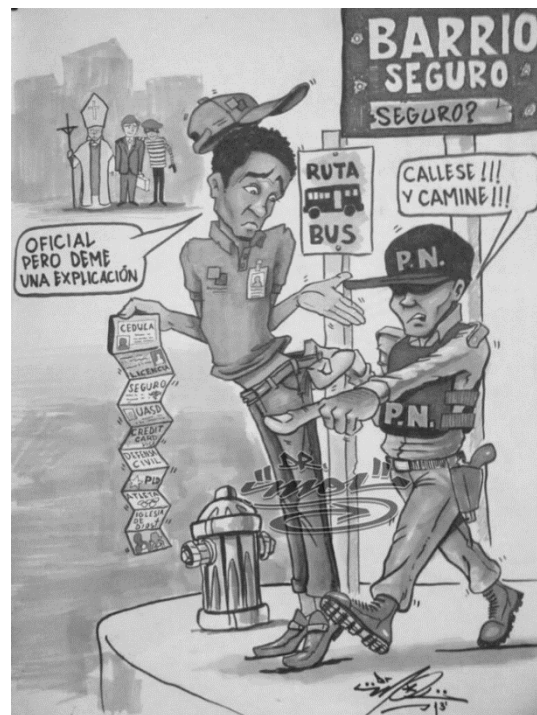
Macbeth as a Dominican drug war; “Cristo Rey” (2013), which explores issues of family, race, and local drug dealers inside the National District barrio of Cristo Rey; and “El Rey de Najayo” (The King of Najayo Prison) (2012), a dramatization of the life and death of the most notorious Dominican drug trafficker Flórian Félix.

According to Taylor, the legal discourse that criminalizes poverty is one of many strategies that obscure the role that social inequality plays as the root of crime (2009, 132). Moreover, the social discourse of the *tíguere* also works to eclipse the fact that young Dominican males are often the victims of street crime themselves, in addition to being the victims of police violence and corruption (see Figure 2.14). As previously mentioned, several carnival leaders are engaged in a similar struggle to be accepted as executors of Dominican culture despite stigmas against poverty. As a result, many carnival group leaders that I interviewed expressed concerns about how perceptions of *delincuencia* affect them and what part they must play in combating this discourse. For group leaders like Kiobalky Polanco, this puts the onus on carnival performers to change the public’s perception of them, stating: “Because our society thinks that carnival is only for *delincuencia* and where it should be the opposite....And this weighs on the shoulders [*está en el peso*] of each carnival participant to keep cultivating culture before anything else.”<sup>38</sup> The two most commonly mentioned ways that Alibabá leaders feel that they are actively doing so is by instilling discipline and providing training for their members in the rehearsal setting.

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<sup>38</sup> “Porque nuestra sociedad piensa que el carnaval es solamente de *delincuencia* y donde debería ser lo contrario....Y eso está en el peso de cada *comparsero* de ir cultivando la cultura ante todo” (Kiobalky Polanco, interview, 23 November 2014).

**Figure 2.14** A cartoon depicting a young Dominican male being accosted by a police officer, illustrating how a common sentiment of their felt experience of unfair criminalization at the hands of the National Police and as a result of programs like Barrio Seguro—while the perceived real criminals (the clergy, politicians, etc.) are unhindered in the background (English translation provided below) (original artist unknown, posted by Twitter user Dr. Molecula, 1 April 2013)



Signage: *Barrio Seguro* (Secure Neighborhood) Secure?  
 Young Dominican man: “But officer give me an explanation”  
 National Police Officer: “Shut up!!! and walk!!!”

First, multiple group leaders cite the demands of the Alibabá rehearsal schedule in terms of commitment and discipline as an effective means of controlling and reducing delincuencia. The sound of the Alibabá rehearsal is such that all kinds of people are attracted to it, which according to several group leaders includes some individuals who may be perceived to be or are delinquents. Therefore, group leaders are aware of the impression that their audiences may have of the Alibabá group as a result, such as Félix “Navidad” Reyes, who told me: “For the most part, those that come to watch the rehearsals are—tígueres come, the police come, lawyers come—all classes come, all classes of people come to the rehearsal. Everyone comes together



[including] people that have a problem with other people and those problems are noticed.”<sup>39</sup> To combat these issues from affecting the group, leaders cite the physical demand and discipline required to participate in Alibabá as mostly eliminating this problem among its members.

According to group leader Juan Carlos “Kiko” Núñez from Villa María, the young members of his group have little time to think about anything besides rehearsal, saying:

Because you have them from 6 in the evening until 10, 11 at night, because they leave already tired—they go home, one goes thinking about nothing more than their Alibabá. You understand me? Yes, because, right now, we are in the off season [*no tenemos tiempo de eso*], but as soon as January arrives you will see the whole world dancing in the barrio first thing in the morning. The young tígueres wake up, they set themselves up in the door of the colmado to dance and learn just one step—until the clock strikes 6 pm [and] they are showering for their rehearsal.

This is one part—that one does a job for society who from their point of view do not perceive it this way. But the fathers and the mothers and the aforementioned neighborhoods, when they see their kid, what he is still doing at the rehearsal, and they come to see him—because all the fathers and mothers always come to the rehearsal to see—we are shifting their perceptions [*los vamos desfocalizando*] about any bad thing that they may have in mind.<sup>40</sup>

Similarly, Pedro Thompson, whose Alibabá group from Sabana Perdida won the Grand Prize at the National Carnival Parade in 2013, explained to me:

All the Alibabás are good, but there is a space where each group has all types of people...and I have nearly every kind of delinquent under the sun. For example, when I take and I save a person from the area, where he has his difficulties, and he is in my project, in my rehearsals, I feel happy. Last year, at my rehearsals, there were some policemen that would not leave me alone—or two, three of the guys because they were delinquents—and every time they [the police] came, they would beat them up [*los mangaban*]...

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<sup>39</sup> “Mayormente, los que vienen para ver los ensayos son—vienen tígueres, vienen policía, vienen abogados—vienen todas las clases, todas esas clases de personas vienen al ensayo. Todos se juntan [incluyendo] gente que tienen lío con otras personas y que se ven esos problemas” (Luis Félix “Navidad” Reyes, interview, 26 Nov 2014).

<sup>40</sup> “Porque tú los agarras desde las 6 de la noche, lo suelta a las 10, las 11, ya porque van cansados—se van por su casa, que va uno pensando nada más que en su Alibabá. ¿Tú me entiendes? Sí, porque así ahora mismo no tenemos tiempo de eso, pero inmediatamente [cuando] llegue enero ya tú ves a todo el mundo en el barrio bailando desde por la mañana. Los tigueros se levantan, se ponen en la puerta del colmado a bailar [y] aprender solo un paso—que llega las 6 de la tarde [y] están bañándose para su ensayo. Esto es una parte—que uno, realmente le hace su trabajo a la sociedad que desde un punto de vista de ellos no lo perciben así. Pero, los padres y las madres y las mismas barriadas cuando ven que su hijo, los que hace todavía en el ensayo y van a verlo—porque todos los padres y las madres siempre van al ensayo a ver—los vamos desfocalizando de cualquier cosa mala que tengan en el pensamiento” (Juan Carlos Núñez, interview, 4 August 2014).

But, what happens in this space? For example, when I know that there was a delinquent and [his] thing is to steal, I delegate to [him] that [he] take charge of discipline for me. In other words, I give [him] a space that is important to me, even though it may be just for one hour daily, and that allows for not looking [*quedar*] bad.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to controlling the criminal elements, Alibabá may also be helping curb less publicly desirable, but legal behaviors among its members. Based on my observations, alcohol and tobacco are typically present in some form at rehearsals—including beer, whiskey, sweet red wine, cigarettes, or hookah. However, these substances are very rarely used during the rehearsal while an individual is actively practicing the dance or music. Most often, only captains, group leaders, or individuals from the coro who are not actively participating will be drinking or smoking throughout the entire rehearsal. Actively participating members only drink or smoke a small amount while taking a break, or just wait until the rehearsal is over. Afterwards, most members of “Imperio Clásico” also return to their own home or Momón’s workshop rather than continue to socialize in the streets or at a colmado.

Second, other leaders cite amateurism or a lack of formal training rather than delinquency as the possible source of any negative attitudes towards the Alibabá rehearsal or its members. For example, Ramón “Chicho” Rivas renounced Alibabá after over twenty years of participation (as both a dancer and a leader) in 1993. In an interview that I conducted with Chicho, he stated:

Why did I leave? Because like I was explaining to you before, back then sometimes Alibabá was being damaged because of *ñoñoría* [lack of character] – people that didn’t know how to dance, people who didn’t even know how to dance bolero. And you try them out. I used to have this tíguere that joined my

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<sup>41</sup> “Todos los Alibabá son buenos, pero hay un espacio donde cada agrupación tiene todos tipos de personas....Y yo tengo casi todos los delincuentes del mundo. Por ejemplo, cuando yo agarro y rescato una persona del medio donde tiene sus dificultades, y está en mi proyecto, yo me siento feliz. El año pasado, en mi práctica, había unas policías que no me dejaban tranquilo—ni a dos, tres de los muchachos porque eran delincuentes—que cada vez que iban, los mangaban....Pero, ¿qué pasa con este espacio? Por ejemplo, cuando yo sé que estuvo un delincuente, y lo tuyo es robar, yo te pongo a ti a que me dirigía—la disciplina. O sea, te doy un espacio donde yo tengo importante, aunque sea por una hora diaria y eso no te permite a no quedar mal” (Pedro Thompson, interview, 11 August 2014).

group [*imitates bad dancing*] – one and two, one and two – and he couldn’t dance.<sup>42</sup>

Francisco “Alex Boutique” Blanco, who was active as an Alibabá leader from 1996 until 2008, is also critical of the effect that the lack of formal training is having on the ability of group leaders to maintain their group. However, as a professional musician himself, Boutique speaks of this issue more from a standpoint of a lack of opportunity rather than the inability to learn. During an interview, he said:

Right now, there is a musical problem, now real Alibabá is not being played—right now, what’s going on there is a mess of rhythms [*un lío de ritmos*—of Alibabá rhythms. What I would like—if they were to allow me to do so in any group or any person—I can give music lessons in what is the original Alibabá rhythm that the groups should be playing....

I would rather invest putting a school with those [the Ministry of Culture’s] resources—to teach the guys what Dominican folklore is, and the importance that their roots, their customs have. I would support finding resources to teach young people....It’s because of this that people have to at least study a little bit of music. You ask any one of these guys, “What is a musical staff?” and no one will tell you—neither will they tell you where the musical notes are written because they don’t have the knowledge.<sup>43</sup>

As a way to address this issue, other senior Alibabá musicians who are still active are already engaged in informal musical training endeavors. For instance, César Carvajal studied percussion at the Santo Domingo conservatory before joining Alex Boutique’s group as a snare

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<sup>42</sup> “¿Por qué lo dejé? Porque como te explicaba ahorita, allá los Alibabá a veces habían dañado porque ya tenía ñoñoría – gente que no sabe bailar...la gente que no sabe bailar ni bolero. Y tú los ensayabas. Yo tenía un tíguere que entró en lo mío – uno y dos, uno y dos – y no podía bailar” (Ramón “Chicho” Rivas, interview, 1 August 2014). Rivas currently directs the diablo (devil) group “Los Dragones de Villa María” (The Dragons of Villa María).

<sup>43</sup> “Ahora mismo, hay un problema musical, ahora no se está tocando Alibabá de verdad—ahora mismo, los que hay allí es un lío de ritmos—de ritmos de Alibabá. Que me gustaría—si ellos me lo permitieran en cualquier comparsa o cualquier persona—yo lo puedo dar instrucciones de música de cuál es el ritmo de Alibabá original que deben de tocar las comparsas....Yo aportaría mejor poner una escuela con esos recursos [del Ministerio de Cultura] y enseñar a los muchachos lo que es el folclor dominicano y la importancia que tienen sus raíces, sus costumbres. Yo apoyaría por conseguir recursos para enseñar a los jóvenes....Por eso que la gente tiene que por lo menos estudiar un poquito de música. Tú lo preguntas a cualquier muchacho de esos, ‘¿Que lo qué es un pentagrama musical?’ y ninguno te dicen—ni a dónde se escribe la nota musical tampoco te van a decir porque no tienen los conocimientos” (Francisco “Alex Boutique” Blanco, interview, 25 November 2014). Alex Boutique is currently the front man for the professional mambo group “Alex Boutique y los Reyes del Mambo” (Alex Boutique and the Mambo Kings).

drummer in the 1990s. He now serves as the musical director for groups in Villa Consuelo and Villa Duarte. During the summer of 2015, he began rehearsing a marching band in Villa Duarte comprised of young Alibabá drummers with several older instrumentalists with marching band experience. During a break of one such rehearsal on 25 June, Carvajal mentioned to me that the primary goal of this project was to get more gigs for his musicians outside of the carnival season. He mentioned that currently, his biggest hurdle is that this generation of snare drummers has not been trained to play anything but the mambo rhythm. Thus, he has made it his mission to correct this by teaching them more versatility.

In the eyes of these group leaders, the negative stigma against all young Dominican males as delinquents is undeserved. Rather, group leaders point to the Alibabá rehearsal's external social structures, like discipline and education, that are helping to give creative and physical outlets to young people from the barrio who may lack access to other kinds of community services and be caught up in drug activity instead. Therefore, in considering these factors, it becomes possible to understand why individuals like El Niño consider Alibabá to function as a social enterprise by suggesting exactly what kind of social change Alibabá may be capable of and for whom.

#### *2.4 Alibabá as a Social Enterprise*

Like many members of other performance groups, those who participate in Alibabá benefit from the social interaction that stems from spending time together dancing and playing music together in rehearsal. Echoing El Niño's opinions that I shared at the beginning of this chapter, what makes Alibabá special then, is that it is capable of meaningful change in the lives of its performers outside of the rehearsal as well—in part because of requisite personal

dedication and subsequent group social cohesion. First, several Alibabá leaders like Momón and Kiko describe their groups as more than carnival acts, but also as social “projects” or “movements” that capitalize on the social cohesion and sense of belonging that stems from rehearsing in order to maintain strong connections into the off-season (roughly from April until July, and again in November and December). When these groups are not practicing, many leaders organize sporting events or other community service activities to keep young members active and contributing to their neighborhoods. Some of these events are as simple as community fundraisers or sweeping up trash.

Other activities revolve around sports or politics. In the off-season, Octavio’s Alibabá group from Tamarindo has played together as a volleyball team in the Dominican Volleyball Selection since 2003. Every year, Alexis Núñez organizes a team from members of his group from Villa Francisca to participate in the Inter-Street Basketball Tournament. In the summer of 2015, Alibabá group leaders from the National District and East Santo Domingo began organizing friendly basketball tournaments. At a community level, Alibabá bands often play in the stands in support of various sports activities that take place between groups during the carnival off-seasons. In terms of civic participation, Momón and Núñez launched small-scale (but ultimately unsuccessful) political campaigns as candidates for city council, each depending on the support of their group members. For example, Momón enlisted his group members to assist in hanging flyers around Los Mina.

Second, the social cohesion among Alibabá group members that is a result of extensive rehearsing is not only necessary for overcoming economic shortages and perceptions of delincuencia, but also for dealing with the daily risks of accidents and health crises. During the 2015 spring carnival season alone, two Alibabá group leaders were hospitalized with stress

related illnesses—one with chronic nosebleeds and another who fell into a brief coma due to cranial swelling. However, the entirety of their group members and larger Alibabá community rallied around these leaders until their health recovered. Moreover, hardly a week seemed to pass when carnival members or their friends both young and old would pass away unexpectedly. This was sometimes due to relative old age, but more often than not, it was young males dying unexpectedly. For instance, one of the bass drummers from Momón's group passed away in January of 2015 at the age of nineteen after crashing his motorcycle. In May 2016, an eighteen-year old member of the Villa Duarte Alibabá group died after a month-long coma. In these cases, and in others, the group has become an instrumental part of their fallen friends' nine-day period of mourning ceremonies that are common in the Dominican Republic. In a place where just making it day-to-day is not guaranteed, these individuals depend on each other and their communities in very meaningful ways.

Although I do not claim that participating in Alibabá is a solution to crime and poverty within the city of Santo Domingo, I do suggest that encouraging cultural practices like Alibabá offers its members and fans alternatives to both the realities of and anxieties about the barrio. As a social enterprise, participating in Alibabá rehearsals increases the collective efficacy of barrio residents that could more effectively counter perceptions of poverty and crime within the barrio. So, what are the enduring roadblocks that exist within Santo Domingo that are complicating a change in attitudes towards Alibabá within the city? In the remainder of this dissertation, I explore Alibabá's presence in Santo Domingo's soundscape and various other intersecting systems of values by unpacking the social history of the performance of Alibabá music and dance. Ultimately, this line of historical inquiry will foster a better understanding of Alibabá as a

Dominican cultural expression and lead to a discussion of ways that performers and carnival event organizers can bridge their divides.

### CHAPTER 3

## THE GENEALOGY OF THE RHYTHM AND INSTRUMENTATION OF ALIBABÁ AND THE SOUNDSCAPE OF SANTO DOMINGO (1976-2001)

During the summer of 2015, I took several weeks of snare drum lessons alongside members of the group “Imperio Clásico” (Classical Empire) in Los Mina. Having little prior experience playing percussion instruments, I found it very difficult to master even the basic Alibabá mambo groove. While I was able to convince a few senior members of the group to give me a handful of private lessons, they insisted that the best way for me to learn was simply to come and play with them during a few low-stakes summer rehearsals—and to pick up the rhythms and cortes by listening to them again and again over the course of so many hours and so many days. Despite being a classically trained clarinet player, I quickly discovered that I did not know how to listen. In a way, my musical background was a hindrance since drummers who can play by ear are much more valuable to these groups. I quickly discovered that they would rather dedicate time to rehearsals than private lessons.

Eventually, I put aside the dream of mastering the snare drum and refocused on transcribing the rhythms instead. During a return trip in the spring of 2016, I asked two of the drummers from “Imperio Clásico” to dictate the rhythms to me so I could write down some of the cortes that they play most often. When I still had difficulties interpreting the rhythms of one of the more complicated cortes, one colleague took out his phone and demanded that I just listen to the merengue song that inspired it. For me, this became the key to understanding how to listen to Alibabá cortes—as most of the rhythms came from other songs that many of the drummers were already familiar with. Several Alibabá percussionists that I talked to also mentioned their



habit of scouring the radio and even the internet for any interesting bachata, merengue, salsa, rap, or reggaetón melody when it comes time to compose a new corte. One group even adapted the chorus from American rapper 50 Cent's 2003 hit "P.I.M.P." These experiences taught me that listening serves as an essential mode of learning to play and composing new Alibabá rhythms. Other experiences during my time in Santo Domingo taught me that the practice of listening is a skill that younger Alibabá musicians (those active since the year 2000) inherited from the first generation of Alibabá performers (those active 1970s-1990s), who also relied on the soundscape of Santo Domingo to inform and shape the possibilities for their own performance choices.

In this chapter, I present an ethnography of listening within the soundscape of Santo Domingo during the final few decades of the twentieth century, and the role that people, location, and technology played in its construction. In the field of music, composer and scholar R. Murray Schafer (1994) applied the term "soundscape" to refer broadly to all the sounds that are particular to one's immediate surroundings—including natural sounds, environmental sounds, and sounds created by humans (Hill 2017, para. 1). Prior to the advent of audio (and later visual) recording technology, the soundscape of a given place was limited temporarily and physically, restricted to only what a person could hear live. Beginning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, humans were for the first time able to determine not only what, but also how and when sounds were heard by separating them from their immediate environment. By removing sounds from their original context and bringing them to new listeners, human actors were able to use recording technology to directly and indirectly shape the sonic geography of a place with their vision of what it should look and sound like (see also Samuels et al. 2010). Of course, sound design and recording technology also changed the way that listeners began to perceive sounds

and understand their environment. As I will demonstrate, this can be attributed to the agency of the listening audience, who embrace, adapt, or ignore these sounds as they see fit.

As a fairly recent musical phenomenon, Alibabá is a particularly salient case study for examining the power dynamics between outside actors, recording technology, listeners, and musical activity in Santo Domingo. To create the overall chronological structure for this analysis, I summarize three cases of prominent individuals and their use of media technology in capturing, curating, and circulating certain kinds of musical activity throughout the city in line with various political and commercial agendas. Within this framework, I document the genealogy of Alibabá rhythm and instrumentation through an exploration of personal narratives and a set of partial histories that I collected through speaking with Alibabá performers in the present-day National District, East Santo Domingo, and North Santo Domingo.

What can the changes in sound over time tell us about the listening practices of Alibabá performers? What can these changes also tell us about the power dynamics between outside actors and recording technology in shaping the soundscape and listeners in interpreting it? I begin by documenting the emergence of the initial Alibabá rhythm in the mid-1970s and its continuity with the “guloya” rhythm—a processional music from the provincial town of San Pedro de Macorís. I do so by situating the trajectories of these two musical practices in the wake of Dominican folklore projects spearheaded by Fradique Lizardo that brought this new sound to Santo Domingo and culminated in a televised presentation of the “guloyas” at the Miss Universe Pageant in Santo Domingo in 1977. Following this, I discuss the motivation of snare drummers to modify the Alibabá rhythm and instrumentation in the 1980s-1990s by appropriating elements of merengue—the most prominent national popular music at the time. I then look at the work of carnival scholar and activist Dagoberto Tejeda and two recording artists in their attempts to

integrate merengue into the Dominican National Carnival Parade by analyzing visual and sonic production choices for the first carnival anthem “Baila en la Calle” (1983/1985). Finally, I look at Cuco Valoy’s “La Cuca de Cuco” (1997) and Alex Boutique’s “Mambo Alibabá” (2001)—the first recordings to feature Alibabá rhythm—in order to make some conclusions about the dynamics between outside actors, recording technology, listeners, and musical activity in Santo Domingo at the end of the twentieth century. Constructing an analysis in this way allows me to show that Alibabá is in fact implicit in any discussion of the articulation of sound as music within Santo Domingo’s aural public sphere.

### *3.1 The Origins of the Alibabá Rhythm and Instrumentation: The Cocolo Dance Drama Tradition and Fradique Lizardo’s Folkloric Projects in Santo Domingo*

In thinking about the constitution of what she calls the “aural public sphere,” Ana María Ochoa discusses the emergence of folklore studies as an extension of Latin American nationalism projects during the twentieth century (2012, 388). She details the efforts of individual, and often solitary, scholars in countries like Brazil, Cuba, and Mexico to preserve and protect one or several targeted local music and dance practices and to disseminate them to a wider audience in line with the “valorization of sonic localism that was crucial to nationalist postcolonial projects” (394). In these cases, and others, those who carried out folkloric projects were often successful at circulating these practices to a larger audience. At the same time, these folklore projects were sometimes accomplished at the expense of the very people and musical practices that they were trying to protect, preserving a sound’s connection to the idea of a place while at the same time physically extracting it from its immediate surroundings (Samuels et al. 2010, 339).

Like other Latin American countries, scholars in the Dominican Republic also engaged in folklore projects, including Fradique Lizardo’s “Cocolo Dance Drama Tradition” folkloric project in the 1960s. To many, Lizardo’s folkloric project was successful in achieving its primary goal—transforming Santo Domingo’s soundscape by introducing “guloya” dance and its music to Dominicans living in the capital. As an unintended outcome, the “guloyas” are universally credited as the source of the Alibabá rhythm. In a photo exhibition sponsored by the Ministry of Culture in 2010, the caption for an Alibabá group relays this connection (see Figure 3.1):

Place: National District; Category: Alibabá; Theme: Group where choreography is done to the rhythm of drums and snare drums. In this photograph, the entourage represents Arabic culture in their costume, this manifestation is traditionally done for the popular carnivals in the barrios of the Dominican capital, Luis Roberto Torres (Chachón) being the principal creator, who made a mix of the music of the guloyas and a warrior-like acrobatic dance, that was popularized in the decades of the 1980s and continue with much strength today.

**Figure 3.1** Alibabá photo on display as a part of the Ministry of Culture’s 2010 “Carnaval Dominicano” that was on display in Independence Park, National District during the 2010 spring carnival season (photograph by Miguel Peralta)



ALÍ BABÁ

Lugar: Distrito Nacional; Categoría: Ali Babá; Temática: Comparsa donde se hace una coreografía a ritmo de tambores y redoblantes. En esta fotografía el cortejo representa la cultura árabe en su vestimenta, esta manifestación se ha hecho tradicional en el carnaval popular de los barrios de la capital dominicana, siendo su principal creador Luis Roberto Torres (Chachón), quien hizo una mezcla de la música de Los Guloyas y un baile acrobático guerrero, que se popularizó en la década de los 80 y que persiste con mucha fuerza hasta el día de hoy. Fotografía: Miguel Peralta.

Carnaval  
DOMINICANO

2010 SANTO DOMINGO

MINISTERIO DE CULTURA

Although this origin myth is widely accepted and acknowledged among both Alibabá practitioners and scholars, the specific ways in which this set of diverse dance and marching rhythms influenced Alibabá have never been explored in depth. What can an analysis of the Alibabá repertoire tell us about these performers as resident listeners of guloya music at the time and, by extension, the local ramifications of the cocolo folkloric project? In short, Lizardo's efforts to incorporate the guloyas into Santo Domingo's soundscape were constructive—contributing to the emergence of Alibabá—and also reductive—playing a key role in transforming the various cocolo dance dramas into a singular, codified folkloric genre referred to as “guloya.”

#### Cocolo Dance Dramas in San Pedro and the Cocolo Folkloric Project in Santo Domingo

A significant percentage of the population of San Pedro is comprised of the descendants of Afro-Antillean manual laborers called “cocolos” in the Dominican Republic, who originated in the English and Dutch islands of the Lesser Antilles—including St. Kitts and Nevis, Antigua, Barbados, and Tortola. Beginning as early as the 1870s, these laborers were brought to sugar cane zones in the East to replace Haitian workers in cities like San Pedro and La Romana.<sup>44</sup> Like other relocated populations of sugar cane workers from the British territories elsewhere in the Caribbean, this population in the Dominican Republic maintained and recreated their Christmas-time masquerade tradition using English as the preferred language for lyrics, instruments, and

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<sup>44</sup> Folklorist and guloya expert Orlando Inoa cites the year that the cocolos began arriving in the Dominican Republic as 1893 (2005, 24-25). In the program for the National Carnival Parade dedicated to the guloyas in 2006, this date is cited as 1885 (Secretaría del Estado de Cultura 2006, 6). Scholar Julio César Mota Acosta mentions that by the year 1884, there were nearly 500 cocolo laborers already in the country (1977, 12). On the official UNESCO website for the Cocolo Dance Drama Tradition, this date is cited more vaguely as the “mid-nineteenth century” (UNESCO 2015). A myth regarding the origin of the name “cocolo” suggests that it was derived from a mispronunciation of the Spanish word “*tórtolos*” (people from Tortola), however, in his pre-prologue letter to Mota Acosta's book, Dominican poet laureate Pedro Mir disputes this and provides evidence that the term “cocolo” was used to describe Haitian manual laborers prior to the arrival of these Afro-Antillean immigrants (1977, vii).

dance names (see Bettleheim 1979; Bilby 2010; Rommen 2011). These public performances became locally known as one of two kinds of cocolo dance drama groups, called the “guloyas” and the “Wild Indians.”<sup>45</sup> Up until the 1960s, several different groups operated in the sugar cane factory villages surrounding the city center, such as in Miramar, Consuelo, Angelina, and Santa Fé.<sup>46</sup> In general, both the guloyas and the Wild Indians dress in shirts, pants, head scarfs, hats, aprons, and capes covered in small ribbons and mirror. However, the guloya hat is much shorter and only occasionally features feathers, whereas the Wild Indian hat is much taller and must be made of peacock feathers (see Figure 3.2).

**Figure 3.2** Examples of (a) the guloyas costume and (b) Wild Indian costume (photos taken in San Pedro de Macorís, 22 July 2009)



(a)



(b)

<sup>45</sup> Although the exact origin of the term “guloya” is not known, Inoa suggests that it potentially stemmed from an idiosyncratic mispronunciation of either: “Goliath” (from the dance based on the biblical legend of “David and Goliath”) or “Good lawyer” (based on the similarities between the Spanish word for ‘lawyer’ (*abogado*) and the English word ‘advocate’, as in “Christ is my advocate”) (2005, 83).

<sup>46</sup> Alex Callendar, interview, 29 July 2015.

In addition to the costumes, the two groups are also distinguished by the principal dance drama that they perform. The *guloyas* used to perform a multitude of dance dramas—with names reflecting the local shift between the English and Spanish language—including “David and Goliath,” “el momis” (literally “the mummies,” derived from mummies), and “el baile del buey” (the ox dance). Conversely, the Wild Indians specialized in only one dance drama—the eponymous “Wild Indian.” As throughout the British Caribbean, these costumed dramas are still accompanied by a mid-tempo marching rhythm performed by an ensemble of snare, bass drum, fife, and triangle (see Figure 3.3). The musicians accompany each dance with a variation of a common rhythm in the snare (see Figure 3.4). The *guloya* rhythms range from around 160-170 bpm. The Wild Indian rhythm is both faster (at around 180 bpm), and features more variations and call-and-response between snare and flute.

**Figure 3.3** *Guloya* marching band instruments (from left to right): fife, redoblante, bombo, and steel (photo taken in San Pedro de Macorís, 22 July 2009)



**Figure 3.4** Fundamental guloya snare drum rhythm (composite of momis, masquerade, and Wild Indian rhythms) and two variations



The Dominican government suspended the immigration of British Antillean laborers in 1932, with a final census in 1935 putting their total population in the country at a little over 9,000. As the cocolo population was slowly integrated into Dominican society and the older generations begin passing away, the younger members of the population switched to speaking Spanish (Inoa 2005, 84).

In the liner notes to her seminal recording, Verna Gillis discusses an interview with Theophilus “Primo” Chiverton, who describes the sad state of these “mummies” plays in 1976:

Theophilus Chiverton, in whose back yard we recorded, is 65 years old and came to the Dominican Republic more than fifty years ago with his parents. He proudly proclaims “I am a British!” and would never give up his British passport. However, this tradition, at least in the Dominican Republic, seems to be drawing to an end because the children of these immigrants from St. Kitts and Nevis don’t speak English, and there is a dwindling English-identified population. Mr. Chiverton told us that it’s been more than twenty years since he’s been able to perform the whole piece. There was just no one else to learn the parts. Now Mr. Chiverton doesn’t even remember all of them. The instruments have been handmade and belong to Mr. Chiverton. The instruments relate to European military bands, however the rhythms certainly relate to Africa as well. (1976, 2-3)

This feeling among folklorists working in the Dominican Republic in the 1960s and 1970s that the cocolo dance drama tradition “seems to be drawing to an end” was one of the primary motivations to revive these practices. While the cocolo dance dramas themselves may have been winding down, this period marked the beginning of the resurgence of cocolo traditions as a part



of a folkloric project spearheaded by Fradique Lizardo in Santo Domingo that was poised to introduce the practice to the entire country.

Fradique Lizardo (1930-1997) is one of the most prolific folklorists in the Dominican Republic and the founder of the *Ballet Folklórico Dominicano* (Dominican Folkloric Ballet).<sup>47</sup> Born in Santo Domingo, he spent the majority of his career tirelessly documenting folk music and dances in both the rural expanse of the country outside of the capital and among the scattered populations of African descent. Under the auspices of Lizardo, these cocolo dance dramas made their debut in Santo Domingo in 1963 as a part of the First Dominican Folklore Festival.<sup>48</sup> Lizardo's efforts culminated in a brief presentation for a "Dominican Folkloric Spectacle" (choreographed by Gene Bayliss) that would serve as the world premiere performance of the Folkloric Ballet during the 1977 Miss Universe Pageant in Santo Domingo (Inoa 2005, 72).<sup>49</sup> Held in the recently-constructed National Theater, the spectacle featured trained dancers performing three acts representing the purported tri-ethnic origins of the Dominican people: a

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<sup>47</sup> Following Lizardo's cocolo folklore project, there was a rise in academic interest of Afro-Dominican cultural expressions from around the country in both rural and urban contexts. This intelligentsia movement included Dominican scholars Lizardo (1974, 1979) and Julio César Mota Acosta (1977) and American scholars June C. Rosenberg (1979) and Martha Ellen Davis (1976, 1981, 1987). The work of these individuals contributed to an increased national and international awareness of African musical and cultural heritage in genres like Dominican *palos*, *congós*, and *gagá*. It is also important to note that Lizardo is also somewhat of a problematic figure among scholars of Dominican folklore. Although he was successful at promoting his own projects, this often came at the expense of the work of other colleagues at the time—including Edna Garrido de Boggs, René Carrasco, and Martha Davis.

<sup>48</sup> The existence of the First Dominican Folklore Festival, like many cultural events, also has ties to the Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD) controlling the government. After spending decades in exile after being branded as an enemy of the state under the Trujillo dictatorship, Juan Bosch returned to the country after Trujillo's assassination and successfully ran for president in the country's first democratic elections. His presidency was brief, lasting only February – September, 1963 before being ousted himself by a Dominican military coup. When a growing insurgency attempted to restore Bosch to the presidency in 1965, the U.S. marines were dispatched to the city to keep Bosch from office—out of suspicion that he may have been a communist. This ushered in the Post-Trujillo era under Juan Balaguer until 1996.

<sup>49</sup> A full-length video of the pageant can be viewed on YouTube in "Miss Universe 1977 - Janelle Commissiong - Trinidad e Tobago YouTube," posted by Andriago Lopes, 12 July 2013 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDHeekk8aLw>). The guloyas enter at 1:07:47. This pageant has a certain historical significance as that year's winner, Janelle Commissiong from Trinidad and Tobago, was the first black woman to ever win the crown.

Spanish-origin *zapateo* (couples' stamping dance), a recreation of an indigenous Taíno invocation, and the African-origin Wild Indian dance drama (see Figure 3.5). This acknowledgement of the African ancestry of the Dominican people in front of an international audience was an important step in revising the narrative of Dominican national consciousness that previously focused on only Spanish and indigenous heritage.<sup>50</sup>

**Figure 3.5** Images from the “Dominican Folklore Spectacle” at the 1977 Miss Universe Pageant including (a) Spanish *zapateo*, (b) Taíno invocation, and (c) Afro-Dominican Wild Indian dance performed by the Folkloric Ballet (screenshots taken from YouTube video posted by user Andriago Lopes, 12 July 2013)



(a)



(b)



(c)

<sup>50</sup> For more on state-sponsored dance companies, choreography, and the politics of representation, see Anthony Shay's *Choreographic Politics* (2003).

## Alibabá Rhythm and Instrumentation (1976-1980): Constructing a Genre, Building Instruments

According to several Alibabá performers active at the time, the cocolo groups were also invited to perform during carnival in various barrios in Santo Domingo beginning in the 1970s.<sup>51</sup> This is how a “guloya” group happened to be parading in the barrios of Santo Domingo by the time Luis Roberto “Chachón” Torres—the undisputed inventor of the Alibabá dance—first dressed in his Alibabá costume and took to the streets of Villa Francisca (see also Chapter 4.1):

And so it went, coming together, the people without music following me [shouting], “Alibabá, Alibabá”...and just like that, it was August, from there I did the dance. I looked for the guloyas to play for me and I took from them that music...And that is how Alibabá started.<sup>52</sup>

The impetus to turn Chachón’s character into an organized carnival group is attributed to another young pioneer. Juan “Guancho” Gómez built on Chachón’s theme and planned a new kind of carnival group in 1976 in San Carlos—one of the neighborhoods directly next door to Villa Francisca. The first iterations of Alibabá groups combined Chachón’s oriental-style costume (including beards, robes, and turbans) and his new choreography, while acting as characters from the story “Alibaba and the 40 Thieves.” Due to creative differences, Chachón and Guancho split after only one year together to lead their own groups featuring Alibaba-type costumes, Chachón’s choreography, and accompanied by an approximation of the guloya rhythm.

With a total of twelve dancers, Chachón needed some musicians to include in his group. While the guloyas served as a fortuitous starting point for the Alibabá rhythm, musicians in

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<sup>51</sup> Marcos Keppis (interview, 4 August 2014) and Juan “Guancho” Gómez (interview, 5 August 2014) reported that the guloyas began participating in Santo Domingo carnivals sometime during the 1970s. Both Torres (interview 2 August 2014) and Alberto “Beto” Fernández (interview 7 August 2014) also confirmed that the guloyas participated in both spring and summer carnivals in Santo Domingo, though neither gave a specific timeframe.

<sup>52</sup> “Y así se fue, juntando, la gente sin música atrás de mí [haciendo bulla] ‘Alibabá, Alibabá’...y así mismo, llegó agosto—ahí yo hice el baile. Busqué a los guloyas para que me tocaran y les robé de aquella música...Y de allí fue que comenzó el Alibabá” (Luis Roberto Torres, interview, 2 August 2014).

Santo Domingo were soon needed to recreate the *guloya* rhythm in order to participate in carnival celebrations. According to Chachón:

So, they [the *guloyas*] played for me and I danced, and after that I looked for [other] musicians. Ah! I went to the City Council to look for borrowed instruments, because I didn't have any.<sup>53</sup>

This is around the time that Chachón asked snare drummers Domingo “Pichilo” Velásquez Ramírez and Luis Valdez Medina to accompany his group.<sup>54</sup> Although performing in San Carlos and Villa Francisca, the first generation of musicians to accompany the Alibabá *comparsa* primarily came from the Villa María neighborhood in the National District.

The first shift from *guloya* towards an independent Alibabá genre happened in terms of instrumentation more than rhythm. Instead of exactly copying the *guloya* fife-and-drum ensemble, the first Alibabá marching band line-up included two *redoblantes* (snare drums), one bass drum (also referred to as *bombo* or *drum*), and possibly a triangle or cowbell for rhythmic support (see Figure 3.6). Instead of the fife, the *botella* (bottle) functioned as a basic melodic and rhythmic support—complementing the snare rhythm with two available pitches (the fundamental and the overblown octave above) (see Figure 3.7).

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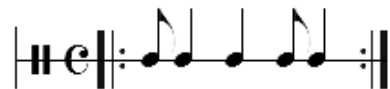
<sup>53</sup> “Entonces, ellos me tocaron y yo estaba bailando, entonces yo busqué [otros] músicos. ¡Ah! Fui al ayuntamiento a buscar instrumentos prestados, porque yo no tenía” (Luis Roberto Torres, interview, 2 August 2014).

<sup>54</sup> A bass drummer also accompanied the group, however, among the various Alibabá performers and musicians that I interviewed, no one could remember the drummer’s name beyond his nickname – “Tito.”

**Figure 3.6** First generation Alibabá percussion ensemble, with bass drum (Luís Emilio Váldez Medina), snare drum (Domingo Velásquez Ramírez, aka Pichilo), and botella (unidentified woman) at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ali-Banda Festival in Santo Domingo (photo taken in Juan Barón Plaza, National District, 1 March 2013)<sup>55</sup>



**Figure 3.7** Typical syncopated rhythm performed on bottle



Using the guloya snare and bass drum as a rhythmic foundation, the initial Alibabá rhythm has been described to me as “basically the guloya rhythm, slightly faster” (to around 190 bpm). The most significant difference is that Alibabá snare drummers, not well-versed in the rhythmic intricacies of the cocolo rhythms, removed the improvisations (which drummer César Carvajal described as “embellishing out of time”) and maintained a more consistent groove throughout.<sup>56</sup> According to several individuals of this generation that I interviewed who

<sup>55</sup> A video of this performance can be viewed on YouTube in “2o Festival de Ali-Bandas - Primera Generacion,” posted by Jessica Hajek, 10 March 2013 ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2W0ZEPns\\_OU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2W0ZEPns_OU)).

<sup>56</sup> “Replica fuera de tiempo” (César Carvajal, personal communication, 25 June 2015).

participated in Alibabá groups, the choice to keep a controlled tempo was important—both to ensure that the quality of the dance would not suffer and so that the musicians would not tire out.

Although Chachón mentions that he borrowed instruments for his group from the City Council, the instruments that were used during the first several carnival seasons between 1976 and 1980, were most likely hand-made—much like the instruments that were used by the *guloya* marching bands. Similar to the construction of other Dominican folk drums, the body of the snare drum used by the Alibabá musicians was typically fashioned out of local caoba wood strung together by rope. Guancho mentioned that in order to create the snare sound, musicians would attach rubber bands with bobby pins (“*gomita con pincho*”) and use X-ray film for the drum head.<sup>57</sup> The bass drum was constructed using a heavy-duty plastic bucket or water tank cut in half, with dried goat skin stretched over it to make the drum head. Guancho recalled the process of making some of these first instruments:

So, the first drum, called ‘*drum*,’ for that one I looked for a black plastic tank, made from that plastic that is really resistant, which now is not, because these days they make plastics, plastic buckets—it’s more flexible! The plastic bucket from that era was a strong plastic bucket... So, I sent them to be made into drum shells to Miguel Tavárez, that’s where I sent them to be made with skins on both sides—with goat skin. Then, we gave it to him, so this was the *drum* that we used. Then, what we used to use for the snare drum, was the *quinto* drum of a timbal. The timbal consist of the same as the conga drum – a quinto and *dúo*, the first and the second, and the bass drum. The quinto was used as snare drum [by] Tavárez without the “snare” [‘*string*’] so that it vibrates.... Also, yes, that X-ray film, from there we used to put that also on the timbal, yes because it was used, just like with the conga drum – it’s the same, the exact same!<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Juan Gómez, interview, 5 August 2014.

<sup>58</sup> “Entonces, el primer *drum*, lo que se llama ‘*drum*,’ [por] eso yo busqué un tanque plástico negro, [hecho] de ese plástico que es muy resistente, que hoy en día no, porque hoy en día hacen los plásticos, los cubos plásticos, ¡es más flexible! Aquel cubo plástico de esa época era un cubo plástico fuerte... Entonces, yo los mandé hacer los aros a Miguel Tavárez, allí yo mandé hacer el *drum* con los cueros de los dos lados—con cuero de chivo. Entonces nosotros le dábamos, entonces ese era el *drum* que nosotros utilizábamos. Entonces, los que utilizamos de redoblante, era el quinto de un timbal. El timbal se compone igual que la tumbadora – un quinto y dúo, el primero y el dúo, y el *drum*. El quinto era usado como redoblante [por] Tavárez sin el ‘*string*’ para que vibre.... También, sí, esa placa de rayos-X, de ahí le poníamos eso también al timbal, sí porque sí se usa, porque al congó – es lo mismo, lo mismo!” (Juan Gómez, interview, 5 August 2014).

In general, the instrument making process was a collaboration between the Alibabá group leaders like Chachón and Guancho—who would locate supplies—and instrument makers like Miguel Tavárez—who would assemble the final products. Other leaders of Alibabá groups recount similar stories, mentioning that they would even resort to visiting the local hospitals after hours to collect any discarded X-rays in that day’s trash because they had limited resources for buying materials.<sup>59</sup>

### Towards an Ethnography of Listening through a Genealogy of Sound

With all of this in mind, I now return to my original question that I posited at the beginning of this section: what can an analysis of the Alibabá repertoire tell us about these performers as resident listeners of guloya music at the time and also the consequences of the cocolo folkloric project within Santo Domingo’s soundscape? On one hand, folkloric projects can have constructive outcomes. This is because these projects typically involve the selecting of traditional practices from previously excluded or ignored local communities that are transformed by others into folkloric presentations. The presence of the cocolo dance dramas endured in Santo Domingo thanks in part to other cultural agents carrying on the legacy of Lizardo’s work. After their televised presentation at the Miss Universe competition, the sounds and images of guloya costumes, dance, and music enjoyed a continued presence in Santo Domingo through commercials, popular songs, and documentaries. For instance, the guloya and Wild Indian costumes and dances were immortalized in a 1980s Barceló rum commercial and the guloya rhythm served as the basis for Juan Luis Guerra’s hit “Guavaberry” (1987). In 2005, the Museum of Dominican Man produced the documentary “Guloya’s Coming!” as a part of the group’s

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<sup>59</sup> Enrique Scharbay, interview, 7 August 2014.

application for UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.<sup>60</sup> Lizardo was also successful in introducing cocolo dramas to new listeners in the capital—including Torres, who was exposed to this sound in the streets of the capital’s barrios. Torres and subsequent Alibabá performers did not simply interpret cocolo dance dramas as static, cultural artifacts to be appreciated, but appropriated them as a source of inspiration that became part of their own musical activity. Alibabá’s popularity has only continued to grow over the last four decades, with at least twenty active Alibabá groups throughout the Santo Domingo provinces (see Chapter 4).

On the other hand, folkloric projects are also reductive. Due to the very nature of folkloric projects, the sound of these local practices come to be welcomed as a valuable part of an expanded soundscape, even though the people they claim to preserve and protect often do not directly benefit from these projects. For example, Lizardo was primarily motivated to collect and preserve folk songs and dances either from the Dominican countryside or that were attributed to populations of African descent. As in the case of the guloyas, the end result of this scholarship was mostly limited to the inclusion of concentrated versions of these dance and music traditions within the repertory of professional folkloric ensembles and on promotional recordings in Santo Domingo. The continued efforts by Lizardo, local San Pedro folklorists, and cocolo performers themselves to incorporate these dance dramas as a part of Dominican folklore did not result in a revival of the actual tradition in San Pedro. Subsequently, in the 1980s, the cocolo dance dramas consolidated into only two groups—one group of guloyas (lead by Theophilus “Primo” Chiverton) and one group of Wild Indians (lead by Nathaniel “Chaplín” Phillips). Also around this time, the groups began performing the dance dramas without their original English texts.

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<sup>60</sup> In 2005, the Cocolo Dance Drama Tradition was proclaimed as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO; in 2006, the National Carnival Parade was dedicated to “The Guloya Dance Theater of San Pedro”; in 2008, the Cocolo Dance Drama tradition was inscribed on UNESCO’s representative list.



After the deaths of Chaplín in 1996 and Primo in 2001, Donald “Linda” Henderson unified the two remaining groups as a single troupe collectively referred to as the “guloyas.” This group performed both guloya and Wild Indian dances.

Echoing the cries of Primo in 1976, Linda stresses (in English) the need to preserve the guloyas in the “Guloya’s Coming!” (2005) documentary: “[8:58] If I die, it is finished!!! Because they have nobody else here to teach nothing about that, absolutely. You have to do it now. Now that we are still alive and we can direct them and tell them what they have to do – you have to dance so, you have to jump so... You have to do it now, but we have nobody to help us here.” It is worth repeating that despite all of their successes in the capital, these performers have not been able to increase their presence in San Pedro—as there are still no formal schools to teach these dances. Alex Callendar, who grew up in San Pedro before moving to New York City in 2001, feels that people’s interest in the tradition is waning because of the absence of economic support. Once Linda passed away in 2009, the fate of the guloyas and the cocolo dance dramas has been even more precarious. Although the guloyas still make an appearance at the National Carnival Parade in Santo Domingo each year, they are not directly supported by the Ministry of Culture and instead primarily rely on money earned from tourists to keep their traditions alive in San Pedro.<sup>61</sup>

I presented this brief discussion of the fate of the “guloyas” in San Pedro and in the capital because it helps establish a precedent for understanding how the current Alibabá repertoire reflects these performers’ interaction with Santo Domingo’s soundscape and points to listening as a primary mode of learning to play Alibabá. The first generation of Alibabá drummers were not trained cocolo musicians, but instead learned to play by interpreting and

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<sup>61</sup> Alex Callendar, interview, 29 July 2015; Julianito Adames Santana, interview, 3 May 2016.

approximating performatic elements of *guloya* rhythm and instrumentation over the span of about a decade. From there, these performers and musicians would continue innovating instrument usage and rhythmic elements, borrowing from other musical activities that were readily available in their immediate environment.

### *3.2 The Modernization of the Alibabá Rhythm and Instrumentation (1980s-2001): The Impact of Merengue as Nationalist Project and Commercial Endeavor*

In her discussion of the aural public sphere and Latin American nationalism in the twentieth century, Ochoa (2012) not only focuses on the treatment of “traditional” folkloric sounds, but also on the ideologies behind the formation of “modern” popular sounds. Ochoa specifically uses the notion of “sonic modernity” to problematize the various political and commercial agendas behind the canonization of various national music genres. She states, “What we have here then is a highly-contested field characterized by multiple mediations in which the politics of sonic validation and/or exclusion are articulated in contradictory ways in an embattled sonic modernity” (398). Ochoa cites Argentine tango, Cuban son, and Brazilian samba as examples of these contested musical activities that became national emblems in their respective countries in the hands of both cultural and commercial agents during the early- to mid-twentieth century. As history demonstrates, in these and other cases, when musical practices are endorsed at the national level, others are left behind.

The majority of studies of nationalist music projects emphasize the efforts of outside actors (e.g., intellectuals and government agents) in selecting a small fraction of local practices for the national stage. The power of such actors in shaping Santo Domingo’s soundscape by validating and excluding musical practices can be seen in the case of Dominican merengue (see Austerlitz 1997). Like many of his contemporaries, Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo (1931-

1960) realized the power of rural cultural expressions to act as national emblems and bolster popular support for his regime. The most well-known of Trujillo's state-sponsored cultural nationalist projects was his campaign in Santo Domingo to promote the *merengue cibaëño* (Cibao-style merengue), a local music and dance from the northern region (see Austerlitz 1997). Trujillo preferred this kind of merengue, popular in cities like Santiago, even though he grew up in a southern province dominated by Afro-Dominican merengue variations like *merengue palo echao*.<sup>62</sup>

Trujillo went on to single-handedly support several personal merengue orchestras in Santo Domingo, including Luis Alberti and the President Trujillo Orchestra and the Super San José Orchestra. Trujillo's monolithic support of merengue cibaëño was furthered by its subsequent saturation on radios throughout the Dominican Republic. In 1945, Trujillo moved his brother's radio station from the rural city of Bonao (in the geographic center of the country) to Santo Domingo (the political center) and renamed it "The Dominican Voice." Trujillo capitalized on his monopoly of the airwaves and popularized both the big-band orchestra format and the smaller merengue *conjunto* combo, featuring accordion, saxophone, *tambora*, and *güira* (see Hajek 2010). While this kind of analyses is useful in understanding how certain sounds come to dominate a soundscape, it is not as effective of a way of understanding listeners' consumption habits. While merengue became an important sound in Santo Domingo, it does not mean it was the only sound. I argue that an analysis of the Alibabá repertoire actually paints a more complete picture of Santo Domingo's soundscape at the end of the twentieth century.

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<sup>62</sup> Xiomara Pérez (the first National Director of Folklore in the Dominican Republic) states that the biggest factor differentiating merengue variants was the type of drum featured in the ensemble. The merengue cibaëño features *tambora*, while the merengue palo echao features the *palo* drum (*Listín Diario* 2014a).

Using the genealogy of Alibabá as a measure of audience listening practices reveals two important aspects regarding the role of the audience in actively engaging with the sonic geography of a given place. In addition to focusing on the acceptance of certain musical practices by elite audiences, I also posit that the urban poor represent a new kind of listening audience that is integral to this process. In his analysis of merengue music in Santo Domingo, Austerlitz (1997) shows how different audiences can interact with the same sounds in different ways. In the case of merengue, Trujillo codified a single, national merengue genre and promoted it across class lines in Santo Domingo. Although all residents of the capital heard the merengue cibaëño as a result of Trujillo's efforts, these different groups of listeners engaged with the genre through varying modes of validation. Some of the reasons for accepting Trujillo's nationalist projects, as described by Austerlitz, include that the dictator's populism made merengue more attractive to lower-class and middle-class Dominicans, whereas many upper-class Dominicans may have reluctantly accepted merengue as a way to appease Trujillo (and maintain their statuses within his regime) (67). Austerlitz (1997) also traces the trajectory of the modernization of merengue in Santo Domingo after Trujillo's assassination in 1960. Whereas Trujillo's old-fashioned big band format fell into decline, commercial recording artists like Johnny Ventura and Wilfrido Vargas further popularized the conjunto format and introduced new sonic features—including an increased tempo, more rhythmic contrast, an emphasis on the saxophone over the accordion, and the addition of synthesizers and other electric instruments.

I also present the genealogy of the Alibabá sound to counter the assumption that the widespread dissemination of modern, popular genres means that audiences no longer prefer more traditional genres. So too, the Alibabá repertoire may offer some insight as to how and why urban audiences listened to merengue in post-Trujillo Santo Domingo. As residents of primarily

middle- to lower-class neighborhoods within the barrios of Santo Domingo, Alibabá performers represent an interesting chance to get past these weaknesses in the scholarship by analyzing how and why non-elite audiences embrace or reject certain sounds in relation to their soundscape. In other words, this segment of the urban population is not just comprised of enthusiastic listeners of modern merengue from Santo Domingo, but of a multitude of sounds from a variety of contexts.

### Merengue's Impact on the Listening Practices among Alibabá Performers in the Barrios of Santo Domingo

The era of Trujillo's big band merengue received a final blow in the 1960s, as the music industry began to favor sleeker formats in response to increased competition from foreign genres. Many of the most prominent merengue artists of this period were influenced by the sounds of Cuban salsa music and U.S. rock 'n' roll. The influence of these kinds of foreign groups also drove a change in the preference of merengue instrumentation from the big band to the smaller combo—or *conjunto*. The line-ups for artists like Ventura's and Vargas's all-male merengue conjuntos followed similar patterns—the lead singer plus three back-up singers/dancers, one conga player, one tambora player (a Dominican double-headed folk drum played sideways), one güüira player, one electric keyboard player, one electric bass player, a pair of saxophones, a pair of trumpets, and one trombone. In the 1980s, local Dominican labels like Karen and Kubaney helped spur a new generation of artists like Fernando Villalona and Juan Luis Guerra and increase audience consumption of domestic genres. By the early 1990s, the conjunto format playing fast merengue dominated the airwaves.

During this time, an audience of casual listeners on the radio began giving way to audiences watching lively performances of merengue on Dominican television. According to

Yaqui Núñez del Risco, “On television, the sound element alone is not sufficient. A visual image must also be present, and a band’s impression of motion is appealing when there is a headlining group [of singers/dancers] who puts on a show while merengue is being sung” (1986, 7; qtd. in Austerlitz 1997, 90). The effect of this desire to create the impression of visual motion also resulted in a literal increase in tempo under the auspices of merengue band leaders like Ventura in the 1960s (first from around 120 bpm to 150 bpm), followed by Vargas in the 1970s and 1980s (from 150 bpm to around 160 bpm).

Several individuals whom I interviewed cited the same merengue conjuntos as the most influential for the first generation Alibabá performers, including: (1) the group “Los Kenton” (The Kenton’s) in terms of dance choreography, and (2) the groups “Kinito Méndez y la Roka Banda” (Kinito Méndez and The Rock Band) and “Pochy Familia y Su Cocoband” (Pochy Family and His Coconut-band) in terms of instrumentation and particularly for their tambora playing style. The changes to Alibabá rhythm and instrumentation during the 1980s and 1990s highlight how the listening audience in Santo Domingo gravitated towards and embraced these modern merengue sounds in the capital.

By 1981, there were five Alibabá groups spread across the National District in neighborhoods like San Carlos, Villa Francisca, Villa María, Villa Consuelo, and Villa Juana. Many of these new performers lacked the skills or desire to build instruments themselves. With few instrument makers in the city, it became more common for Alibabá groups to borrow manufactured marching instruments—especially from professional marching bands associated with the City Council, the firefighters, or the Marines. Although the preferred instrumentation of the first Alibabá marching groups was two marching snares and a bass drum, groups would often get creative if these instruments were not available or were out of their price range. Often, a 16”

tenor drum would be substituted for a 26” or 28” marching bass drum because it was less expensive. When marching instruments were not available, groups would also resort to borrowing an even smaller bass drum or snare drum from drum kits found in local music schools or churches.

Often, the instruments’ owner required the Alibabá group leaders to sign rental documents and pay per instrument. Arquímedes Bergés from Villa María, who originally danced in Chachón’s and Roberto “Noro” Rodríguez’s groups, explains his first experience renting instruments from a music school in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo:

There used to be a woman, also, that loaned us some instruments. Her name was Iris del Valle and we would go all the way over there [to Los Mina]. In exchange for use doing a presentation for her—because we had to give a presentation, if not she wouldn’t let us go—but I remember that thing because I, with that lady, I went every year and when I went over there, she mentioned, ‘Come here, Arquímedes, look I will loan you some instruments under one condition.’ And listen, how I got there you are not going to believe it, before I could get to the *guagua* [local bus] – there was a problem, and I went walking on foot from here to Los Mina – all the way over there. Wow, on foot! And at that hour I picked up, I picked up at like five in the morning—and I got together with Marquitos [Marcos Keppis] and us two guys went over there on foot. And the instruments got here this way. That was in the year 1981, 1980.<sup>63</sup>

To put this in perspective, the distance between Villa María and Los Minas is around four miles and would take about an hour to walk on foot. This was just part of the constant effort that Alibabá performers needed to make in order to secure proper instruments for their groups. This also meant paying to typeset rental documents (at a time when personal typewriters were not

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<sup>63</sup> “...Había una señora, también, que nos prestaba unos instrumentos. Ella se llamaba Iris del Valle... Y nosotros íbamos para allá [a Los Mina], a cambio que le hiciéramos una presentación, porque teníamos que hacer una presentación, si no nos soltaba...pero yo me recuerdo de esa cosa que yo con esa señora, yo iba todos los años y cuando yo iba para allá, ella mencionaba, ‘Ven aquí, Arquímedes, mira yo le voy a prestarte unos instrumentos con una condición.’ Y, oye, como yo iba, usted no lo va a creer, antes para yo irme para la guagua – era un lfo, y yo me iba a pie de aquí para Los Mina – para allá. Wao, ¡a pie! Y a esa hora yo cogía, yo cogía como las cinco de la mañana—y yo me agarré con Marquitos, y...cogieron para allá los dos a pie muchachos. Y vinieron con instrumentos así. Eso fue en el año 1981, 1980” (Arquímedes Bergés, interview, 4 August 2014).

common), safe-guarding these documents from the elements (particularly from floods or fires), and traveling across the capital city (despite unreliable public transportation).

Towards the end of the 1980s, less-expensive marching instruments began being imported into the Dominican Republic from Europe and the U.S. (first made of wood composite, then of metal).<sup>64</sup> Because of this, Alibabá groups started to be able to purchase their own instruments rather than making them or renting them. However, the idea of purchasing instruments was not immediately a popular one, as this meant that group leaders often had to ask their members to contribute a small *cuota* (fee). In his memoir, *El Maestro del Disfraz*, Gustavo “Tico” Batista describes the first time he introduced the idea of purchasing instruments to his group “Los Secretos” (The Secrets):

In order to form the group ‘The Secrets’ in 1984 we began meeting up beginning in May. At the first meeting I proposed to the guys that they each bring ten pesos in order to buy the instruments...[and] with those \$110 pesos we will order tickets for a raffle, we will sell them and you will see that it will be enough to buy at least a couple instruments even if they are used. And so it goes, with this incentive we went to schools to sell our tickets. A few days later, with the proceeds of the raffle...we bought a snare drum and a tenor drum in the Montepiedad pawn shop [*establecimiento de compra y venta*]; later we got another small snare drum from a drum set, and with these three instruments we could later hit the streets accompanying our carnival group.<sup>65</sup> (2013, 41-42)

Much in the same way as when groups rented their instruments, Alibabá groups of the mid-1980s purchased what they could and made do with the resources available to them. With his raffle proceeds, Tico bought a marching snare drum and a 16” tenor drum, and only later was able to

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<sup>64</sup> Alberto Fernández, interview, 7 August 2014.

<sup>65</sup> “Para formar en 1984 el grupo Los Secretos empezamos a reunirnos desde el mes de mayo. En la primera reunión le propuse a los muchachos que trajeran diez pesos cada uno para comprar los instrumentos...[y] con esos \$110 pesos mandamos a hacer boletos para una rifa, los vendemos y tú verá [sic] que nos alcanza por lo menos para un par de instrumentos aunque estén usados. Y así fue, motivados nos íbamos a colegios a vender nuestros boletos. Días después, con la ganancia de la rifa...compramos un redoblante y un tenor en el establecimiento de compra y venta Montepiedad; luego conseguimos otro redoblante pequeño de batería, y con esos tres instrumentos pudimos salir después por las calles llevando nuestra comparsa.”



purchase a second snare drum (albeit from a drum set). Eventually, Tico also upgraded to a bass drum in place of the tenor drum, but not until 1986 (see Batista 2013, 53).

With more accessible instruments, the speed of the Alibabá rhythm also began to accelerate in line with the tempos of contemporary merengue conjuntos (particularly among the snare drummers in Villa Francisca). To accommodate this increase in speed, Chachón doubled his snare players—now featuring two primero (first-part) and a segundo (second-part) players, with Pichilo and Máximo taking on the roles of the primeros and another drummer called “Popeye” playing segundo. This division of labor was put into practice not to increase the volume of the group, per se, but instead to ensure that the musicians could play continuously throughout the night (from 7 pm to midnight or later), with the primeros taking turns between performing the primary rhythm and resting. As group sizes began expanding after the inception of the National Carnival Parade, group leaders created the role of *pitadores* (or captains of one block of dancers who helped dictate the choreography by blowing a whistle) to help manage the additional dancers.

With more focus on the quality and consistency of the music, a certain amount of renown typically reserved for the carnival group leaders began to be garnered for the Alibabá musicians, and for the lead snare drummers in particular. As more groups formed and gained popularity in the 1990s, certain prominent snare drummers began to leave their marks on several different groups in the National District—in Villa Francisca: Pichilo and later Máximo Guerrero with Chachón, Alberto “Beto” Fernández with Alex Boutique, Francisquito with “Los Marineros de

La Jacuba,” and Octaviano “Bejota” Leroux with Marcos Keppis; in Villa María: César Carvajal with Kiko; and in Villa Consuelo, Iván Ureña with Tico.<sup>66</sup>

Although Chachón’s innovations to the Alibabá groups in terms of size are significant, the snare drummer “Bejota” is unanimously credited as the father of the contemporary Alibabá rhythm.<sup>67</sup> According to most performers, Bejota not only sped up the Alibabá rhythm (from 190 bpm to 200 bpm), he also added new short slogans (also referred to as “coros”) and rhythmic cortes that are still popular today. Bejota’s contribution to the new Alibabá sound was systemic, and took hold in most Alibabá groups long before Bejota immigrated to the U.S. around 1997. Since then, many popular cortes emerged from other core performers, such as Beto from Villa Francisca, Iván from Villa Consuelo, along with other musicians from the neighborhoods of San Carlos and Villa María.

Snare drummer Beto suggested to me that the tambora and güira were also added to the Alibabá orchestra sometime between 1991 and 1996.<sup>68</sup> According to Beto, these instruments were added by the famed Alibabá dancer, choreographer, pitador, and musician known as “el Pinto” from Marcos Keppis’ group in Villa Francisca. Not surprisingly, el Pinto’s primary motivation for doing so was to design a carnival theme as an homage to Johnny Ventura. In order to transform the tambora from an instrument typically played while seated to a marching instrument, the first Alibabá tambora players called “Junior” and “Joselito” turned the drum

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<sup>66</sup> As of 2015, Pichilo and Francisquito had both retired from carnival performance, Bejota had immigrated to the U.S., Beto and César are now leaders of their own groups, and only Máximo continues to perform as a güira player for Alex Boutique. Iván was tragically killed in 1997.

<sup>67</sup> In terms of increasing the size of the Alibabá group, first Chachón and el Chowí combined forces to create a super group for the 1983 National Carnival Parade. Ever the innovator, Chachón’s 1992 Alibabá group (for the carnival in celebration of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Columbus’ discovery of the Americas) included four blocks of dancers—two male blocks and two female blocks of about twenty dancers each. To accommodate the increased number of dancers, Chachón also increased the size of his marching band—from two snares and one bass drum, to three snares and four bass drums.

<sup>68</sup> Alberto Fernández, interview, 7 August 2014.

upright and affixed it at their waist with a leather strap and played the drum on only one side (in the same way as a snare) (see Figure 3.8).<sup>69</sup> Around this same time (1991-1996), group leaders Kiko and Arquímedes in Villa María also began adding novel, melodic instruments to their Alibabá marching band for “Los Cadetes” (The Cadets) based on the merengue conjunto line-up as well—namely saxophone, trumpet, and trombone. Although the use of the saxophone did not catch on, the efforts of another group leader named Francisco Blanco—better known as “Alex Boutique”—set the precedent that led to professional brass players (and especially trombonists) becoming essential to Alibabá bands in 1996.

**Figure 3.8** Difference in tambora performance techniques (instrument circled) between (a) an unidentified merengue conjunto who play for tourists in Columbus Park (photo taken in the Colonial Zone, National District, 21 June 2009) and (b) an Alibabá band performing with the group “El Nuevo Roba La Gallina del D.N.” (The New *Robalagallina* from the National District) in a local carnival parade (right) (photo taken in Villa Consuelo, National District, 9 August 2014)



<sup>69</sup> The tambora in Alibabá is struck with two sticks on the *macho* head (or the drumhead made from the skin of a male goat). Many Alibabá musicians agree that the reason for this was that the macho head reverberates more and is not as fragile as the *hembra* head (or the drumhead made from the skin of a female goat).

The rhythmic pattern played on the Alibabá tambora is a simplified version of the merengue *maco* rhythm that became popular in the late 1970s and eventually replaced the traditional merengue rhythm—what Paul Austerlitz calls “the Cibao-style” rhythm that originated in the northern city of Santiago (1997, 93-95). Unlike the interlocking rhythms that are typical in traditional merengue, the maco rhythm is much less rhythmically complex (see Figure 3.9). According to Austerlitz, “In the 1980s, Pochi [sic] y su Coco Band, Jossie Esteban y la Patrulla 15, and other groups, especially Los Hermanos Rosario, gained great popularity by basing their style on this rhythm, by then considered a type of merengue rather than an independent genre and known as the maco rhythm. By the 1990s, the maco was more prevalent than the typical Cibao-style percussion pattern” (95). Many Alibabá performers who are not adept at percussion simplify the tambora rhythmic pattern from maco-style merengue even more, so that the left hand performs only the open stick tones from the maco rhythm, accompanied by the right hand performing an open tone with a stick on each beat.

**Figure 3.9** Comparison of tambora rhythm patterns performed in (a) Cibao-style merengue variants, (b) maco-style merengue, and (c) the Alibabá rhythm<sup>70</sup>



In addition to influencing the rhythm and instrumentation, many first-generation Alibabá performers told me that they adapted elements of merengue performance into their choreography. Along with a growing preference for continuous rhythmic accompaniment at Alibabá rehearsal, dancers began taking fewer breaks between dance numbers. At first, dancers would stand at attention, and transition from a cold stop into a given dance number after the signal was given by the captain. However, according to Chachón’s principal choreographer José Manuel “Poto” Sánchez, a new kind of step emerged that became known as the *alisado* (smooth) step.<sup>71</sup> The *alisado* was added between the dance numbers, which the dancers used to pass time before “smoothly” transitioning into the next dance number when called by the captain (see Chapter 2).

In closing, the shift from renting instruments to purchasing them was a crucial step in establishing live musical performance as an essential component of the Alibabá group at the

<sup>70</sup> Austerlitz includes a transcription of the Cibao-style rhythm and the maco-style rhythm (1997, 93-94). The Alibabá rhythm was transcribed by the author.

\* Tambora key

1 { ● right hand (stick) open tone  
■ left hand open tone } 2 - × right hand (stick) rim hit 3 { × left hand bass slap  
● left hand (stick) open tone }

<sup>71</sup> José Manuel “Poto” Sánchez, interview, 28 February 2015.

rehearsal and, by extension during carnival performances. Thanks to a booming economy in Santo Domingo, most of the Alibabá groups that formed during the 1990s never had to make or rent instruments, and thus the habit of purchasing instruments became the new norm. Even with a substantial one-time purchasing cost, the fact that groups now had instruments at their disposal year round meant that Alibabá musicians had more time to hone their craft and ultimately led to the first significant changes in the sound of the Alibabá rhythm towards a more modernized genre. More importantly, it also meant that groups were now able to rehearse the dance and music together, rather than only having the musicians present at performance events. According to Kiko:

When I was a boy, I always had that curiosity, so we practiced with music, but we practiced with music made on a can. We used to take two tomato sauce cans, and every day I had my musicians, who played the rhythm for us on those two cans, and I being the oldest one directed the other boys who were following me, I always spoke as the head captain.<sup>72</sup>

This quote shows that the demand for the Alibabá rhythm became so great even during rehearsals that if instruments were not available, group leaders would find other means to provide some sort of sonic accompaniment for their dancers.

More importantly, Kiko's experience is indicative of the secondary effect of having musical sound present at the rehearsals of these groups in terms of learning to play. More people were being exposed to the rhythm outside of the carnival parades and a new generation of young children would begin to listen to the Alibabá rhythm before ever touching a snare drum. Most older snare drummers of the first generation were trained percussionists, who either studied at the conservatory (César Carvajal) or performed in other groups before joining Alibabá (Pichilo,

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<sup>72</sup> “Cuando yo ya entré ya en el tiempo mío, yo fui un muchacho que tuve siempre como esa inquietud, entonces nosotros practicamos con música, pero nosotros hemos practicado con música de lata. Nosotros agarrábamos dos latas de salsa, y todos los días yo tenía mis músicos, que en esas dos latas nos daban el ritmo, y yo más muchacho guiaba a todos los otros muchachos que me seguían a mí, yo siempre dije como capitán jefe” (Juan Carlos Núñez, interview, 4 August 2014).

Bejota, and Francisquito). In the 1990s, it became more common for young musicians to learn to play snare drum in Alibabá groups. This is also one of the first times that the sound of the Alibabá rhythm as sonic spectacle began to receive more attention, rivalling the visual spectacle of costuming and choreography.

#### Constructing the Soundscape of Carnival in Santo Domingo: “Baila en la Calle” (1983-1985) at the Dominican National Carnival Parade

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, many scholars within the field of musicology became interested in musical nationalism. Their work resulted in studies that looked at the elevation of popular music genres as national emblems through the lens of musical activity that was formerly excluded before being validated by intellectuals, commercial artists, and (most often elite) audiences (Turino 2003). In the case of Latin America alone, this included Cuban son (Moore 1997; Carpentier 2001), Colombian vallenato (Wade 2000), and Mexican mariachi (Sheehy 1999)—to name only a few. Many of these scholars’ conclusions were strikingly similar, as they detailed how certain outside agents and commercial artists selected local practices that already represented a desired image of the whole nation, rather than just one part. By extension, this means that many varieties of musical activities remained excluded from such processes. For instance, as a part of his cultural campaigns of the 1930s, Trujillo targeted dance and music practices from the rural northern region, which had the highest concentrations of white Dominicans. Moreover, all of Trujillo’s efforts could have been in vain, as these projects are only successful if the listening audience also accepts them—as audience can also ignore such attempts to regulate the national soundscape. The intersection of merengue and Alibabá at the first Dominican National Carnival Parade is a surprisingly noteworthy example of the mutual power of exclusion that outside actors, recording technology, and listeners possess, and its

impact on nationalist projects. Here, I analyze the Alibabá repertoire and carnival merengue anthems to ask which sounds present in Santo Domingo in the 1980s were embraced or rejected, by whom, and why.

In February 1982, folklore scholars Dagoberto Tejeda Ortiz and Iván Domínguez devised a television special to be aired on the popular show “Otra Vez con Yaqui” (“Again with Yaqui,” hosted by Yaqui Núñez del Risco) documenting popular carnival practices in the Borojol neighborhood in the sector of Villa Francisca. According to Tejeda Ortiz, “This production had a big impact on the entire country, since it was one of the few times, perhaps the first, that the richness and authenticity of popular carnival in the city of Santo Domingo was shown on Dominican television from a pedagogical-educational and sociological perspective” (2008, 130).<sup>73</sup>

With the success of this documentary, Milagros Ortiz Bosch—a fellow political member of the Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD)—submitted a proposal to create a new kind of parade that would put on display the carnival traditions of the entire country at one time and in one place. She submitted the proposal to both José Francisco Peña Gómez and Rafael Suberví Bonilla at the Secretary of State for Tourism—also prominent members of the PRD. The proposal was accepted and the first National Carnival Parade was scheduled to take place on Dominican Independence Day, 27 February 1983 along the malecón, George Washington Avenue.

In preparation for the National Parade in 1984, Tejeda Ortiz was also charged with commissioning an official carnival musical theme. Without time to prepare a true nation-wide

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<sup>73</sup> “Esta producción tuvo un gran impacto en todo el país, ya que era una de las pocas veces, quizás la primera, que se mostraba en la televisión dominicana la riqueza y la autenticidad del carnaval popular de la ciudad de Santo Domingo desde una perspectiva pedagógico-educativo y sociológica.”



competition, Tejeda Ortiz simply asked his friend and singer-songwriter Luis “Terror” Días to compose a new merengue song (Tejeda Ortiz 2008, 140). Although Tejeda Ortiz (as the spokesperson for the *nueva canción* group Convite) considered merengue at the time to be “an escapist product created by the capitalist music industry,” the popularity of the genre could not be denied (qtd. in Austerlitz 1997, 150). Similarly, Alibabá snare drummer Beto believes that merengue was the only genre at the time that was popular enough throughout the entire country to attract the big-name performers that could bring the crowds and patronage that would hopefully establish the nascent national parade as an annual event.<sup>74</sup> Without much time or resources, Días quickly wrote and recorded a song along with Sonia Silvestre, calling it “Baila en la Calle” (Dance in the Streets). In the video recorded for the song, Días and Silvestre are joined by a mass of people celebrating carnival in the streets of Santo Domingo’s barrios, some of whom are playing Dominican *palos* (tall, single-headed hand drums) and Haitian-Dominican *bambúes* (single-note cylindrical trumpets made of bamboo).<sup>75</sup> Their performance alternates with footage of parading carnival groups—including three different Alibabá groups (see Figure 3.10).

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<sup>74</sup> Alberto Fernández, interview, 7 August 2014.

<sup>75</sup> This video can be viewed on YouTube in “Luis Diaz y Sonia Silvestre baila en la calle.m4v,” posted by user Robert Lizardo, 16 April 2011 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nI0efkRSUGo>).

**Figure 3.10** Images of Alibabá groups from Días’ video for “Baila en la Calle” including: (a) “los Doctores” (the Doctors), (b) “los Califas” (the Caliphs), and (c) “los Babi de Alibabá” (the Alibabá Babies) (screenshots taken from YouTube video posted by Robert Lizardo, 16 April 2011)



(a)



(b)



(c)

Only a year later, the Secretary of State for Tourism made the decision to have merengue superstar Fernando Villalona re-record Días’s “Baila en la Calle” (released by Kubaney Records). The resulting cover version (1985) was arranged by Pedro Raymer. While Raymer maintained the original lyrics, he altered almost all other aspects of the song in order to create a much more straightforward commercial merengue—removing all traces of Afro-Dominican folk instruments and rhythms and reducing the vocal range of the melody by taking out the octave

leaps (Tejeda Ortiz 2008, 140). Consequently, Villalona's version of "Baila en la Calle" surpassed the popularity of Días's original recording at carnival.

The video for this version of "Baila en la Calle" features Villalona dressed in a traditional Santo Domingo-style *diablo* (devil) costume performing on stage in front of a massive crowd. Much like Días's video, the concert footage is interspersed with footage of parading carnival groups at the National Parade. In general, Villalona's video features a more representative display of popular carnival traditions from throughout the Dominican Republic, and especially various types of diablo costumes (discussed in more detail in Chapter 4). Unlike Días's video, no footage of Alibabá groups was selected for this version of the video.

In considering the sonic and visual production choices and the inclusion or exclusion of Alibabá in the two "Baila en la Calle" videos, two different approaches to Santo Domingo's carnival music project become apparent. Typically, the political motivation of these nationalist projects is either to reshape the established image of the nation as more or less inclusive, or reinforce the current image. Sonically, the social goals of the PRD and artists like Días were to select and promote traditional Dominican carnival activities, and especially Afro-Dominican folk traditions, as a part of the new national discourse. As a composer associated with the *nueva canción* movement, Días's particular goal for "Baila en la Calle" (1984) was to create a musical fusion of commercial merengue music and many other types of Afro-Dominican folk music (including *pri-prí*, *palos*, *salve*, *sarandunga*, *congo*, and *gagá*)—even though none of these genres were strongly associated with Dominican carnival.<sup>76</sup> From its very beginning, Alibabá

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<sup>76</sup> Tejeda Ortiz, Días, and Silvestre were also all members of "The 70's Generation" who, according to Deborah Pacini Hernández, were politically active singers and songwriters of the avant-garde and *nueva canción*—a pan-Latin American musical phenomenon typified by singer-songwriters performing politically-conscious (and typically leftist) ballads influenced by folk music from each artist's home country (1995, 205). Silvestre was also briefly married to Yaqui Núñez del Risco (1976-1980). Of the musical influences in "Baila en la Calle," those of Haitian-Dominican *gagá* are the strongest in terms of the fundamental rhythm—most likely because *gagá* is the only one of these genres that is processional music that can be "danced in the streets."

rhythm has always been associated with carnival, and yet the people doing Alibabá in the 1980s were not Afro-Dominicans. It is possible to conclude that the Alibabá rhythm simply did not fit the musical selection criteria for Días.

Visually, Días's video for "Baila en la Calle" offers a chance to view all the different types of carnival groups active in Santo Domingo at the time (see also Chapter 4). The desired image for the Dominican nation that was promoted by the PRD and the *nueva canción* movement (spearheaded by artists like Días, Silvestre, and Tejeda Ortiz) was a vision of a multiethnic people performing Afro-Dominican traditions and merengue side-by-side. As a way to visually educate citizens, this video prominently featured images of the city itself and various carnival groups from the capital. Although somewhat coincidental, the appearance of the Alibabá groups in Días's video is in line with the PRD's political agenda of introducing Santo Domingo residents to unfamiliar carnival practices. Conversely, the goals of integrating commercial merengue into National Carnival depended on attracting a large audience by combining popular aspects from direct contexts into carnival—such as their favorite carnival costumes with merengue artists like Villalona. In order to reach the largest national audience, Villalona's video displayed only the most well-known costumed characters from a number of Dominican cities across the country. Although we know from Días's video that Alibabá groups were performing at the National Parade in the 1980s, Alibabá was not popular enough outside of Santo Domingo's barrios at the time—which provides a legitimate reason for it to not be included in Villalona's video.

It is difficult to speculate on the reasons why scholars and recordings artists did not recognize Alibabá's potential at the National Parade in the 1980s.<sup>77</sup> It is less challenging to

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<sup>77</sup> Several other factors for the limited proliferation of live music at Santo Domingo carnival will be discussed in Chapter 4.

analyze the potential that merengue music had at carnival for Alibabá performers. First of all, Alibabá performers consistently adapted melodic and rhythmic elements of popular merengues from Santo Domingo in surprising and unconventional ways. As discussed in Chapter 2, many standard cortes are based on rhythmic elements of popular merengues from the 1970s and 1980s. One example is a corte inspired by Marcos Caminero's rendition of Dolcey Gutiérrez's "El Hombre del Palo" (The Wooden Man).<sup>78</sup> In looking at the original lyrics, melody, and rhythm, it is easy to see why this song lends itself so well to serving as an Alibabá corte. The vocal cue "Este es el hombre del palo" comes from an excerpt of the lyrics from the first verse. The verse presents a bit of a lyrical tongue-twister with a minimal melodic range, focusing on the rhythmically interesting presentation of the words that build from "Este es el palo" (This is the wood), and increases in complexity clause by clause to the final lyric: "Este es el pantalón que tiene el bolsillo que tiene el llavero que tiene la llave que abre el candado que está en las argollas que están en las puertas que están en la casa del hombre del palo" (These are the pants that have the pocket of the keychain that has the key that opens the lock that is on the chains that are on the doors that are in the house of the wooden man). The final vocal cue "El pantalón" comes from the chorus, "Y el pantalón, lo tiene puesto el hombre del palo" (And the pants that the man with the stick has on), after which the snare drums respond in unison imitating the straightforward rhythm of this chorus' short, punctuated, ascending arpeggiated melody (see Figure 3.11).

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<sup>78</sup> This song was originally recorded by Colombian vallenato artist Dolcey Gutiérrez.

**Figure 3.11** Corte based on the song “El Hombre del Palo” by Dolcey Gutiérrez (interpreted by Marcos Caminero), performed by “Imperio Clásico” (score reduction)

The image shows a musical score reduction for a 'Corte' (a rhythmic bridge) based on the song 'El Hombre del Palo'. The score is written on a single staff with a common time signature (C) and a tempo marking of ♩ = 200. The lyrics are: 'Este es el hombre del palo, del palo, del palo...' (Snare Drums) and 'el pan-ta-lón, el pan-ta-lón, el pan-ta-lón' (Voice). The score features a complex rhythmic pattern with syncopation. A 'Transition back to mambo' is indicated at the end of the score.

Interestingly, Alibabá musicians also borrowed melodic and rhythmic elements specifically from merengues for carnival, but it was not just from among those for the National Parade in Santo Domingo. One such example of a classic corte from this period stems from the carnival merengue dedicated to diablo group “Las Fieras” (The Beasts) from the northern city of La Vega; called “Esto Se Encendió” (This Catches Fire) (1993) it is by Diómedes Núñez and his group, Grupo Mío (Pérez 2014, para. 7). In this example, the corte borrows from one of the musical bridges, which features some interesting rhythmic syncopation. First, the corneta imitates the rhythm of the antecedent phrase in duple meter (originally played by trumpets and saxes as the call), with the snare and bass drums playing the consequent phrase with a triple-meter feel as the response. Following this, the drummers often vocalize a part of the chorus from an earlier point in the original song (see Figure 3.12).

**Figure 3.12** Corte based on the song “Este Se Encendió” by Diómedes Núñez and Grupo Mío, performed by “Imperio Clásico” (full score) (♩ = flam; ♪ = buzz roll)

Corneta cue  
♩ = 200

Corte

Corneta

Snare Drum

Tambora

Güira

Bass Drum

Transition back to mambo

Voices

S. Dr.

Tambora

Güira

B. Dr.

Figure 3.12 cont. (caption shown on previous page)

The musical score consists of five staves. The top staff is for Voices, with lyrics 'Woh - oh - oh' and 'oh'. The second staff is for S.Dr. (Soprano Drum), with rhythmic notation 'R L RRLR R' and 'R L RRLR R'. The third staff is for Tambora, with rhythmic notation including eighth notes. The fourth staff is for Güira, with rhythmic notation including sixteenth notes. The fifth staff is for B. Dr. (Bass Drum), with rhythmic notation including quarter notes. The score is divided into two systems, 1 and 2, with a repeat sign between them.

More importantly, Alibabá musicians were also listening to other sounds besides merengue that were present within the soundscape of Santo Domingo. In addition to *guloya* and merengue, Alibabá drummers began to incorporate elements of *mangulina* and *batumbalé* into their repertory in the 1990s. According to Lizardo (1974), the *mangulina* is a couple's dance that emerged in the southern provinces of the Dominican Republic during the nineteenth century. The dance was equally popular in rural and urban zones, including Santo Domingo. The *mangulina* shares much in common with other nineteenth-century Dominican popular dances (including merengue and the *carabiné* dance), with relatively simple choreography that was danced to songs accompanied by a conjunto led by either accordion or guitar, but with the Dominican palo drum in place of the tambora.<sup>79</sup> One sonic feature that distinguishes *mangulina* from merengue or *carabiné* is the tendency for the dance to be composed in a compound duple meter (6/8 or 12/8).

<sup>79</sup> Citing Emilio Rodríguez Demorizi's work *Música y Baile en Santo Domingo* (1971), both Lizardo (1974) and Austerlitz (1997) contend that Dominican composer Juan Bautista Alfonseca (1810-1865) composed the very first



Snare drummer César Carvajal credits Beto and himself for introducing a repique called the “backwards mangulina” (see Chapter 2.1 for a discussion on repiques) during the 1990s.<sup>80</sup> This repique features a two-beat variation on top of the rhythmic groove played by a primero snare drummer (see Figure 3.13). The drummer begins by repeating the groove pattern five times before playing the variation on beats three and four. The drummer then continues counting down, repeating the pattern four times, three times, and two times until ultimately, he only plays the groove pattern once. At this point, he plays the variation on both beats one and two, and three and four as many times as he likes before transitioning back to the groove pattern. According to Carvajal, the repique is called “backwards” because for mangulina, the palo drummer plays a similar variation pattern starting from the outer edge of the drumhead and traveling towards the center (with the pitch lowering slightly on each stroke). For Alibabá, the snare drummer plays the variation starting from the center of the drum head and traveling towards the rim (with the pitch rising slightly on each stroke).

**Figure 3.13** The “backwards mangulina” repique for primero snare drum, performed by César Carvajal (excerpt, reduced score) (♩ = rim shot)

The musical notation for the "backwards mangulina" repique on snare drum is as follows:

Tempo: ♩ = 120

Time Signature: 2/4

Instrument: Snare Drum

Notation: The score is written on a single staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. It begins with a double bar line and a common time signature. The first section is marked "Vamp 5x" and contains five measures of the groove pattern: RLLRLLRLLRLL. This is followed by a variation on beats three and four, which is repeated four times, then three times, and then two times. The variation is marked "Repeat ad lib." and "Transition back to repique". The notation includes a "Vamp 4x" section and a "Vamp 5x" section. The notation also includes "etc." and "Transition back to repique".

Rhythmic Pattern: RLLRLLRLLRLL RLLRLLRLLRLL RLLRLLRLLRLL RLLRLLRLLRLL

etc.

One time only Repeat ad lib. Transition back to repique

RLLRLLRLLRLL RLLRLLRLLRLL RLLRLLRLLRLL

Dominican national anthem in 1844 (after the end of the Haitian occupation) in the style of a mangulina. For further discussion about carabiné, see Lizardo (1974) and Hajek (2010).

<sup>80</sup> Carvajal referred to this repique as “la mangulina al revés” or “la mangulina contraria.” Further research is needed to confirm what style of palo playing this repique is inspired by—as it could be based on a conflation of mangulina, carabiné, or even merengue palo echao drumming technique. This repique variation is also similar to the tambora rhythm played in Cibao-style merengue (see Figure 3.9).

Another important influence on the Alibabá repertory in the 1990s was batumbalé. The Dominican baton twirling practice referred to locally as batumbalé has many fundamental characteristics in common with the Alibabá in terms of dance, costumes, and rhythm, and thus provided an excellent source from which Alibabá musicians could borrow. The term “batumbalé” is an idiosyncratic pronunciation of “*batton ballet*” (baton twirling) that is common in many parts of the country. According to Tony Estrella, the President of the Federation of Dominican Batton Ballet (FEDOBAB), batumbalé was a part of a project spearheaded by Dominican Secretary of Education Joaquin Balaguer and President Rafael Trujillo (sometime between 1949-1955) (interview 23 February 2015). After supposedly watching a German documentary showing military exercises accompanied by legions of young girls twirling batons, Trujillo ordered similar ensembles to be formed by City Councils all around the country. Numerous groups are still active in prominent cities like Baní, Bonaó, San Pedro, San Cristobal, and La Vega. In Santo Domingo, batumbalé groups operate in a multitude of barrios, including Guayabar, Villa Mella, Manoguayabo, Sabana Perdida, Guachupita, Yamasá, La Vanta, Hato Mayor, Villa Duarte, Santiago, Herrera, Ciénaga, Guaricano, and Cristo Rey (where Estrella mentions is home to seven batumbalé groups alone). In addition to performing in parades and their own competitions, at least one batumbalé group is invited to perform in the National Carnival Parade each year.

The batumbalé ensemble typically consists of two to four snare drummers and a bass drummer performing a martial rhythm (around 120-130 bpm), to which a group of twelve to sixteen girls dance in formation while twirling batons (see Figure 3.14). Moreover, several of the Alibabá snare drummers who were becoming prominent also played for the batumbalé groups of Santo Domingo and San Carlos—namely Bejota and Francisquito. Interestingly, many first-

generation performers attribute the batumbalé rhythm as the impetus for speeding up Alibabá. Although it is more likely that merengue was the source of the increased tempo, Alibabá musicians did adapt the batumbalé-style rhythm for use as an introduction to or transition between faster sections.

**Figure 3.14** Batumbalé group from Cristo Rey, directed by Tony Estrella, featuring (a) female twirlers and (b) marching band performing in the 2010 National Carnival Parade (photos taken on George Washington Avenue, National District, 7 March 2010)



(a)



(b)

In one prominent example of Alibabá musicians borrowing from multiple sources, Alex Boutique's recording of "Mambo Alibabá" (2001) includes a corte based on the instrumental intro of Villalona's rendition of "Baila en la Calle" over a batumbalé rhythmic accompaniment

(see also Section 3.3). Here, the snares play a slower, martial rhythm while the trombone performs the melody and rhythm of the horn section from the 1986 version of the song (see Figure 3.15).

**Figure 3.15** Corte based on the song “Baila en la Calle” by Luís Días (interpreted by Fernando Villalona) as performed by Los Reyes del Carnaval’s “Mambo Alibabá” (2001) (full score) (♩ = flam; ♪ = buzz roll)

The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system, marked with a tempo of ♩ = 120, features four staves: Trombone, Snare Drum, Güira, and Bass Drum. The Trombone part consists of a melodic line with triplet markings. The Snare Drum part includes a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with the notation 'RLLRL RL RLRLRLRL RL RLRLRLRL RL RLRLRLRL'. The Güira part has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The Bass Drum part provides a simple rhythmic foundation. The second system, marked with a tempo of ♩ = 200, features four staves: Tbn., S.Dr., Güira, and B. Dr. It is divided into three sections: 'Transition back to mambo', 'Mambo', and 'Mambo'. The Tbn. part has a melodic line with a triplet marking. The S.Dr. part includes a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with the notation 'RL RLRLRLRL RL RLRL RLRLRL RLRLRLRLRL RL RRLR R'. The Güira part has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The B. Dr. part provides a simple rhythmic foundation. A dashed box encloses the final measures of the second system.

All of this shows us that the modernization of the Alibabá rhythm and instrumentation is indicative of the power of outside actors and listeners as reciprocal actors of nationalist projects and commercial endeavors within Santo Domingo. Thanks in part to commercial artists like Méndez and Ventura, the sights and sounds of post-1960s merengue decisively shaped the overall rhythmic and instrumentation choices of the first generation of Alibabá performers as listeners, laying the groundwork for them to create new cortes and repiques throughout the 1980s and 1990s. While it is true that these performers were dependent on those sounds that were available to them in Santo Domingo, Alibabá performers discriminated between those sounds that adapted well to their preferences for rhythm and instrumentation and excluded those that did not. For instance, Alibabá performers were equally influenced by commercial merengues (such as “El Hombre del Palo”) and those recorded for carnival in other Dominican cities (such as “Este Se Encendió”) that became popular in the capital. Moreover, Alibabá performers were also influenced by more traditional sounds that still pervaded the Santo Domingo soundscape—in this case, mangulina and batumbalé.

Not only do the choices of Alibabá performers highlight the importance of considering the agency of the listening audience, they also suggest that there are multiple kinds of audiences that are worthy of attention. While the political and commercial efforts of cultural agents like Tejeda Ortiz, Díaz, and Villalona used carnival merengue to attract more upper-class audiences to the National Parade in the 1980s, capitalizing on the potential for other carnival music to attract lower and middle-class audiences was not as high of a priority. All of this provides good evidence that listening audiences, such as those associated with Alibabá performers, often have different goals and desires that are not met when considering elite audiences alone.

### *3.3 A Genealogy of Sound for the First Generation of Alibabá Performers: Takeaways from Cuco Valoy's "La Cuca de Cuco" (1997) and Alex Boutique's "Mambo Alibabá" (2001)*

Using the genealogy of Alibabá rhythm and instrumentation as a framework, I showed how listening became a central aspect of learning to play and compose new Alibabá rhythms. While briefly discussing the power of outside actors and recording technology to introduce sounds to new audiences and forward their agendas to shape the soundscape, I also demonstrated the agency of listeners to interpret those visions in order to suit their own tastes and purposes. Among Alibabá performers of the first generation, most of their listening was not to Alibabá music, per se, but rather to other genres that were introduced into the soundscape either by intellectuals or commercial artists through various forms of mediation. This began to change towards the end of the 1990s, when the Alibabá rhythm and instrumentation became the subject of commercial recordings. When I asked about the earliest recordings of Alibabá music, some of the Alibabá performers that I interviewed mentioned the song "La Cuca de Cuco" (Cuco's Cuckoo) (1997), by the internationally acclaimed singer-songwriter, salsa-legend Cuco Valoy. Still, an overwhelming majority of other performers that I interviewed cited the quintessential recording as "Mambo Alibabá" (2001) by the band leader Alex Boutique. Whereas the impact of these early recordings seems to be relatively limited within the overall soundscape of the city, "Mambo Alibabá" has enjoyed a much more thorough integration within the carnival soundscape and among Alibabá performers themselves. What can the differences between these first two recordings tell us about the listening practices of Alibabá audiences to Alibabá music?

Examining Valoy's personal and professional background in a little more depth helps explain his predisposition for the local Alibabá rhythm and decision to include it in one of his recordings. Valoy is a Dominican singer of "tropical" music (which includes merengue, salsa, Cuban son, and Colombian cumbia). Although he was born in Manoguayabo in West Santo

Domingo, Valoy grew up in Villa Juana and even raised his kids in the National District. Later, like other Dominican artists, Valoy developed a profound relationship with carnival music as a performer in Barranquilla, Colombia in the 1980s (see Chapter 4). Valoy recorded the well-known carnival merengue “Frutos de Carnaval” (Fruits of Carnival) on the album *Sin Comentarios* (Without Comment) (1981) that became an unofficial anthem of carnival in Barranquilla. He also won first place in the “salsa” category of the Festival of Orchestras and Conjuntos at Barranquilla carnival in 1982 and 1983. He is most famous for his song “Juliana,” popularized by the New York salsa group DLG (Dark Latin Groove) in 1997.

The exact story of how Alibabá rhythm ended up in the hands of Valoy was shared with me in interviews with Alibabá dancer José Manuel “Poto” Sánchez and other Alibabá group leaders, and is also found in part in Batista’s memoir (2013). First, Valoy hired Poto (who was still an active dancer in Chachón’s Alibabá group) as a choreographer for his South American tour in 1988. According to Poto, one day while performing on stage in Barranquilla, the concert venue suddenly lost power. Although hired as a choreographer, Poto happened to be standing over by the percussion section while the band was waiting for the lights to come back on. To help pass the time, Poto began to improvise on the snare drum, tapping out an Alibabá rhythm. Valoy was curious about what Poto was playing and was drawn to the sound of the catchy rhythm. Valoy liked the Alibabá rhythm so much that he then decided to incorporate it into a song.<sup>81</sup>

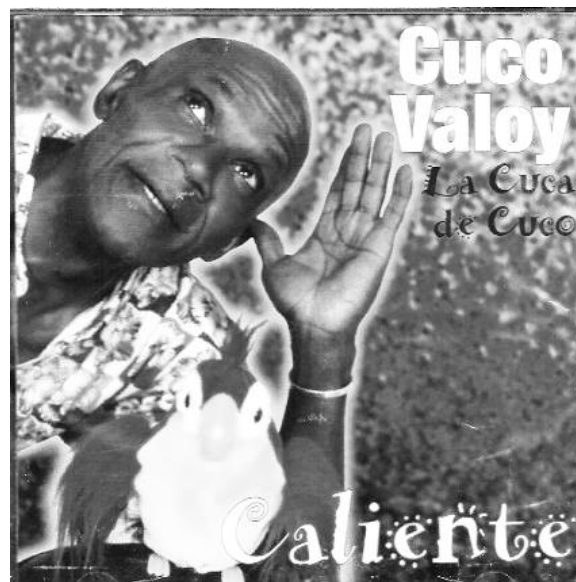
Valoy credits “La Cuca de Cuco” as an adaptation on the album *Caliente: La Cuca de Cuco* (Hot: Cuco’s Cuckoo) (1997) (see Figure 3.16). The song “La Cuca de Cuco” reflects the influence of Alibabá rhythm and instrumentation in several ways. First, as a drastic departure

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<sup>81</sup> José Manuel Sánchez, interview, 28 February 2015.

from a full conjunto line-up, the song only features Valoy and a back-up singer on vocals, plus snare drum, synthesizer, electric bass, and cowbell. Second, the song is much faster than a salsa or merengue, with a tempo of around 180 bpm. Third, the song itself demonstrates two clear influences from the coro slogans typical of Alibabá. The lyrical content is rather minimal, describing Valoy’s relationship with a woman named Cuca (“cuca” refers to the cuckoo bird, but is also slang for female genitalia), with a short chorus that simply repeats “Yo quiero a mi Cuca” (I love my Cuca). Also, the melodic range is small (within a perfect fifth)—which makes the song sound as though it is being chanted, or almost even rapped.

**Figure 3.16** Album cover art of Valoy’s *Caliente: La Cuca de Cuco* (1997)



Francisco “Alex Boutique” Blanco’s exposure to Alibabá is more direct than Valoy’s. Originally from Villa Francisca in the National District, Boutique first joined Chachón’s Alibabá group “El Colorido de Carnaval” (Colorfulness of Carnival) in 1996 before slowly taking over as leader and musical director in 1999 when the group’s name changed to “Fantasía Carnavalesca” (Carnival Fantasy). More importantly, he renamed this group in 2000 as “Los Reyes del Carnaval” (The Carnival Kings).



Between 1996 and 2000, Boutique created the foundation for the first Alibabá orchestra that was capable of performing independently of the Alibabá dancers. Boutique continued the trend of expanding the size and instrumentation of the Alibabá ensemble that was common in several groups in the 1990s. Boutique included in his line-up three snare drums (two 14” and one 15”), two bass drums (26”), tambora, güira, cowbell, up to three trombones, and botella (this is the first prominent instance that the bottle, as an instrument, was included in performances rather than only during rehearsals).

According to Boutique, cultural agent Roldán Mármol (of the Bayahonda Cultural Foundation) happened to secure funding in 2000 to compile a recording of Dominican carnival music.<sup>82</sup> Mármol selected many of the best-known carnival merengue anthems to feature on the album, including Díaz’s “Baila en la Calle” (1984), Villalona’s “Baila en la Calle” (1985), Mendez’s “El Carnaval” (1999), Caminero’s “Carnaval de Carnavales” (2000), and Mármol’s “Pipí en Carnaval” (2001). More importantly, Mármol also wanted to capture a carnival theme in the style of Alibabá. He turned to his fellow expert in Dominican carnival the aforementioned Tejada Ortiz for his recommendation—who in turn gave him the name “Alex Boutique.” At Mármol’s request, Boutique quickly put together an Alibabá anthem for the recording.<sup>83</sup>

Like Valoy’s song, the lyrics of “Mambo Alibabá” are minimal. Boutique sings short verses with a limited melodic range of either newly composed lyrics or lyrics borrowed from other carnival characters like Califé and *robalagallina* (see Chapter 4). The rest of the group interjects, often with only a word or two such as “wey hey,” “oh oh,” or “Alex Boutique.” Unlike

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<sup>82</sup> Rossy Díaz, interview, 7 August 2014. The album *Música de Carnaval Vol. I* was originally released in 2001. The album was released by the Dominican Secretary of State and the National Authorizing Officer of the European Development Fund (ONFED) in 2006 as a part of the First Culture Festival of the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) group of states. The ACP’s membership is comprised of 80 island states in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific.

<sup>83</sup> Francisco “Alex Boutique” Blanco, interview, 25 November 2014.

Valoy's recording, *Boutique* is accompanied live by the other members of his Alibabá orchestra "Los Reyes del Carnaval," including Beto on snare drum, Montañó Alberto on trombone, and Henry Daniel Pimentel on botella, among others. This song includes a batumbalé-inspired introduction that gradually accelerates as a transition into the mambo, with the trombone and snare drums performing a variety of cortes in between the verses.

#### Alibabá and the Articulation of Sound as Music within Santo Domingo's Aural Public Sphere

One takeaway from my discussion of outside actors, recording technology, listeners, and musical activity is that the mediation of performance practices is for the benefit of new listening audiences rather than the original producers of the practice—regardless of the political or commercial agenda. To reach these listeners, outside actors typically alter the performance practice to better fit the tastes of the targeted audience (e.g., a staged, folkloric presentation or a modern, commercial recording). Therefore, it makes sense that Alibabá performers did not reap much success from these early recordings. What is more unexpected is that Alibabá music did not generate a substantial listening audience among the general public. Even though Valoy was at the height of his career, enjoying his commercially successful collaboration with DLG for the salsa hit "Juliana" that same year, the majority of the songs on the album *Caliente* were merengues (not salsa, for which Valoy was more known), compounded by the fact that the album was poorly distributed.<sup>84</sup> Likewise, even though "Mambo Alibabá" was produced by Mármol and David Almengod (the famed percussionist for Juan Luis Guerra), *Boutique* was not a well-

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<sup>84</sup> Valoy's disc was produced by the relatively small record label By... P Publishing Corp., recorded in Santo Domingo and New York, distributed by the New York-based Montañó Distributors Corps.

known artist outside of the Alibabá community. Moreover, the initial appeal of “Mambo Alibabá” was limited primarily to the spring carnival season in Santo Domingo.<sup>85</sup>

Another takeaway, however, is that Alibabá performers embodied a different kind of audience with a unique set of listening practices. I have already suggested two key traits of Alibabá performers as listeners: (1) they were primarily influenced by the sounds available to them within the barrios of Santo Domingo (whether live or mediated sounds), and (2) although they were fairly indiscriminate in their listening habits, they preferred to borrow melodically or rhythmically interesting (e.g., memorable or novel) snippets. This has translated as only a limited trace of “La Cuca de Cuco” within the current Alibabá repertory, even though the stylistic language of the song is very much rooted in Alibabá. Unlike the popular merengues that provided inspiration for the many new cortes in the 1980s and 1990s, “La Cuca de Cuco” features a constant rhythmic groove and an unremarkable melody—and there is very little of interest for Alibabá performers to copy or adapt. Conversely, the introductions and cortes from Boutique’s “Mambo Alibabá” are still an active part of the contemporary Alibabá repertory. As I have demonstrated, this is because the song itself offers more rhythmic and melodic novelty for other Alibabá performers to copy. Moreover, Boutique and his ensemble were active in carnival until 2008, thus ensuring that the recording has maintained its presence for many years, which has increased the likelihood of it being heard.

More importantly, what the genealogy of the Alibabá sound confirms is that performance practices like these can remain vital to the neighborhood groups who continued to perform year in and year out even without the intervention of scholars or commercial artists. Although the interest in Dominican carnival music was nominal in the 1980s and 1990s, it has become a much

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<sup>85</sup> See Chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion of the song “Mambo Alibabá.”

higher priority among intellectuals, scholars, and folklorists associated with the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Tourism over time, and particularly since 2005. In the next chapter, I analyze the impact of two seemingly contradictory cultural policy agendas (regulating diversity and tradition) on the presence of music, and especially Alibabá, at carnival parades and competitions in Santo Domingo.

## CHAPTER 4

### REGULATING AND EVALUATING MUSICAL PERFORMANCE AT CARNIVAL IN SANTO DOMINGO: PERFORMING ALIBABÁ AT PARADES AND COMPETITIONS

On 12 February 2017, the Alibabá group “Imperio Clásico” (Classical Empire) from Los Mina mounted a protest during the first East Santo Domingo (SDE) carnival parade of the season. This act was a culmination of unrest among carnival group leaders like Enrique “Momón” Scharbay, who finally decided to take a public stance and demand more clarity in regard to how carnival funds in East Santo Domingo were being managed. The group wore black t-shirts and jeans to the parade in lieu of costumes, and refrained from dancing or playing music in front of the judges—what they called a “*protesta del silencio*” (silent protest). The group was thwarted by security and escorted from the parade route peacefully. Only once out of range of the judges did the “Imperio Clásico” musicians begin to play the telltale mambo rhythm. A video of the incident was recorded and posted to the digital news website CiudadOriental.com and distributed on Facebook via groups like “CARNAVAL ORIENTAL.” Towards the end of the video, as Momón was being escorted away from the judging area, a reporter asked what the silent protest was about, to which Momón replied:

[3:18] The silence is for the mistreatment of the carnival participants [*carnavaleros*]. They [the carnival organizers] don’t let us express ourselves. They don’t let us negotiate, not even with the mayor [*el síndico*]. They don’t let us feel that we are telling the truth [*tenemos la verdad*]. But, it doesn’t stop here. We will continue with this, ok? One has to keep in mind that we are their artists. This is the only industry that doesn’t pay, the only entertainment industry that doesn’t pay.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> “El silencio es por el maltrato de los carnavaleros. No nos dejan expresarnos. No nos dejan dialogar, ni siquiera con el síndico. No nos dejan nos sentir que nosotros tenemos la verdad. Pero, no se queda ahí la cosa. Nosotros seguimos con esto, ¿ok? Hay que tomar en cuenta que somos los artistas de ellos. Esta es la única industria que no paga, la única industria de la diversión que no paga.” The full-length interview can be viewed on YouTube in “Protesta de carnavaleros en el Carnaval de SDE 2017,” posted by El Oriental, 13 February 2017 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X5QSIImAfLow>).

It is not surprising to me that Momón and his group used the power of costumes and music (or rather, their absence) to bring attention to the disconnects between carnival performers and event organizers. A more interesting question is how things became this way—where some aspects of carnival are more valuable to some but apparently less valued by others?

The underlying tensions between and within carnival performances like Alibabá offer an ideal lens to bring into focus the multiple value systems held by a variety of stakeholders regarding musical sound at carnival in Santo Domingo. These stakeholders include participants, judges, event organizers, and even the audience. In his discussion of the structure of ethical value systems, anthropologist Joel Robbins downplays an emphasis on the number of different value systems in operation, but he suggests that it is how these systems relate to each other that should be at the heart of these kinds of evaluations (2013, 99-102). Ethnomusicologist Klisala Harrison applies Robbins' framework to an analysis of musical practices, looking at the effect that hierarchies of social, economic, and cultural value systems can have on music and musicians (2015). Harrison suggests not only that these value systems can change over time between individual actors and groups, but that communities enjoy the most freedom in terms of their cultural expressions when their value systems align, and experience the most conflicts when they oppose each other (100-104). I contend that this line of thinking is also more generally applicable to evaluating systems of values between communities of performers and those cultural agents who design policies governing their musical practices.

In this chapter, I construct an analysis of choices for regulating and evaluating carnival groups at Santo Domingo events over the last half-century through a discussion of the presence of Alibabá groups and live music-making at parades and competition. As the capital of the country, Santo Domingo plays host to a number of local and municipal carnival activities in

addition to national celebrations—most importantly the annual National Carnival Parade. Thus, the opportunity to examine carnival regulations at various levels of cultural policy is greatest in the capital city.

As I mentioned in the Introduction, the former Sub-Secretary of Culture Mateo Morrison has discussed cultural policy in the Dominican Republic in great detail, defining it as “the conjunction of operations, principles, practices, and procedures” pertaining to the social and economic goals of government institutions (2009, 35).<sup>87</sup> In Santo Domingo, the main agent of cultural policy at the national level is the Ministry of Culture (MINC), whereas local city councils manage more regional operations. Complicating this, carnival celebrations are further governed by additional official entities, including the National Directorate of Carnival and regional offices like the Culture and Folklore and Organization of Carnival in East Santo Domingo. While theoretically these government institutions follow the same agendas, in practice, this has not always been the case. Moreover, even when such governmental policies are implemented across the board, they often conflict with performers on the ground. In this case, Alibabá serves as a clear example of how musical practices at carnival flourish most readily when there are either no clear policies or when they are supported by advantageous regulations, and how they are inhibited as a result of incongruous ones.

First, I look at how regulations (or a lack thereof) that promote diversity impacted the presence of Alibabá groups at carnival parades Santo Domingo since the 1970s. I begin by showing that the rise of Alibabá as a carnival practice is directly correlated to cultural diversity and the nature of local carnival practices in Santo Domingo (1950-1970). Then, I suggest how the atmosphere of the National Carnival Parade (1983-2005) was particularly beneficial to Santo

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<sup>87</sup> “el conjunto de operaciones, principios, prácticas y procedimientos”

Domingo carnival groups and promoted the initial spread of Alibabá. Ultimately, I will demonstrate how certain policies drove changes at Dominican National Carnival to maintain diversity at the parade. Due to limits on the number of Santo Domingo groups permitted at the National Parade since 2006, the participation of Alibabá groups—and by extension their associated music—was also constrained.

In the second section, I look at the impact of prize allocation systems, and how decisions regarding the constitution of carnival genres and the evaluation of *musicalidad* (loosely translating to “musicalness,” a term I will use to refer to the quality of being musical or exemplifying musical performance—as opposed to “musicality,” which describes one’s musical talent or producing a pleasant sound) among carnival groups at the national level have played out at the local level. Focusing on two specific resolutions established by the First Dominican Carnival Congress in 2005, I will demonstrate how the carnival organizers’ and judges’ decision to reward genres that “reaffirm Dominican identity” worked against “motivating musical performance” among carnival participants. To begin, I look at the early success of Alibabá groups under the original prize allocation system before the change to genre-based prize categories in 2006. Moving away from the spotlight of the National Parade, I then shift focus to three local parades within the city: the municipal carnival parades in the National District and East Santo Domingo, and the “Años Dorados de los Diablos Cojuelos” (The Golden Years of the Diablo Cojuelo) throughout Santo Domingo’s urban zones. Within the context of these carnival events, I will compare the inclusion of live-music making among the Alibabá with three other primarily costumed-based carnival genres—namely fantasy, traditional, and diablo. I will demonstrate the tensions that have arisen between Alibabá groups and other genres of carnival performers in terms of music-making at parades throughout the city. In doing so, I claim that



even though the decision to codify strict prize category definitions at the Dominican National Parade since 2006 created apparent economic benefits for Alibabá groups, it also restricted the presence of live music making among other carnival groups in Santo Domingo.

All of this comes together in the final section, where I discuss more recent and direct efforts by event organizers to regulate and evaluate music and dance outside of carnival parades at separate competitions. First, I compare outcomes of the National Dominican Carnival Anthem Composition Concourse to the Carnival Music Festival in Santo Domingo to examine how the compatibility of audiences' and performers' goals impacts the reception of these events. Then, I then look at and the Grand Carnival Gala in Santiago, the Alibabá Choreography Competition in the National District, and the Grand Alibabá Dance Competition in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo to assess the importance of congruence between what performers do on stage and how judges assess it. I argue that local practices like Alibabá flourish more readily when music and dance competitions support the social goals of these groups within their communities.

#### *4.1 Regulating Diversity: Carnival Parades in Santo Domingo and the Emergence of Alibabá*

On the surface, the stories shared with me about how Alibabá began are similar to the stories of how samba schools emerged in Rio de Janeiro, and both carnival groups have many things in common. In fact, many of the characteristics of Santo Domingo that made it the ideal breeding ground for Alibabá are the same for Rio. Much like Alibabá in the city of Santo Domingo, samba groups got their beginnings as popular street performances comprised of people parading in the streets wearing costumes, playing music, and dancing. In his article on the pre-history of samba, John Charles Chasteen argues that carnival in Rio of the late nineteenth century had a great diversity of popular carnival groups that could be seen parading in the streets. One

group was the *congós* or *cucumbys*, who originated in the Northeast of Brazil before migrating to Rio and who dressed in stereotypically “African” or “Indian” costumes (1996, 40). Another group was the *Zé Pereiras*, who dressed in a variety of costumes and who were accompanied by snares and bass drums. Numerous other kinds of carnival groups combining costume with music or dance dotted the streets of Rio, including groups of *cordões*, *tunas*, and *Bumba meu boi* (41-42). Beginning in the 1920s, these groups paved the way for the earliest samba schools.

It is important to note that the current discourse regarding samba schools, and their representative music and dance, presents them as a dominating force in Rio’s carnival scene—even if, at the same time it somewhat conflates these groups and the marching band rhythms they perform (while overlooking other prominent marching rhythms, including *marchinhas* and *frevos*) (see Filho and Herschmann 2003). What is most telling about this brief history is that samba schools emerged from a combination of diverse carnival groups and diverse migrant populations all vying for space in the popular sectors of Rio. However, for these groups to take over as the central focus of Rio’s carnival, it would require official sponsorship in 1935 and further governmental promotion throughout the 1960s. More importantly, as Chasteen points out, “In the 1980s, the major parades were removed from the street altogether and enclosed in the telemedia-saturated sambadrome, built on the location of one of the neighborhoods where the early *escolas de samba* [samba schools] had developed half a century earlier” (45). Chasteen posits that the primary reason why “samba” became the centerpiece of Rio carnival and an emblem of Brazilian national culture is that this was desired by intellectuals, artists, government officials, and by the people playing samba.

I suggest that the established narrative of Rio’s samba schools within the Brazilian national imagination represents only one possible outcome from changing regulations,

promotion, and sponsorship regarding carnival groups that dance and play music. To further examine potential outcomes that changing regulations can have on what kinds of groups participate in carnival parades, I frame this section within three regulatory shifts regarding carnival practices in Santo Domingo in the latter half of the twentieth century until circa 2015. I do so to show how changing attitudes among politicians and cultural agents favored promoting “diverse” carnival events as opposed to promoting Alibabá as a centerpiece of Santo Domingo carnivals and, by extension, an emblem of Dominican national identity.

### The Emergence of Alibabá (1970s-1983): Migration and Popular Carnival Practices in Santo Domingo

As the largest urban center in the country, Santo Domingo has been the recipient of constant waves of foreign immigration beginning in the late nineteenth century and continuing to the present. This, paired with a significant rural-to-urban migration between the 1950s and 1970s, doubled the population of the capital every decade between the 1920s and 1970s. The size of the city itself expanded outside the heart of the urban zone to the east, north, and west. Newly constructed industrial zones in places like Herrera drew migrants looking for work, and expanded agricultural zones in places like San Luis drew laborers to the sugar cane fields surrounding the capital (Hoffnung-Garskof 2008, 46-50). Although rigid class barriers mostly isolated the upper and upper-middle class neighborhoods from this population surge, there is much evidence that populations in the working and lower class neighborhoods like San Carlos, Villa Francisca, and Villa Consuelo were more prominently exposed to the cultural practices—including music and dance—brought by migrant populations to the city.

In terms of popular carnival practices, life in Santo Domingo during the greater part of the twentieth century was dominated by the conservative Dominican Party (PD)—first with the

dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo (1930-1961) and followed in the post-Trujillo era by his predecessor Joaquín Balaguer (1966-1978). Carnival practices in the city during this time were highly stratified along class lines. Trujillo's support and preference for elite carnival balls and military parades are well documented (see Derby 2000; Tejeda Ortiz 2008; and Hajek 2010). Although popular carnival was not officially regulated by Trujillo, his passive acceptance of it acted as a sort of unofficial sanction. According to William-Dos, many contemporary popular groups from the barrios can trace their origins to the Trujillo period—including both the diablos and the *indios* (the natives) of San Carlos.<sup>88</sup>

The regulation of popular carnival practices did not begin until the long presidency of Balaguer during the height of the Cold War. In effect, Balaguer began by banning carnival masks in the streets and requiring all carnival participants to register with their official identification cards (the *cédula*) in order to participate. According to José Danilo Vásquez in an interview for *Listín Diario*, “Balaguer said that he who dressed up at that time was a communist and had to get permission to wear a costume” (qtd. in López 2011, para. 14).<sup>89</sup> However, Arías recalls that this was also a way to prevent criminals from committing crimes under an assumed anonymity during carnival celebrations.<sup>90</sup>

The importance of migration and popular carnival regulations in the rise of Alibabá is most evident in the stories told by Dominicans themselves. In his significant work *Carnaval Dominicano*, Dagoberto Tejeda Ortiz describes the origin of Alibabá in Santo Domingo during the 1970s in the same way that I heard it from countless colleagues during my field research:

One Sunday in February, with carnival in full swing, Luis Roberto Torres, known as Chachón, a young choreographer from the working-class barrio of Villa Francisca had

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<sup>88</sup> Francisco Arías, interview, 25 February 2015.

<sup>89</sup> “Balaguer decía que el que se disfrazaba en ese tiempo era comunista, había que sacar un permiso para disfrazarse.”

<sup>90</sup> Francisco Arías, interview, 25 February 2015.

committed to participate in an advertised salsa competition with a carnival theme, but he did not have an impressive costume in order to be able to participate.

Being in the living room of his house thinking about the solution to this difficulty, he saw his mom come out from the bathroom, with a robe and a towel around her head. Impressed by this image, he didn't hesitate to ask her for said attire, he dressed up as an Arab, at the moment in which the Guloyas of San Pedro were passing by playing in the street.

Chachón left with this costume and started to create dance steps. After a while of doing so, turning around to face backwards, full of surprise he saw that the neighborhood children were imitating all of his moves. This is how the Alibabá were born as carnival characters, with the music of the Guloyas and Chachón's choreography.<sup>91</sup> (2008, 219)

First, we see that the source of the musical component of Alibabá is the product of both foreign immigration and rural-to-urban migration in Santo Domingo. As recounted by Tejada Ortiz, the music from a visiting marching group from nearby San Pedro inspired the sound of Alibabá. In turn, the population of San Pedro were descendants of British Afro-Antilleans brought as sugar cane laborers to the rural regions to the east of the capital (see Chapter 3). Second, the birth of Alibabá took place within Villa Francisca, a central barrio of the National District. Located between San Carlos and Villa Consuelo, these are some of the first established neighborhoods in the city and have the strongest connection to its popular carnival celebrations. Third, the idea of using an Arab-themed costume was a creative solution that would allow individuals like Chachón and Guancho to participate in popular carnival while conforming to Balaguer's mask ban.

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<sup>91</sup> "Un domingo de febrero, en plena época de carnaval, Luis Roberto Torres, conocido como Chachón, un joven coreógrafo del barrio popular de Villa Francisca estaba comprometido a participar en un anunciado concurso de Salsa en un ambiente de carnaval, pero no tenía un vestuario impactante para poder participar. Estando en la sala de su casa pensando en la solución de esta dificultad, vio salir a su madre para el baño, con una bata y una toalla en la cabeza. Impresionado por esta imagen, no vaciló en solicitarle dicho atuendo, se vistió de árabe, en el momento en que pasaban los Guloyas de San Pedro de Macorís tocando por la calle. Chachón salió con su vestimenta y comenzó a inventar coreografías. Después de un tiempo de estar en esta tarea, al volver la cara hacia atrás, lleno de sorpresa vio que los niños del barrio imitaban todos sus movimientos. Ahí nacieron los Alí-Babá como personajes de carnaval, con la música de los Guloyas y la coreografía de Chachón."

I present this brief history to support my claim that Alibabá initially flourished at carnival parades in Santo Domingo, in part, because of the lack of any regulations against it. This is most readily seen in the increased presence of these groups during the first two decades of the National Carnival Parade celebration in Santo Domingo. In what follows, I will discuss in more detail how Alibabá practitioners were able to take advantage of nebulously defined parade regulations concerning a “national” sense of diversity by turning it into a “local” one.

#### The Presence of Alibabá at the National Carnival Parade (1983-2005): The National Parade as a Substitute for Santo Domingo Carnival

The victory of the Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD) and the election of Antonio Guzmán to the presidency in 1978 marked at least a symbolic return of liberal ideology and political freedom to the country after almost fifty years of dictatorial control under Trujillo and Balaguer (Tejeda Ortiz 2008, 270). In line with the political renaissance fostered by the PRD, the idea to create a National Carnival Parade was born out of a small group of Dominican folklorists, scholars, and politicians from the capital—spearheaded by Dagoberto Tejeda Ortiz and Milagros Ortiz Bosch in 1982 (see Chapter 3.2). The social goal of the parade was to put on display the popular carnival traditions of the entire country at one time and in one place. The first of such parades was scheduled on Dominican Independence Day, 27 February 1983 directly following the military parade in Santo Domingo and has been an annual event ever since (Tejeda Ortiz 2008; López 2011).

However, at the time no clear policy was in place to determine how this “diversity” of traditions would be regulated—meaning whether each city would actively select their own diverse carnival delegation to send to the parade or whether the diversity would simply result from the sheer number of groups participating from around the country. Because of this rather

passive approach to diversity, Santo Domingo carnival groups dominated the National Parade, which in turn fostered an environment that allowed for the increased presence of Alibabá from 1983 to 2005. I argue that this environment materialized because of three factors. First, as the only organized city-wide parade, carnival groups from the capital used the National Parade to create a platform. Second, Santo Domingo carnival groups were the most diverse in the country, and therefore featured the greatest number of carnival characters to present at the parade—including Alibabá groups. Third, as the largest city and host of the parade, carnival participants from the capital dominated because they had much easier access and the shortest travel time to the parade route.<sup>92</sup>

It merits repeating that the massive participation of Santo Domingo groups is also due in part to the fact that, in the capital city, organized local carnival celebrations in the spring were deemphasized prior to the 2000s.<sup>93</sup> Instead, the impromptu carnival processions that took place at the end of February in the streets of barrios like San Carlos and Villa Francisca were still much more popular. According to Juan Gustavo “Félix Juan” Ramos Lucas in an interview for the *Listín Diario*, “Before, carnivals took place only for three days, 25, 26 and 27 of February. We used to run around the whole capital” (qtd. in López 2011, para. 2).<sup>94</sup> Thus, the National Carnival Parade became an important focal point within the capital city as it also substituted for an independent city-wide celebration—such as those that took place in northern cities like La Vega and Santiago.

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<sup>92</sup> Travel times from the western-most (i.e., Dajabón) and eastern-most (i.e., Samaná) to Santo Domingo were about four to six hours each way, without stops.

<sup>93</sup> According to Mario Alies in a photo posted to the Facebook group “CARNAVAL ORIENTAL,” the National District City Council began organizing popular carnival parades among the barrios, but only during the month of August, beginning in 1987 (6 Sep 2016).

<sup>94</sup> “Los carnavales de antes eran de tres días solamente, 25, 26 y 27 de febrero. Recorriamos la capital entera.”

The National Parade was also incredibly important to the early success and spread of Alibabá during the 1980s. Alibabá maintained its presence during the first decades of the National Parade because, as previously mentioned, the parade functioned like a local carnival parade. According to Gustavo “Tico” Batista (2013) in his memoir the first generation of Alibabá, there were consistently around seven groups that participated from Santo Domingo in the annual National Parade—with some groups retiring and others taking their place (see Table 4.1). It was only subsequent changes in carnival regulation that would ultimately restrict Alibabá’s presence at the parade.

**Table 4.1** Alibabá groups from Santo Domingo participating in the National Carnival Parade (1985-1988) (Batista 2013, 44-66)

| 1985   | 1986  | 1987  | 1988   |
|--|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Los Marineros de La Jacuba</li> <li>• Los Babi de Alibabá</li> <li>• Los Toreros</li> <li>• Los Califas</li> <li>• Los Pitufos</li> <li>• Los Ku Klux Klan</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Los Marineros de La Jacuba</li> <li>• Los Doctores</li> <li>• Los Babi de Alibabá</li> <li>• Napoleón Bonaparte</li> <li>• Los Califas</li> <li>• Los Pitufos</li> <li>• Los Ku Klux Klan</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Los Marineros de La Jacuba</li> <li>• Los Ninja</li> <li>• Los Babi de Alibabá</li> <li>• Los Gaiteros escoceses</li> <li>• Los Califas</li> <li>• Alibabá y los 40 ladrones</li> <li>• Los Nazareños</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Los Tráficos</li> <li>• Los Rumberos</li> <li>• Los Musulmanes</li> <li>• Los SWAT</li> <li>• Los Cantillas</li> <li>• Los Bachachá</li> <li>• Los Califas</li> </ul> |

The Restructuring of the National Parade and the Establishment of Municipal Carnival in Santo Domingo

It is possible to use the decisions made when restructuring carnival parades as a lens through which to understand the various values driving these events both before and after implementation. The changes made to parade rules and regulations gives scholars a glimpse at both the organizers’ ideal vision for the parade and how they perhaps felt that these goals had not yet been met. More importantly, we can gauge the end results of the restructuring in terms of the



positive and negative effects on elements of the celebration. Upon closer examination, the literature on Rio carnival serves as an example how such restructuring processes tend to favor the presence of certain musical practices at the expense of others.

In her two important works on samba at Rio carnival, Alison Raphael (1981, 1990) discusses the imposing of new regulations beginning in 1933. For the fledgling samba schools, these regulations included requiring parade participants to obtain a permit; create an official name; designate official officers; submit to official judging of their music, float, parade, and costume design; include a folkloric wing of “Bahian women;” prohibit the use of woodwind instruments; and limit their parade themes to “politically and ideologically acceptable” content (Raphael 1981, 98-100 and Raphael 1990, 77). In this way, it is possible to interpret the rule prohibiting the use of wind instruments as having positively favored the percussion-based samba schools.

In 2005, organizers in Santo Domingo voted to restructure the National Parade and refocus on creating a more balanced “national” diversity. Many of the regulations were changed in a way that did not favor Alibabá groups. With Decree No. 602-02 in 2002, the Dominican Congress created the National Carnival Commission as a subsidiary of the Secretary of State for Culture to work in tandem with the Secretary of State for Tourism, Secretary of State for Education, Secretary of State for Youth, the National District City Council, and the Dominican Institute of Folklore among others to: “Realize and support the development of Dominican Carnival on the basis of national identity [and]...Organize the National Carnival Parades” (Congreso Nacional 2002, 20-21).<sup>95</sup> In order to restructure the National Parade, the Carnival

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<sup>95</sup> “Realizar y apoyar el desarrollo del Carnaval Dominicano en base a la identidad nacional [y]...Organizar los desfiles nacionales de carnaval.” The Dominican Congress voted to expand the member organizations of the Carnival Commission with Decree No. 1330-04 in 2004 (Congreso Nacional 2007, 6).

Commission convened the First National Carnival Congress, held over two days on 27-28 August 2005. In the opening remarks before the Congress, Sub-Secretary of Culture Avelino Stanely shared the impetus and social goals of a modern National Carnival Parade, or “to undertake the necessary actions that would help to reorganize all aspects that could obstruct the dizzying growth of the last twenty years of Dominican carnival” (*Primer Congreso 2006*, 8).<sup>96</sup>

By reorganizing the parade, the Carnival Commission presented their modified vision of a truly “national” parade that had a well-balanced representation of the variety of characters found in local carnivals from across the country. National Carnival organizers better defined their approach to creating diversity and achieved their vision rather easily by limiting the number of people and groups permitted to participate, stating:

One of the greatest detected inconveniences has been the unlimited presence of carnival groups from throughout the country. Now, in order to participate in the National Carnival Parade, the provinces cannot have delegations greater than 150 people. In East, West, and North Santo Domingo and the National District, a maximum of 18 carnival groups for each, for a total of no more than 72 carnival groups from the capital.<sup>97</sup> (*Secretaría de Estado de Cultura 2006*, 5)

Santo Domingo was targeted even more explicitly with resolution number 17 (a-e) in order to limit the number of groups that could participate from the capital to only the top groups in each of the recently established municipal parades either within the National District, North Santo Domingo, West Santo Domingo, or East Santo Domingo (*Primer Congreso 2005*, 25-26). With the local parades acting as a filter, no more than three groups of each primary genre—diablos, traditional, historical, popular creativity, fantasy, and Alibabá—have participated in the National Parade from any of the Santo Domingo Provinces since 2006.

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<sup>96</sup> “para realizar las acciones necesarias que ayuden a reorganizar todos los aspectos que puedan obstruir el vertiginoso crecimiento de los últimos veinte años del carnaval dominicano.”

<sup>97</sup> “Uno de los grandes inconvenientes detectados era la presencia ilimitada de comparsas de todo el país. Ahora, para participar en el Desfile Nacional del Carnaval, las provincias no podrán traer delegaciones superiores a 150 personas. En Santo Domingo Este, Norte, Oeste y el Distrito Nacional se escogerá un máximo de 18 comparsas por cada uno, para un total de no más de 72 comparsas de toda la capital.”

Overall, the change was quite successful at manifesting the goal of the Carnival Commission in Santo Domingo—namely to promote a form of national diversity that represents all local characters equally and thus reflects their vision of Dominican carnival identity. For example, over 200 groups nationwide registered to participate in the 2014 National Parade. Of these, sixty-two were diablos, forty-nine were traditional, forty-six were popular creativity, thirty-four were fantasy, and twenty-seven were historical—which is a fairly balanced representation. Yet, only eleven Alibabá groups registered to participate in the parade in 2014, still rendering this group a minority among other carnival practices. For a truly balanced parade, each category should represent around 15% of the competitors. However, Alibabá has never represented more than 5% of the total participants in a given parade since 2006.

It is interesting to note that, prior to the reorganization, an average of seven Alibabá groups from the National District participated in the parade. This is because during the 1980s and 1990s, there were only about seven Alibabá groups total in the country.<sup>98</sup> Surprisingly, only seven Alibabá groups competed at the 2015 National Parade. Yet, this restriction in the presence of Alibabá groups over the last thirty years is only at the national level. In fact, there were eight Alibabá groups in 2015 that represented just the National District at the local level alone. Moreover, my Dominican colleagues and I estimated that there are actually around twenty Alibabá groups operating in and around Santo Domingo in total. Thus, even as the number of Alibabá groups at the National Parades remains the same, their numbers are actually increasing throughout the province (see Table 4.2).

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<sup>98</sup> Since 2014, one Alibabá group from Bayaguana, Monte Plata province has also registered for the National Parade. Bayaguana is situated directly to the north of North Santo Domingo

**Table 4.2** Alibabá groups in 2015, including those representing the National District in local parades and those from around the country that registered for the National Parade from the National District (DN), Bayaguana (MP), West Santo Domingo (SDO), and East Santo Domingo (SDE)

| Groups from the National District  | Groups at the National Parade   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creación Fantástica</li> <li>• Fusión Guloya</li> <li>• Fantasía Tropical</li> <li>• Los Cadetes de Villa Francisca</li> <li>• Fantasía y Tradición</li> <li>• Los Sultanes de Villas Agrícolas</li> <li>• Los Egipcios</li> <li>• Los Beiby del Mambo</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creación Fantástica (DN)</li> <li>• Fusión Guloya (DN)</li> <li>• Morímambo (MP)</li> <li>• Samurais Sin Maestros (SDO)</li> <li>• Alibabá de Los Alcarrizos (SDO)</li> <li>• Los Magos del Almirante (SDE)</li> <li>• Fantasía Taína (SDE)</li> </ul> |

In summary, the limiting of Santo Domingo groups effectively prevented Alibabá from even having an equal presence at the National Parade since 2006—which in turn has limited the presence of Alibabá music at the parade. It appears the impetus for this was, in part, due to the Carnival Commission’s redefined approach to creating a more balanced national diversity at carnival. However, carnival regulations that favor diversity do not readily explain the continued scarcity of live music performance at carnival parades in Santo Domingo in general—especially among groups with a stronger presence such as diablo, fantasy, and traditional groups. This is even more surprising considering that the Carnival Commission’s reorganization efforts have actually sought to support the presence of live musical performance. To understand this, in the next section, I begin by returning back to the introduction of Alibabá in the 1970s and its initial success at infusing musical performance into a variety of carnival genres from 1983 to 2005. I then look at how a change in prize allocation systems codified the definition of “musicalness” as a judging criterion and impacted the inclusion of live music making among carnival groups in the capital.

#### 4.2 Evaluating Prize Allocation: Reaffirming Identity or Motivating Musical Performance in Santo Domingo's Carnivals

Whereas my interest in the performance of live music at carnival in Santo Domingo has focused almost exclusively on Alibabá, many within the Dominican culture sector appear to be equal proponents of any music genre becoming associated with carnival, such as merengue (see Chapter 3). In her blog titled “Dominican Folklore,” Xiomara Pérez laments, “*The Dominican Republic still does not have a carnival music lineage* that identifies itself, like those of other Caribbean, Central American, and South American countries...Brazil, Columbia, Trinidad and Tobago, Haiti, and Panama among others possess a music with a carnival identity [that] once heard, we immediately know its origin because it has *an essence, an identifying basis*, like what happens with other aspect of traditional culture” (2014, para. 2; emphasis in original).<sup>99</sup> I contend that one reason for the absence of a carnival music lineage in the Dominican Republic is that nationalized popular musics (like merengue or bachata) have not been carnivalized by performers. Another reason is because the specific cultural policies regulating diversity have meant that Alibabá groups are not actively positioned as emblematic of Dominican national identity—as has been the case for samba schools in Rio or steel bands in Trinidad (see Section 4.3).

This is not to say that all cultural policies that promote diversity could not be conducive to promoting the performance of Dominican commercial music at carnival events. Even merengue is not precluded from serving as a genre of carnival music—as it has easily entered the carnival soundscape of Barranquilla, Colombia. Carnival celebrations in Barranquilla take place

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<sup>99</sup> “*La República Dominicana no tiene todavía una línea musical carnavalesca que la identifique, como tienen otros pueblos del área del Caribe, Centroamérica y Suramérica...Brasil, Colombia, Trinidad y Tobago, Haití y Panamá, entre otros, poseen una música con identidad carnavalesca. Inmediatamente se escucha sabemos cuál es su origen, porque tiene una esencia, una base identitaria, como ocurre con otros aspectos de la cultura tradicional.*”

over the course of the four days prior to Ash Wednesday. Events include the Tradition and Folklore Parade on Sunday, followed by the Fantasy Parade and Orchestra Festival on Monday. In part, the folkloric genres like *tambor* and *gaitas* are as equally prominent as the salsa, vallenato, and merengue because of a prize allocation system that rewards such diversity (see Márceles Daconte 2014; Vignolo 2014).

Starting in 1981, artist Wilfrido Vargas and his orchestra first performed at Barranquilla carnival, which inspired the addition of a “tropical music” category to the Barranquilla music competition that year, followed by a “foreign group” category starting in 1984. Between 1981 and 1998, a number of Dominican artists featured prominently at the Barranquilla music competition, including Vargas, Cuco Valoy, Johnny Ventura, Milly Quezada and los Vecinos, Josie Esteban and la Patrulla 15, and Kinito Méndez. In 1985, Valoy even recorded a cover version of “Baila en la Calle,” altering the opening lyric to “In the carnival of my Barranquilla, dance in the street all night, dance in the street all day.”<sup>100</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to surmise why Dominican carnival groups historically have not included much live music in their performances prior to the rise of Alibabá in the 1970s. However, it is possible to examine factors at play in the continued overall absence of musical performance from Dominican carnival since the Ministry of Culture (MINC) recognized Alibabá as a carnival genre. Prior to 2006, Dominican National Carnival organizers encouraged the participation of a variety of groups by offering prizes that supported diversity in two ways. First, prizes were awarded to the best carnival groups by genre, including “historical,” “traditional” and “fantasy.” Second, and more importantly, prizes were also awarded based on the quality of individual elements—such as originality, musicalness, choreography, etc.—for

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<sup>100</sup> “En el carnaval de mi Barranquilla, baila en la calle de noche, baila en la calle de día.”

groups that did not adhere to a specific genre (Tejeda Ortiz 2008, 132). Therefore, as I will argue here, the continued relative lack of musical performance at the Dominican National Parade can be traced to major changes in the prize allocation system.

Alibabá groups of the 1970s were not yet an established genre, but they were immediately recognizable by their inclusion of some form of three key elements: (1) dance, (2) music, and (3) costumes. Since Alibabá did not become a fixed prize category until 2006, these groups benefitted from the flexibility of the original prize allocation system. Despite the name “Alibabá,” which automatically evokes images of Arab or Middle Eastern imagery, Alibabá groups have even been dressing in a variety of costumes—both Arab-inspired and non-Arab inspired—since at least 1981. More importantly, from the beginning, creativity and variety also played a vital role in distinguishing one Alibabá group from the next—particularly in terms of costumes. Therefore, the existence of prize categories based on individual and thematic elements more so than genre encouraged Alibabá groups to participate, compete, and win at the National Parade.

For example, as one of the most successful groups with a legacy of over forty years, Chachón’s Alibabá group is one of the most highly decorated and also one of the most diverse in terms of thematic components. Between 1983 and 2006, Chachón’s group won several first and second place awards in almost every category, including: first place for traditional theme with his “Comparsa Descubrimiento y Conquista de Villa Francisca” (Discovery and Conquista Group from Villa Francisca) in 1992; first place for originality, musicalness, and choreography, in addition to fantasy theme, with “los Joe” (The Joe’s) in 1993; first place for historical theme with “Maltrato a los Esclavos” (Mistreatment of the Slaves) in 1996; and second place for

traditional theme with “El Colorido de Carnaval” (The Colorfulness of Carnival) in 2006 among others (Secretaría de Estado de Cultura 2009, 11).<sup>101</sup>

As the National Director of Folklore in the Dominican Republic during the first Carnival Congress, Xiomara Pérez and others attempted to address this deficit back in 2005. Thus, among the sixty-eight agreements reached by the Congress, three focused on increasing the presence of music: “7. Give priority to Dominican music at carnival manifestations...46. Motivate groups so that they bring their own musicians, and with this also promote musical creativity...[and] 47. Create mechanisms to facilitate the movement of musical groups that participate in the National Parade” (*Primer Congreso* 2006, 22, 33).<sup>102</sup> I have already demonstrated that the Congress’ desires to create a nationally diverse parade by limiting Santo Domingo groups also limited the presence of Alibabá music. However, given their desire to promote music at Dominican carnival in general, there are seemingly other elements at play that have complicated the full integration of musical performance among other non-Alibabá carnival genres in the capital as well.

Not surprisingly, the very first resolution that the Carnival Congress reached in order to reevaluate carnival practices revolved around the idea of promoting “Dominican identity” namely to: “1. Reaffirm Dominican identity in carnival manifestations, in the National District as much as in the provinces and municipalities; so that the emergent representations are groups or individual characters who emphasize Dominican reality” (*Primer Congreso* 2006, 21).<sup>103</sup> For this reason, the Secretary of State for Culture named the 2006 National Parade “The Springtime of Dominican Identity” (Secretaría del Estado de Cultura 2006, 6). The National Parade organizers

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<sup>101</sup> Luis Roberto Torres, interview, 2 August 2014.

<sup>102</sup> “7. Dar prioridad a la música dominicana en las manifestaciones de carnaval...46. Motivar que las comparsas lleven sus propios músicos, pues con esto además de fomentar la creatividad musical...[y] 47. Crear mecanismos para facilitar el desplazamiento de los grupos musicales que participan en el Desfile Nacional.”

<sup>103</sup> “1. Reafirmar la identidad dominicana en las manifestaciones de carnaval, tanto en el Distrito Nacional como en las provincias y los municipios; que las representaciones que surjan enfaticen en personajes de comparsas o individuales sobre la realidad dominicana.”



were faced with a decision of how to implement the Congress's resolution that either fostered a Dominican identity at carnival by "motivating" the addition of new elements like music or by "reaffirming" set traditions. In an attempt to do both, carnival organizers decided to update and simplify the prize categories. This resulted in only genre-based prized categories, with a total of six categories for groups: diablo, fantasy, historical, traditional, popular creativity, and Alibabá.<sup>104</sup>

Some recent definitions of these principal prize categories provided in the official National Parade program in 2015 are as follows:

1. **Diablos:** Is the most numerous representation of Dominican carnival. There exists a great variety of versions of diablos as local carnival characters. This multiplicity of diablos is as great as it is emblematic. The most well-know are the *diablos cojuelos* [limping devils]. But also there are the diablos cojuelos from La Vega, the *lechones* [pig devils] from Santiago, the *macaraos* [masked devils] from Bonao and from Salcedo, *los toros y civiles* [bull devils and civilians] from Montecristi, among others.
2. **Traditional:** They are comprised of characters from everyday life that adhere to carnival characteristics and are presented in a traditional way in Dominican carnival, as much in Santo Domingo as in the distinct provinces.
3. **History:** Are those that are comprised in part by the representation of characters, costumes, and time-period situations from the past.
4. **Popular Creativity:** Their elements recreate over-the-top popular elements through the imaginary and creativity.
5. **Fantasy:** Their elements exceed the imaginary and the mundane brought to life through characters, costumes, masks, artistic dimensions, originality, and a creativity without limits. The variety of colorfulness and the use of glitter is part of their characteristics.

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<sup>104</sup> For the purpose of this dissertation, I do not discuss the two additional categories of "best individual costume" or "best mask" as groups are not eligible to compete for these prizes. It is important to note that for the 2017 celebration, the Ministry of Culture revised the prize allocation system for the National Carnival Parade again, condensing the categories not by genre, but in a way that is more reminiscent to the 1983 allocation system, awarding for "Best Provincial Production," "Best Sectorial Production" (i.e., from Santo Domingo), "Individual Character," and "Mask," plus a grand prize. This decision was not without controversy, and it remains to be seen how this may impact the inclusion of live-music making among non-Alibabá groups in the future.

6. Alibabá: They are distinguished by their costumes, that for the most part symbolize the folklore of Asia, The Orient, Europe, and more recently part of Dominican culture. Acrobatic dances, musical cadence, and adherence to thematic elements that allegorize different rites, legends, and other ethnicities. They are personified most frequently in the city of Santo Domingo’s carnival.<sup>105</sup> (MINC 2015, 59-60)

With the elevation of Alibabá as a nationally recognized carnival genre, one might expect that the presence of Alibabá music would increase substantially. Alibabá groups now competed for three dedicated prizes—RD\$40,000, RD\$20,000, and RD\$10,000 (about US\$900, US\$450, and US\$225, respectively)—in addition to the overall Grand Prize of RD\$75,000 (or about US\$1,700). Yet, as I have already shown, the limits put on the number of groups from the capital neutralized any economic incentives and apparent favorable odds that may have encouraged the spawn of new Alibabá groups. But, what effect did this decision to recognize Alibabá music have on the inclusion of live music making among the other five genres?

The issue that I raise with the switch to genre-based prize categories is not with the definitions of the genres as established by MINC, but with the way judges interpreted the inclusion of “musicalness” by way of prize allocation. As a case in point, part of the

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<sup>105</sup> “1. Diablos: Es la representación más numerosa del carnaval dominicano. Existe una gran variedad de versiones de diablos como personajes de carnaval local. Esta multiplicidad de diablos es tan grande como emblemática. Los más conocidos son los diablos cojuelos. Pero también están los diablos cojuelos de La Vega, los lechones de Santiago, los macaraos de Bonao y de Salcedo, los toros y civiles de Montecristi, entre otros.

2. Tradicional: Están compuestas por personajes de la cotidianidad que adquieren características carnavales y se presentan de manera tradicional en los carnavales dominicanos, tanto en Santo Domingo como en las distintas provincias.

3. Historia: Son las que se constituyen a partir de la representación de personajes, vestuarios y situaciones ambientadas en época del pasado.

4. Creatividad Popular: Su contenido recrea elementos populares resaltados a través de lo imaginario y la creatividad.

5. Fantasía: Su contenido desborda lo imaginario y lo común expuestos a través de personajes, vestuarios, máscaras, dimensiones artísticas, originalidad y una creatividad sin límites. La variedad del colorido y el uso del brillo es parte de sus características.”

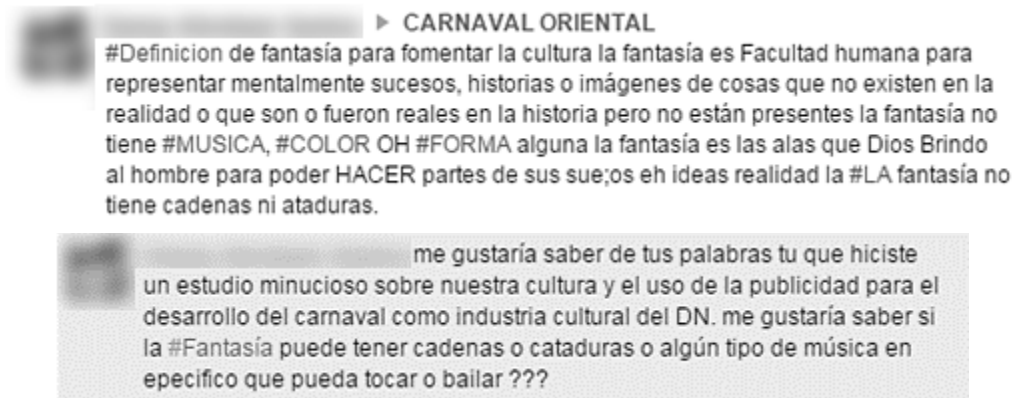
6. Alí-Babá: Se distinguen por sus vestimentas, que en la mayoría de las oportunidades simbolizan el folklore del Asia, Oriente, Europa y muy recientemente de la cultura dominicana. Bailes acrobáticos, cadencia musical y coherencia de elementos temáticos que hace alegoría a diferentes ritos, leyendas y otras etnias. Son personificados con más frecuencia en el carnaval de la ciudad de Santo Domingo.”

reorganizational efforts to simplify the prize categories meant that groups would now have to register in advance and indicate their category in order to be included in a printed program and compete for prizes at the Parade. As groups became more aware of the judges' expectations for each group, judges also became better at establishing boundaries for each category in terms of what was and was not "genre appropriate." Although judges were still encouraged to consider the individual elements (including originality, choreography and musicalness) of each group as a portion of its overall score, not all elements were considered essential to all groups.

For example, the element of "creativity" was incorporated into the definitions of popular creativity and fantasy—but not diablos, historical, traditional, or Alibabá. Likewise, the only group now defined by "originality" and "colorfulness" was fantasy. More importantly, the elements of "choreography" and "musicalness" now only appear in the definition of Alibabá. In the remainder of this section, I will explore the ramifications of reaffirming "musicalness" as a judging criterion unique to Alibabá on the presence of live music making among other carnival groups in Santo Domingo. In order to understand how assumptions about musical performance at the national level have actively impacted the performance of live music at Santo Domingo carnivals at the local level as well, I will look at divergences between judging practices and desires of carnival participants in terms of Alibabá music side-by-side with other costume-based carnival genres. I will support my analysis with the words and ideas of actual carnival participants from Santo Domingo, whom I interviewed, and unsolicited posts on Facebook and YouTube.

## Alibabá and Fantasy Groups: Local vs. National Criteria for Musicalness at the National District Municipal Carnival Parades

Not only is there little consensus on the place of musical performance at national carnival parades, there is also a debate regarding Alibabá music at local carnivals. On 27 November 2015, the Organization Secretary for the National District Carnival Union (UCADI) posed a message for consideration on the Facebook group “CARNAVAL ORIENTAL.” I include portions of the original thread of his comments below, with the most pertinent sections also translated into English.



#Definition of fantasy to stimulate culture. Fantasy is the human Right to mentally represent events, stories, or images of things that do not exist in reality or that are from history but not present. Fantasy does not have #MUSIC, #COLOR, or some #FORM. Fantasy is the wings that God gave to man to be able to MAKE parts of his dreams and ideas come true. #FANTASY has neither chains nor tethers.

I would like to know in your own words, you who did a small study about our culture and the use of marketing for the development of carnival as a cultural industry in the National District. What I would like to know is if #Fantasy can have chains or tether or some kind of specific music that can be played or danced to???

The comment was directed towards another member of the group, who authored a study on the topic of carnival in the National District. She responded with the following:

La fantasía, es un término psicológico que alude a una situación imaginaria y el carnaval es una celebración / expresión socio cultural ... Por ende no tiene límites ninguna de las dos Ni en color, forma y mucho menos la música... La música en el carnaval en todas las categorías es muy muy influyente, un ritmo de música no debe ser prohibida o definir una categoría x .

Ahora voy más directo ( ritmo de alibaba en fantasía) Noo ? No, no debe ser prohibida ? Porque ? Por qué es un ritmo casi casi declarado como música oficial del carnaval

Fantasy, it is a psychological term that alludes to an imaginary situation and carnival is a socio-cultural celebration/expression...As a result neither of these have limits, neither in color, form, and much less music...Music in carnival in all categories is very influential, a musical rhythm should not be prohibited or define any category.

Now I'll be more direct (Alibabá rhythm in fantasy) Right? No, it should not be prohibited? Why? Because it is a rhythm very nearly [*casi casi*] declared as an official music of carnival.

What the author makes clear in her response is that the question of whether music should be permitted among fantasy groups in the capital or not is really about whether or not Alibabá music should be permitted among fantasy groups. As a reminder, fantasy groups often dance choreographed routines to pre-recorded Dominican popular or traditional music on CDs, but the “fantasy” category itself is neither associated with live musical accompaniment nor a specific genre of music. Therefore, there is seemingly little reason for there to be a conflict of values between Alibabá music and fantasy groups in the National District.

Up until now, I have focused primarily on Alibabá groups in Santo Domingo as the principal source of live music performance at Dominican carnival. To complicate this fact, some groups that are fundamentally Alibabá (in terms of costume, choreography, and music) in fact compete in other categories—with “fantasy” as the most common. These groups that I will call “fantasy-Alibabá” groups emerged out of the National District in conjunction with the establishment of municipal parades—or carnival parades with participants from a single municipality of Santo Domingo (National District, East Santo Domingo, etc.). However, it is also

true that there is pressure from the National Parade organizers on National District groups to conform to national genre standards—for which musicalness as a judging criterion is reserved for what I will call “traditional-Alibabá” groups. Hence, unforeseen conflicts have arisen in terms of musical performance as an element of National District fantasy groups.

With Resolution No. 144/2004 (later superseded by Resolution No.2/2011), the city council of the National District passed a decree to create an annual municipal carnival parade in conjunction with the United Diablos Cojuelos Association (ADIU).<sup>106</sup> Part of the ADIU’s goals for proposing such a carnival was in direct opposition to the limits placed on the National Parade by the Carnival Commission. Namely, as the National Parade needed to be national in character and thus support a diverse number of carnival groups, the National District (DN) municipal parades would highlight the diversity of local Santo Domingo carnival groups only. As a result, the National District began holding municipal level carnival parades every Sunday during the month of February beginning in 2003.

One way in which the DN municipal parades stand in opposition to the National Parade is with a distinct prize allocation system that awards prizes in more categories, including “fantasy diablo” and “traditional diablo” among others. Thus, the National District is unique among the carnival celebrations because there are economic incentives in place to support both fantasy groups and traditional groups. Unlike the category definitions established for the National Parade, the prize categories of the National District municipal parades have motivated the incorporation of musical performance by encouraging the evolution of Alibabá into fantasy-Alibabá. Although there is no specific category for fantasy-Alibabá, the link between fantasy and

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<sup>106</sup> The original resolution nominated México Ave. as the preferred route for the municipal parade (between Jacinto de la Concha and Abreu St.). This route was changed to Winston Churchill Ave. and Enrique Jiménez Moya Ave. (from Eduardo Vicioso St. to José Contreras Ave.) with Resolution No. 2/2011 (ADN 2011, 77-78).

Alibabá in the National District is so strong that by 2015, the genre definitions of both fantasy and Alibabá in the National District included references to musicalness (see Table 4.3).

However, this modified definition is unique to the National District, and causes some tension both among Alibabá groups in the National District and among fantasy groups at the National Parade.

According to Sandy Coco of Villa Consuelo, fantasy-Alibabá groups in the National District first emerged in 2003 or 2004, coinciding with the creation of the municipal parade. As a member of these groups, Coco recalls that it was the first time that Alibabá costumes became more intricate, using feathers, glitter, and vibrant colors. Although some innovative choreography began being added to Alibabá in the 1990s (see Chapter 4), Coco recalls that fantasy-Alibabá groups began pushing even more stylized choreography in the 2000s. Coco later became a leader of his own fantasy-Alibabá group in 2006, which he called “Fantasía Carnavalesca” (Carnival Fantasy) while he was also working as a choreographer in the resort town of Punta Cana. Coco’s group was a family affair, with his older brother Máximo “Cuchuken” Coco as lead snare drummer until both immigrated to the U.S. in 2009 (see also Chapter 5).<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Sandy Coco and Máximo Coco, interview, 26 July 2015 and 29 July 2015.

**Table 4.3** Prize Category genre-based definitions for the National District municipal parades, February 2015 (source unknown)<sup>108</sup>

**Description by Category**

|   |                         |  |
|---|-------------------------|--|
| 1 | Traditional Diablo:     | Mask with 4 horns, <i>Vejiga</i> , <sup>109</sup> Cowbells, Jingle bells, Hoods and Ribbon and mirrors, feathered boas.  |
| 2 | Fantasy Diablo:         | Mask, <i>Vejiga</i> , Cowbells and Jingle bells, Hoods (Back Mounts, Feathers, Lights, etc.).  |
| 3 | Historical:             | The Closest possible Representation of the part of history that it is trying to represent.   |
| 4 | Popular Creativity:     | Creative liberty of the carnival participants, sticking to their proposed theme and with a well-defined name.  |
| 5 | Individual:             | Fantasy, Free Expression of a carnival participant   |
| 6 | Traditional Individual: | Emblematic character of Dominican Carnival   |
| 7 | Traditional:            | All characters that have been consistently cultivated in Dominican Carnival ( <i>Robalagallina, Califé, Muerte en yipe, Se me Muere Rebeca, Gallero, Muñecotes, Guloya, El Viejo del Swing</i> ) |
| 8 | Fantasy:                | Themes from the furthest stretches of the imagination, breaking the traditional parameters or schematics of Dominican carnival (Costumes, Musicalness...)  |
| 9 | Alibabá:                | Maintains their Foundation in synchronized Dance and Musicalness to the rhythm of snare drums (Various Costumes)   |

Another prominent fantasy-Alibabá group emerged from the Villa Consuelo neighborhood under the direction of Edward “Miky” Herrera Taveras in 2007. Even though from the beginning Alibabá groups featured Arab and non-Arab costume themes, Miky is overtly credited with expanding the costume to include themes that he calls “Arabesque,” referring to

<sup>108</sup> “1. Diablos Tradicionales: Careta con 4 cachos, Bejiga, Campanas y Cascabeles, Capuchas y Moña y espejos, boas.  
 2. Diablos Fantasía: Careta, Bejiga, Campanas y Cascabeles, Capuchas (Montaje, Espaldar, Plumas, Luces, etc.).  
 3. Histórico: Representación lo más parecido posible a la parte de la historia que trata de representar.  
 4. Creatividad Popular: Libertad creativa de los Carnavalescos, apegada al tema que propone y con su nombre bien definido.  
 5. Individual: Fantasía, Libre Expresión del carnavalesco.  
 6. Individual Tradicional: Personaje emblemático del Carnaval Dominicano.  
 7. Tradicional: Todo personaje que se haya sembrado con su consistencia en el Carnaval Dominicano (Roba la Gallina, Califé, Muerte en yipe, Se Me Muere Rebeca, Gallero, Muñecotes, Guloya, El Viejo del Swing).  
 8. Fantasía: Temáticas más allá de lo imaginario, rompiendo los parámetros o esquemas tradicionales del carnaval Dominicano (Vestuarios, Musicalidad...)  
 9. Alibabá: Mantiene Su Fundamento en el Baile sincronizado y la Musicalidad a ritmo de redoblantes (Vestuarios Variados).”

<sup>109</sup> “*Vejiga*,” or hardened animal bladders or hard plastic football-shaped balloons carried by the devils, is sometimes spelled as “*bejiga*” because of their similar pronunciation. The vejigas are used to playfully smack carnival by-standers.



Venetian-themed elaborate costumes including the distinctive Venetian carnival masks (see Figure 4.1). Not surprisingly, Miky’s group took home the grand prize at National Carnival in 2007 and has continued to earn top recognitions in competitions ever since. In 2009, Coco also designed a Venetian-inspired costume for his group “Suspiro de Venecia” (Breath of Venice). After featuring the same theme for three years, Miky retired his Venetian costumes in 2010 in favor of gladiator costumes.<sup>110</sup> This eventually led to Alibabá groups choosing themes from an expanded “oriental” world, including Greco-Roman gladiators, Egyptian pharaohs, Japanese geishas, and Hindu deities—designs often inspired by anything that can be found on the internet.

**Figure 4.1** Example of the fantasy-Alibabá costume for Sandy Coco’s group from the 2015 National Parade, with a stylized version of a Venetian carnival eye mask (photo taken on George Washington Avenue, National District, 1 March 2015)



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<sup>110</sup> Edward Herrera Taveras, interview, 13 June 2015.

According to Coco and Miky, the primary way to distinguish between a traditional-Alibabá and a fantasy-Alibabá is with the costumes (see Figure 4.2). Traditionally, Alibabá costumes are simple fabric suits without much embellishment. For fantasy-Alibabá groups, there is much more emphasis put on costume decoration. This also means that fantasy-Alibabá groups are more expensive to operate. For 2015, Miky estimated that he spent around RD\$600,000 (over US\$13,000) to design and fabricate costumes for his entire group. In addition to this, he is also responsible for the small salaries he pays his primary choreographer, Gregorio Rodríguez, and band leader, César Carvajal, who direct the dancers and musicians respectively, while Miky works full-time for his tire import/export business. Although Miky states that a majority of this money comes out of pocket, a part of the expenses is subsidized by prize money to cover the costs of the musicians and instruments. Miky's fantasy-Alibabá group has been one of the most successful, garnering awards at municipal parades, the National Parade, the Grand Carnival Gala in Santiago (see Section 4.3), and the now-defunct Carnival Reality Show (2011-2012).

**Figure 4.2** Two examples of Alibabá groups, (a) one from Los Farallones featuring a more traditional-Alibabá costume style (photo taken on España Avenue, East Santo Domingo, 24 February 2013) and (b) another from Villa Maria featuring a fantasy-Alibabá costume style (photo taken in Plaza España, National District, 26 February 2011). Although both feature carnival masks, note the difference between the costume overall (especially the abundance of feathers and sequins in the photo on the right)



(a)



(b)

As previously mentioned, the Carnival Commission passed the onus of selection for the National Parade to the recently established municipal parades in the National District and in North, West, and East Santo Domingo beginning in 2006. In the case of the National District, municipal carnival parades are held every Sunday during the month of February. The municipal parades maintain open registration so that any group may participate that wishes to do so, and each group is subsequently assigned to a single municipal parade in order to keep the total number of groups about even. These first carnival parades act as qualifiers for the parade on the final Sunday of the month. Only the National District groups who are awarded first, second, or third place in their category at the final municipal parade are invited to participate and compete at the National Parade the following Sunday. This means that upwards of six Alibabá groups from the National District may qualify for the National Parade—three traditional-Alibabá competing in the Alibabá category and three fantasy-Alibabá who potentially qualify in the fantasy category. However, as we have seen, the national genre definition for fantasy groups does not reference musicalness—placing it squarely in the domain of the Alibabá category.

This difference between the municipal and the national definition of fantasy created conflict at the national level in terms of live music performance at the National Parade. The conflict between Alibabá and fantasy groups came to a head in 2009, when MINC decided to adhere to their version of genre definitions and insisted that any group who played live music had to compete in the Alibabá category that year. This decision was met with hostility by fantasy-Alibabá group leaders like Coco and Miky who had put in extra time, effort, and money to design fantasy-style costumes. It was also met unfavorably by traditional-Alibabá leaders, who felt like their less intricate costumes could not compete with the prestige of the other groups. Not surprisingly, all three groups that won prizes in the Alibabá category that year were fantasy-

Alibabá groups, including Coco's "Suspiro de Venecia," Pedro Thompson's group "Los Arlequines y Algo Más" (The Harlequins and Something More) from North Santo Domingo, and Miky's group "Los Monarcas en Fantasía" (The Monarchs in Fantasy). Although MINC repealed this decision the following year and allowed for fantasy-Alibabá groups from the capital to compete nationally in the fantasy category, some animosity between fantasy and traditional groups regarding "musicalness" has remained ever since.

Since 2010, with ever increasing numbers of traditional-Alibabá and fantasy-Alibabá groups popping up around the capital, the ratio of a group's musicalness to its emphasis on costumes has been central to how groups distinguish themselves. According to Miky, many Alibabá groups in Santo Domingo simply do not have enough quality musicians who can play the Alibabá rhythm. Thus, according to him, these groups select the fantasy category and emphasize their costumes to compensate for lackluster musicians—as musical performance is still optional for fantasy groups, but is a key component to Alibabá.<sup>111</sup> For traditional-Alibabá groups, the focus is on dance and music as a compensation for less investment in expensive costumes. Not surprisingly, the money involved in maintaining a fantasy-Alibabá group has made some traditionalists skeptical of the ultimate goals and motivations of fantasy-Alibabá. By way of example, I have claimed that Alibabá groups are attempting to represent an alternate social identity that combats the barrio's negative association with delinquency and drug use (see Chapter 2). At the same time, many traditional-Alibabá group members and leaders I spoke to maintain that Miky's economic success year after year had to be because he deals drugs. Other people I spoke to were critical of the success of leaders like Pedro Thompson, who cite his focus on money and habit of charging members a fee to participate in his group as also being contrary

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<sup>111</sup> Edward Herrera Taveras, interview, 13 June 2015.

to the social goals of Alibabá. In 2015, a fight even broke out between a fantasy-Alibabá group from Villa Francisca and a traditional-Alibabá group from Villas Agrícolas at the final DN municipal parade that resulted in both groups being disqualified from the National Parade.

Over the past few years, fantasy-Alibabá and traditional-Alibabá have arranged somewhat of a compromise in a way that allows for fantasy groups to include musical performance without ostracizing traditional-Alibabá groups. In 2013, Pedro Thompson's 500+ member fantasy-Alibabá group took home the grand prize, and group leaders like Miky took notice. In order to recreate the perceived success of Thompson, Miky collaborated with several leaders of traditional-Alibabá groups in East Santo Domingo to combine forces and compete as a single fantasy/Alibabá fusion group in 2014. This created the massive size that Miky was looking for and a more prominent musical component provided by the other groups, which Miky had previously been lacking.<sup>112</sup> Although Miky did not take home the grand prize in 2014 as he had hoped, he did establish a precedent for the following year.

Fantasy groups have a well-established history of performing their choreographed dance routines to pre-recorded music. Up until 2015, the fantasy groups in the National District that have sought to include an element of music in their performance have been at their core Alibabá groups that dressed in fantasy-styled costumes—rather than established fantasy groups looking to incorporate live music. Because of these fusion groups, there is now an indication that non-Alibabá fantasy groups are also looking at Alibabá as a potential additional component of their performance.

In 2015, three established fantasy groups teamed up with one Alibabá group from the National District to form “El Imperio de los Cuarto Elementos” (The Empire of the Four

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<sup>112</sup> Edward Herrera Taveras, interview, 13 June 2015.

Elements) and took home the grand prize (see Chapter 1). For the most part, MINC is satisfied with these fantasy/Alibabá fusions groups in terms of adhering to genre standards.<sup>113</sup> The success of these groups indicates that there may be a future with an increased presence of live musical performance among National District groups at the National Parade.<sup>114</sup> However, the performance of live music may not become an essential part of fantasy groups at the national level as long as “musicalness” remains an optional element within the fantasy category.

### Alibabá and Traditional Groups: The Philosophy of Musical Performance at East Santo Domingo Municipal Carnival Parades

Unlike fantasy groups, traditional carnival groups have a much more limited history with music. The majority of unique characters found at Dominican carnival are primarily costume-based, including the robalagallina (chicken thief), King Califé, and the indios (the natives). Yet, as I have described in my previous work, it would be inaccurate to describe these groups as being entirely musically silent (see Hajek 2010). Throughout the history of Dominican carnival, traditional groups have often been accompanied by a tambora and güira for rhythmic support. Therefore, the presence of musical performance within traditional groups is not in itself a contradiction, especially when the instruments used are also interpreted as “traditional”—especially the tambora and güira, which have both become inextricably linked to Dominican

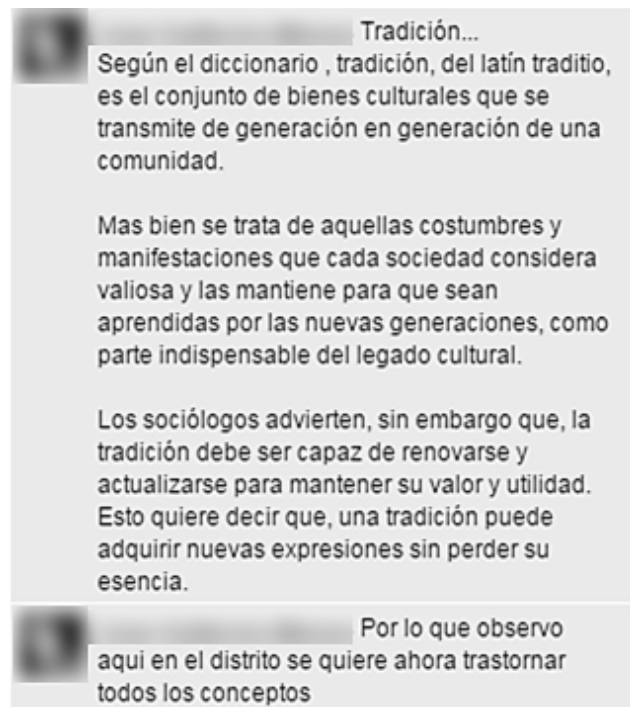
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<sup>113</sup> In 2015, the Ministry of Culture imposed new standards on fusion groups. One, the fusion must be established before the final qualifying municipal parade. Two, at least one of the groups must then qualify at the final municipal parade for the fusion group to perform at the National Parade. Three, all groups must originate in the same province (National District, East Santo Domingo, North Santo Domingo, West Santo Domingo, etc.).

<sup>114</sup> There was some talk at the Carnival Office within the Ministry of Culture during the summer of 2015 to bring up the idea of adding the National District’s “fantasy diablo” category for discussion at the next carnival congress. As part of an informal discussion, many of the staff did not seem in favor of such an idea, but suggested that it was something that the congress could vote on. The majority of their negative reactions focused on the issue of prize allocation—as in, in order to award prizes to “fantasy diablo,” the Ministry would have to take away prize money from another group. Another reason the staff was not in favor of this idea also was because they thought it may lead down a slippery slope of all categories demanding a “fantasy” version included in the prize categories.

identity because of their use in genres like merengue típico. The ire regarding the place of musical performance among traditional groups is reserved for the mixing of traditional characters with “non-traditional” instruments (such as those not specifically linked to Dominican identity) or with “non-traditional” music genres (such as Alibabá or reggaetón).

In a comment to the aforementioned thread in the Facebook group “CARNAVAL ORIENTAL” from 27 November 2015, one prominent leader of a diablo group in the National District verbalized how traditional carnival groups that incorporate non-traditional elements are wrong for doing so. Whereas this thread otherwise discussed the permissibility of music among fantasy groups, this diablo group leader abruptly switched to the topic of traditional carnival groups, stating:



Tradition...According to the dictionary, tradition from the Latin *traditio*, is the joining of cultural goods that are transmitted from generation to generation within a community.

Better yet it pertains to those customs and manifestations that each society considers valuable and maintains them so that they are learned by new generations, as an indispensable part of cultural legacy.

Sociologists advise, however that tradition should be able to renew and update itself in order to maintain its value and utility. In other words, a tradition can acquire new expressions without losing its essence.

Based on what I am observing here in the District, they want to now destroy [*se trastorna*] all of the concepts.

This begs the question of how Dominicans draw the line between traditional carnival practices acquiring new expressions and screwing up the concepts. Of all new expressions informing traditional carnival practices, the inclusion of musical performance is perhaps the most contentious. At the same time that MINC has allowed more and more flexibility with Alibabá groups competing as fantasy since 2010, the Ministry and other similar cultural entities have become more protective of the traditional category in order to “reaffirm” specific carnival practices as traditional and authentic. Before the switch to genre-based categories in 2006, Alibabá groups won prizes in all varieties of categories (as described in Section 4.1). Up until 2010, Alibabá groups still competed in the other prize categories based on a loose interpretation of their costume themes rather than musicalness. This even includes an attempt in 2006 by the Alibabá groups from Los Alcarrizos, who competed in the “traditional” category because they wore “traditional” Alibabá costumes. In 2010, an Alibabá group from Villa Francisca presented a new take on the traditional King Califé character (which is performed in black face) accompanied by an Alibabá rhythm—and won third place in the traditional category (see Figure 4.3).

Currently, Alibabá groups are no longer permitted to compete as traditional at the national level—in short, affirming that Alibabá is not traditional. However, at the local level, this notion has also been reinterpreted to mean that traditional groups cannot include Alibabá



music—inferring that traditional is not Alibabá. As I see it, this state of affairs is the end result of a larger social goal of promoting diversity that is widespread in Santo Domingo carnival. Using East Santo Domingo (SDE) municipal parades as a case study, I analyze the shift from a philosophy of creating a diverse carnival atmosphere by promoting traditional carnival groups to a philosophy of protecting traditional groups by enforcing diversity, and its impact on the presence of musical performance among traditional groups.

**Figure 4.3** Carnival group “Califé” (#175) from Villa Francisca, accompanied by an Alibabá band performing at the 2010 National Parade (photo taken on George Washington Avenue, National District, 7 March 2010)



Prior to 2001, the entire province of Santo Domingo was comprised of a single municipality – the National District. However, as a result of the urban and industrial growth of Santo Domingo in its eastern, western, and northern extremes, the Dominican National Congress voted to decentralize the National District and divide it into four additional municipalities: East Santo Domingo, West Santo Domingo, North Santo Domingo, and Boca Chica (see Congreso Nacional 2001). Sensing the impending separation, Dario de Jesús—on behalf of the Administration-Delegation of Executive Power for Eastern Santo Domingo—sponsored an

initiative to organize a carnival parade in eastern Santo Domingo. The first “Eastern carnival” took place on 7 October 2001—mere weeks before the Congress divided the territory (see Tejeda Ortiz 2002). However, SDE municipal carnival parades were not established as an annual event during the spring carnival season until February 2008.

Occupying a much larger territory than the contemporary National District, agricultural rural communities exist side-by-side with urban zones in East Santo Domingo (SDE). Thus, traditional Dominican carnival groups occupy an important part of the unique local identity of East Santo Domingo in contrast to the entirely urbanized new National District. During an interview in 2015, Gladys Olea, then Manager of Culture and Folklore and Organization of Carnival in East Santo Domingo, proudly touted the diverse array of traditional Dominican characters found within East Santo Domingo, like *los galleros* (“the cock fighters”) and *Se me muere Rebecca* (“Rebecca is dying on me”). Olea also quipped that even though local carnivals in other parts of the country may be more organized due to their highly commercial nature, these parades do not feature enough diversity because they are dominated by a single character (the diablo). Thus, according to Olea, the goal of SDE municipal parades should be to “maintain a more diverse carnival” by encouraging a variety of groups to participate. Traditional groups in particular receive special attention as a fundamental part of SDE carnival identity, so much so that Olea invites other traditional groups with “carnavalesque elements” to perform at the parades, including the *guloyas* from San Pedro and the Haitian-Dominican *gagá* group from San Luis.<sup>115</sup>

The definitions of the prize categories published by the SDE Department of Culture are descriptive in nature, highlighting the diversity of groups that participate in the municipal

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<sup>115</sup> Gladys Olea, interview, 26 November 2014.

parades. The prize categories are based on the National Parade categories, offering simplified descriptions of every genre's theme. Moreover, the opening paragraph explains the criteria for participants to consider in putting together a carnival group: "The professionalism and authenticity of the distinct creative manifestations in thematic and musical terms, along with originality. The carnival groups will select between the seven mentioned categories in which the judges will select 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> place" (See Table 4.4).

As I suggested with the original prize allocation system of the National Parade prior to 2006, the SDE municipal parade guidelines seemingly rewards groups both in terms of individual characteristics ("professionalism," "authenticity," "creative manifestations," "thematic and musical terms," and "originality") and in terms of genre. In Section 4.1, I asserted that the existence of prize categories based on individual and thematic elements in addition to genre encouraged the growth of Alibabá in the National District from 1983-2005. In this way, the SDE municipal parades are also one of the most significant factors in increasing the number of Alibabá groups in East Santo Domingo—from one prior to 2008 to seven in 2015.

**Table 4.4** Document by East Santo Domingo City Council, Department of Culture and Folklore, describing the seven prize categories of the SDE Municipal Carnival Parade (provided by Gladys Olea, Head of Culture and Folklore)<sup>116</sup>

|  |
|--|
| The professionalism and authenticity of the distinct creative manifestations in thematic and musical terms, along with originality. The carnival groups will select between the seven mentioned categories in which the judges will select 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> place |
| <b>1. TRADITIONAL GROUP:</b> is considered a group that represents the traditional characters of Dominican carnival.   |
| <b>2. POPULAR CREATIVITY GROUP:</b> will be a group that exhibits the creation of popular elements by emphasizing imagination and creativity.  |
| <b>3. FANTASY GROUP:</b> will be considered a group that tells a story of the imaginary by emphasizing the characters, originality, and unbounded creativity.  |
| <b>4. DIABLOS GROUP:</b> will be considered a group that represents the different local versions of the devil as a carnival character.   |
| <b>5. ALIBABÁ GROUP:</b> will be considered a group with costume, choreography, musicalness, and adherence to typical thematic elements of this traditional theme of carnival.   |
| <b>6. INDIVIDUAL CHARACTER:</b> will be considered the individual characters that represent creativity, coloring, and elements of local identity in their costumes.  |
| <b>7. HISTORIC GROUP:</b> will be considered a group that represents the setting of the time period, the costume, the characters, etc.   |

The increasing popularity of Alibabá in East Santo Domingo, complicated by the fact that only the top two groups of each category qualify for the National Parade, has led to a certain amount of conflict between carnival participants and carnival judges. In fact, as a direct copy of the National Prize categories firmly established in 2006, the SDE prize allocation system in

<sup>116</sup> “La profesionalidad y autenticidad de las distintas manifestaciones creativas en término temático y musicalidad, así como en la originalidad. Las comparsas se escogerán entre las 7 categorías mencionadas de donde el jurado elegirá 1er y 2do lugar.

1. COMPARSA TRADICIONAL: se toma en cuenta una comparsa que represente a los personajes tradicionales del carnaval Dominicano.
2. COMPARSA CREATIVIDAD POPULAR: se tomará una comparsa que exponga la creación de elementos populares resaltando a través de la imaginación y la creatividad.
3. COMPARSA FANTASÍA: se tomará en cuenta una comparsa donde cuente lo imaginario expuesto a través de los personajes, la originalidad y la creatividad sin límites.
4. COMPARSA DE DIABLOS: se tomará en cuenta una comparsa que represente las diferentes versiones locales de diablos como personaje del carnaval.
5. COMPARSA ALIBABÁ: se tomará en cuenta una comparsa con vestuario, coreografía, musicalidad y coherencia de elementos temáticos propios de este tema tradicional de carnaval.
6. PERSONAJE INDIVIDUAL: se tomará en cuenta los personajes individuales que representen creatividad, colorido y elementos de la identidad local en sus vestuarios.
7. COMPARSA HISTÓRICA: se tomará en cuenta una comparsa que represente la ambientación de la época, el vestuario, los personajes, etc.”

practice actually awards winners based solely on genre criteria rather than individual characteristics. Although in theory all groups are encouraged to include musical performance in their performance, musicalness is again relegated only to the domain of the Alibabá category.

Although Olea described the goal of the SDE Department of Culture to me as promoting traditional carnival groups in order to maintain diversity at the municipal parades, there is evidence that SDE municipal judges have taken it upon themselves to reinterpret this philosophy as promoting diversity by forcibly maintaining tradition. This has led to a belief that in order to protect and preserve Dominican carnival traditions, the delineation of the prize categories must be strictly enforced. Thus, although the prize category descriptions allow for groups to be considered according to both individual characteristics and genre, SDE carnival judges for the most part adhere to a strict interpretation of the genre definitions as a way to dictate what carnival groups can and cannot include in their performance. As musical performance again pertains only to the domain of the Alibabá category, judges have made it their mission to limit the presence of music among the other categories—and especially for traditional groups. Using the events of the 2015 SDE municipal parades as an example, I will show how carnival groups themselves are operating with one mentality regarding prize allocation, while the judges are operating under a different set of assumptions.

In this case, for the 2015 parade cycle, judges went so far as to disqualify groups that included Alibabá music but did not compete in the Alibabá category. This controversy was so unprecedented and unexpected by carnival participants that an East Santo Domingo news outlet *Ciudad Oriental* interviewed the judges, including José Ricardo Ventura, Vidal de la Cruz, and Maritza Silverio (see Figure 4.4). According to the judges, their decision was a justified response

to carnival participants who did not follow the strict guidelines of the prize categories. Not surprisingly, most of their indignation was reserved for Alibabá and traditional groups.

**Figure 4.4** 2015 East Santo Domingo carnival judges, from left to right: Vidal de la Cruz, José Ricardo Ventura, and Maritza Silverio (screenshot taken from YouTube video posted by user Ciudad Oriental, 17 February 2015)



The news story was presented in video format, titled “Understanding why the ‘best’ groups are disqualified in the SDE Carnival 2015.”<sup>117</sup> In the four-minute video, the interviewer poses a series of questions to the three judges in order to understand exactly what had happened and why. In the conversation that ensues between the interviewer, head judge Ventura, and de la Cruz, a variety of repeated themes emerge regarding the relationship between traditional groups and Alibabá. Focusing on both the responsibility of the participants and the burden placed on judges, these themes revolve around the ideas of interpretation, evaluation, reception, and recommendations.

In general, the majority of Ventura’s comments refer to the participants’ (mis)interpretation of the categories, stating very deliberately that, “The carnival participants are confusing the philosophy of the work that we are trying to develop.” Ventura references a group

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<sup>117</sup> The full-length interview can be viewed on YouTube in “Conozca porqué las ‘mejores’ comparsas son descalificadas en el Carnaval de SDE 2015,” posted by Ciudad Oriental, 17 February 2015 ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IK\\_ont51uS8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IK_ont51uS8)).

of indios that participated in the SDE municipal parade on 8 February 2015 who were disqualified because they included an Alibabá band as part of their performance. In the portion of the conversation from the video included below, Ventura emphasizes the disconnect that exists between judges and participants:

[0:00] Interviewer: What is the situation you are going through, the judges, here in this East Santo Domingo carnival?

José Ricardo Ventura (JRV): There is an important part—José Ricardo Ventura, head judge [*presidente del jurado*] on four different occasions—an important point just for the carnival participants. The carnival participants are confusing the philosophy of the work that we are trying to develop. In a traditional group, Alibabá doesn't belong. In an Alibabá group, traditional doesn't belong. And it's a problem that we are dealing with so that the carnival participants can unify the criteria and that they don't make a group concept that is distorted which, really, is what the organization of this carnival wants...

[1:57] JRV: And that, all of the carnival participants are doing the same thing, bringing along more and more of the Alibabá so this is the work really that we have to impart [*enseñar*] within the concept that the organization wants for this carnival, Santo Domingo 2015.<sup>118</sup>

Here, Ventura mentions how the desires of SDE carnival groups to incorporate new expressions (i.e., Alibabá music) into their performances contradicts “the philosophy of the work that [they] are trying to develop.” His opinion is clear regarding the importance in separating the categories, stating: “In a traditional group, Alibabá doesn't belong. In an Alibabá group, traditional doesn't belong.” Ventura uses words like “doesn't belong,” “problem,” and “distorted” to describe how

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<sup>118</sup> Interviewer: “¿Cuál es la situación en que están atravesando Uds., los que son jurados, acá en este carnaval de Santo Domingo Este?” José Ricardo Ventura: “Hay una parte importante, José Ricardo Ventura, presidente del jurado ya por cuatro ocasiones, una parte importante sólo por los comparseros. Los comparseros nos están confundiendo la filosofía del trabajo que estamos desarrollando. En un tradicional, no coloca en Alibabá. En un Alibabá, no coloca en tradicional. Y es una problemática que estamos nosotros tratando de que los comparseros puedan unificar los criterios y que no realicen el concepto de la comparsa distorsionada que, realmente, quiere la organización de este carnaval. Es una problemática que estamos nosotros desde hace años tratando de llevar la conciencia de los comparseros, pero no hace el caso....Y ése, son todos los comparseros que están haciendo lo mismo – llevándose más de lo Alibabá del realmente trabajo que tenemos que enseñar dentro del concepto que quiere la organización de esta...de este carnaval – Santo Domingo 2015.”

the combination of Alibabá and traditional groups diverges from the judges' goal of maintaining diversity via a strict interpretation of the genre definitions.

As the interview continues, Ventura's colleague de la Cruz contributes his opinion on how carnival participants misinterpret the traditional category by including Alibabá music. More importantly, de la Cruz goes one step further to condemn the larger trend of SDE carnival groups incorporating any non-traditional music into their performance. In the opinion of de la Cruz, groups that include Alibabá or, heaven forbid, reggaetón as a part of their performance are apt to be described as "*arroz con mango*" (literally "rice with mango")—a colloquial phrase popular throughout the Caribbean loosely translated as "a complete mess."

[3:23] Or rather, one has to be clear [*tener claro*] when showing up as [*viene con*] a category. If they come as Alibabá, they are Alibabá! If they come as fantasy, they are fantasy! If they show up as a historical category, they are a historical category! Even there are those that show up as a historical category and add reggaetón. So, it needs to be clear, like José Ricardo says, the concept of what you are going to represent. Because they sign up in one category and later a complete mess [*arroz con mango*] shows up.<sup>119</sup>

This raises the question as to why the judges are so bothered as to disqualify offending groups. Ventura justifies the judges' actions by couching them in terms of evaluating practices. In other words, how can judges select winners from each distinct category if all groups look and act the same? To prove his point, Ventura discusses the disqualification of the group of indios that participated in the SDE municipal parade on 8 February 2015. Ventura seems sympathetic to the popularity of Alibabá music throughout the Santo Domingo provinces and thus, by extension,

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<sup>119</sup> *Vidal de la Cruz*: "O sea, tiene que tener claro cuando viene con una categoría. Si vienen de Alibabá, ¡son Alibabá! Si vienen de fantasía, son fantasía. Si vienen a una categoría histórica, son una categoría histórica. He incluso, hay los que vienen de una categoría histórica y le meten reggaetón. Entonces, para tener claro, como dice José Ricardo, el concepto de lo que van a representar. Porque se inscriben con una categoría y después vienen un arroz con mango."



having an Alibabá prize category. However, he also expresses his own frustrations in evaluating groups in the other categories that do not readily conform to genre standards:

[0:54] Interviewer: Can you give an example of this, of some group that...?

JRV: Yes, certainly. Yesterday for example [referring to 8 February], on Sunday the first day of carnival – a group of “indigenous people” [*aborígenes*] and at the end they stuck an Alibabá. So, how do I evaluate a traditional group [*comparsa*] of “indigenous people” adding an Alibabá? Alibabá is a creation of Chachón, and okay they are popular because they are spreading throughout the entire national geography. But, Alibabá—they’re not traditional.<sup>120</sup>

Again, Ventura repeats that “Alibabá is not traditional.” This shows that without forcibly maintaining the distinctions between the prize categories, judges are concerned that the popularity of Alibabá will begin to overshadow traditional practices. The investment in SDE municipal carnival parades maintaining carnival traditions as a part of its unique identity has provided the impetus for maintaining strict genre delineations—in this case, by disqualifying groups that do not do so.

The bigger problem is that carnival participants themselves seem unaware of the judge’s evaluation practices. This is evident not only based on the judge’s comments regarding participants’ misinterpretation of the categories, but also their comments on the divergence between the judges’ final evaluation and the perceived reception of the participants themselves. Towards the end of the interview, de la Cruz mentions that “[the carnival participants] see themselves as very nice and the public too thinks it is very nice, and they think they are winners, and when they see that they aren’t winners, they feel bad and they don’t know maybe, why? What was the reason we weren’t winners?” This comment encapsulates the mentality of the

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<sup>120</sup> Interviewer: “¿Tú puedes llevar un ejemplo de esa, de alguna comparsa que...?” José Ricardo Ventura: “Sí, claramente. Ayer, por ejemplo, el primer...el domingo por ejemplo, el primer día del carnaval – una comparsa de ‘aborígenes’, y al final, le metieron Alibabá. Entonces, ¿cómo yo evaluó una comparsa tradicional de aborígenes colocando un Alibabá? El Alibabá es una creación de Chachón, y okay, ya son populares porque están diseminando en toda la geografía nacional. Pero, el Alibabá no son tradicionales.”

carnival groups opposed to that of the carnival judges. Much like fantasy groups in the National District who are interested in including Alibabá music, traditional groups in East Santo Domingo also perceive Alibabá music (and even reggaetón) as a way to perhaps distinguish themselves and increase their chances of winning. However, unlike the permissive nature of DN carnival judges who allow for musical performance among fantasy groups, traditional groups in East Santo Domingo seem completely unaware that their carnival judges are staunchly opposed to this—which results in the disqualification of these groups.

Not surprisingly, the consensus among the judges is not that they should reevaluate how prizes are allocated. Instead, their recommendations are that SDE carnival groups must get on board with their philosophy of maintaining diversity by strictly adhering to the category definitions. In the eyes of the judges, it is the responsibility of the participants to educate themselves about this philosophy:

[2:11] Interviewer: Recommendation?

JRV: Well, I want, I want research. I want research before starting [*montar*]. Research, for example, in the case of the traditional. What is Alibabá? In what moment should I use Alibabá and in what moment should I utilize traditional? The traditional groups that I'm responsible for [*que me compete*], or if I have a group of "indigenous people," I cannot put Alibabá. But if I have a group of Alibabá, I cannot put "indigenous people." If I have a group of *robalagallina*, I cannot put Alibabá because these are concepts, they are different categories. And I want them to help us here, please.

Interviewer: And for this, the organization has something to do with it [*algo que ver*—for example, the [Ministry of] Culture?

JRV: No, not at all. The carnival participants are responsible for what they have to bring down [*bajar*] here. The organization of this event is clear about what the concepts are – it's clear. They have been told already what they have to do. Now, me as one of the judges [*uno como jurado*], because one evaluates on the basis of what one has and what the organization of this event has designed.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Interviewer: "¿Recomendación?" José Ricardo Ventura: "Bueno, quiero que, quiero que investigar. Quiero que investigar antes de montar. Investigar, por ejemplo, en el caso de los tradicional. ¿Qué son los Alibabá? ¿En qué momento yo debo utilizar los Alibabá y en qué momento debo poner los tradicional? Los tradicional que me

Here, Ventura is adamant that the judges' evaluation practices are "clear" and that it is therefore not the job of the carnival organizers to further inform the public about their system of criteria. Ventura repeats that the participants themselves are "responsible" for "educating" themselves and carrying out "research" on their own before starting their designs. However, this opinion contradicts de la Cruz's previous statement that demonstrates that overall, carnival groups are confused about the judges' actions and often "don't know why [they] aren't winners."

In general, the interview featured in this news story shows that there is no specific hostility against musical performance at carnival in principle. In fact, the judges' reaction is at its core a response to a real concern held by many that the popularity of Alibabá is contributing to the decline of other traditions. This fear is not unfounded, as several traditional groups have already fallen by the wayside in favor of Alibabá. Octavio Mercado (the current leader of an Alibabá group in Tamarindo) recounted to me in an interview that as a young boy, he participated in an established traditional group in Villa Duarte known as *los monos* (the monkeys) before it was supplanted by an Alibabá group. Even in the National District, the percussionist known as "El Chino" (in an interview with Rossy Díaz) attributed Alibabá to the decline of the very famous group known as the indios of San Carlos who have not participated in carnival since 2000.<sup>122</sup>

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competite, o si tenga una comparsa de aborígenes, no puedo meter Alibabá, pero si tenga una comparsa de Alibabá, no puedo poner aborígenes. Si tenga una comparsa de robalagallina, no puedo meter Alibabá porque esos son conceptos, son categorías diferentes. Y quiero que nos ayuden allí, por favor." *Interviewer*: "Y en eso, ¿tiene algo que ver la organización del—por ejemplo, ¿[el Ministerio de] Cultura?" *José Ricardo Ventura*: "No, no, no no no, para nada. Los comparseros, los comparseros son responsables de lo que tienen que bajar aquí, lo que no tienen que bajar. La organización de este evento está clara de lo que es los conceptos – está claro. Y ya ellos se dicen lo que tienen que hacer. Ahora, uno como jurado, porque uno evalúa en base de que uno tiene y en que ha diseñado la organización del evento."

<sup>122</sup> The full-length interview can be viewed on YouTube in "Los indios de San Carlos, comparsa de carnaval part.2," posted by Rossy Díaz Ferreras, 24 February 2014 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FV4Gbzo8FsE>).

Therefore, the social goal of the Department of Culture to maintain the diversity of SDE carnival practices by preventing the Alibabá category from overshadowing other practices makes sense given East Santo Domingo's value of diversity. However, the judges' interpretation of this philosophy in practice forcibly maintains difference between the categories by keeping all elements of Alibabá out of traditional categories—and especially musical performance. In short, although some traditional groups in East Santo Domingo choose to include Alibabá music, they are disqualified at the local level. As these groups are subsequently prevented from qualifying for the National Parade, this in effect precludes traditional groups from including musical elements at the national level as well.

#### Alibabá and Diablo Groups: Musical Performance at the Años Dorados Carnival Celebrations

Up until now, I have juxtaposed the originality and creativity of carnival groups who have constantly pushed genre boundaries against the cultural policies that have constrained them. I have suggested that cultural policies that have consistently favored maintaining diversity and reaffirming identity have resulted in the limited presence of Alibabá groups and Alibabá music at carnival celebrations in Santo Domingo. However, these are certainly not the only factors at play. In fact, even when these kinds of cultural policies are not an issue, tensions still exist between carnival participants who welcome Alibabá music and those who rebuke it.

As a case in point, the summer carnival events known collectively as the “Años Dorados de los Diablos Cojuelos 70 80 90” (Golden Years of the Diablos Cojuelos 70s 80s 90s, hereafter simple referred to as “Años Dorados”) are organized by carnival participants themselves, with no involvement of MINC or the City Councils. Moreover, these events are non-competitive, meaning that there are no genre categories or carnival judges. Even more interestingly, the Años

Dorados are dedicated to a single character, the diablo, and thus, on the surface has very little invested in promoting diversity. Instead, as these events take place throughout the urban zones of Santo Domingo, part of their goal is to celebrate popular carnival and barrio identity from the 1970s-1990s. As I discussed earlier (see Section 4.1), Alibabá is also an important part of popular carnival and barrio identity in the city, and thus finds its way to even the Años Dorados. Thus, using the concerns that arise regarding the presence of Alibabá music at the Años Dorados events, I suggest that there may be deeper social issues that have disincentivized promoting musical performance because of its association with Alibabá.

Although the Años Dorados continue to grow in popularity every year among carnival participants in the barrios, they exist almost completely under the radar to non-initiates. I only became aware of the Años Dorados in May 2014 by accident, and did not fully come to grasp the massive size of these celebrations until the following August, when I had the chance to participate in one. The Años Dorados movement was established in 2012 as a passion project of two established carnival veterans in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo—Joselito Gil and Enrique “Momón” Scharbay (see also Chapter 2). Referring to the project as a “movement,” over the years Momón has brought together leaders of thirty-five other carnival groups throughout the city’s barrios to celebrate the golden era of carnival in the capital when “there didn’t exist as many fantasy costumes....[and] it was not as well organized as today” (qtd. in *De la Zona Oriental* 2013, para. 2).<sup>123</sup> Gil continues to participate as a diablo during the spring carnival season, in addition to running the Facebook group “CARNAVAL ORIENTAL” and publishing a wide variety of media related to carnival activities (such as photos, videos, ads, promos, etc.).

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<sup>123</sup> “donde no existían tantos disfraces de fantasía...[y] no estaba tan bien organizado como en la actualidad.”

Momón, on the other hand, has not participated as a diablo during the spring carnival season since the formation of his Alibabá group “Imperio Clásico” in 1997 (see Chapter 2).

It is worth repeating that the Años Dorados are a very different kind of event, both from the previously discussed spring season municipal parades and even other summer season barrio parades. First, the Años Dorados are not called “parades.” Instead, the organizers refer to them as *salidas* (outings). Keeping true to this important difference, the routes of the Años Dorados outings are circular rather than straight, taking participants on a journey through the narrow alleys of the very barrios that they live in rather straight down a blockaded main street (see Figure 4.5). The location of the routes changes each week, hosted by a specific barrio or group of barrios in order to not conflict with other celebrations in the area. For example, in 2015, various barrios in the National District, East Santo Domingo, and West Santo Domingo took turns hosting the events (see Table 4.5).

**Figure 4.5** Route of the first two Años Dorados Parades of 2015: (a) in Los Mina (2 August) and (b) in the National District (9 August) (posted by Joselito Gil to the Facebook group “CARNAVAL ORIENTAL”)



(a)



(b)

**Table 4.5** Promotional posters advertising the locations of the Años Dorados outings, August 2015. Note the prominent focus on the traditional style of the diablo costume found in the capital 1970s-1990s (designed by Johnny Hernández and Joselito Gil, posted by Joselito Gil to the Facebook group “CARNAVAL ORIENTAL”)

|                                |                                 |                                 |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <p>8/2 (Los Minas, SDE)</p>    | <p>8/16 (Villa Duarte, SDE)</p> | <p>8/30 (National District)</p> |
| <p>8/9 (National District)</p> | <p>8/23 (Herrera, SDO)</p>      |                                 |

Second, these outings are organized among carnival participants themselves without government intervention. The organizers hold meetings during the months of May, June, and July in order to take care of matters such as confirming the route of the parade through each barrio, obtaining sponsorship from the city council and convenience stores, and security issues. During one such meeting I attended in July 2015, the issue of whether or not political



campaigning activities could take place during the procession was also brought up (and ultimately prohibited). In general, most of the precious few official regulations of the Años Dorados focus on making sure the routes are approved on time more than anything else.

Third, although the organizers do not prohibit participants from dressing in any costume of their choosing, the vast majority do dress as diablos. Moreover, the outings are non-competitive in nature and do not award prizes. Thus, although participants take these outings seriously (and often design a new costume solely for the Años Dorados), they do so for their own enjoyment rather than in pursuit of prize money. Based on my interviews and informal discussions with carnival participants in Santo Domingo, my conclusion is that there are two kinds of people that participate in the Años Dorados. One kind of participant is an older carnival participant who was active in the 1970s-1990s and dresses in the capital-style traditional diablo. This includes several leaders who now operate Alibabá groups (like Momón) who started celebrating carnival as diablos during their childhood. Thus, nostalgia for a simpler time and relived youth is a big factor in the success of the Años Dorados for participants over the age of twenty (see Figure 4.6).<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> This includes Chachón, Guancho, Marcos Keppis, Arquímedes Bergés, Gustavo Batista, Ramón Rivas, and Enrique Scharbay. The only first generation group leader that I interviewed who began participating in carnival in an Alibabá group was Juan Carlos Núñez.

**Figure 4.6** Two Alibabá leaders participating in the Años Dorados, (a) Alberto “Beto” Fernández (photo taken on España Avenue, East Santo Domingo, 10 August 2014) and (b) Enrique “Momón” Scharbay (circled) with members of “Imperio Clásico” (photo taken by Joselito Gil in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo, posted by Joselito Gil to the Facebook group “CARNAVAL ORIENTAL”)



However, there is also a second kind of person who participates in the Años Dorados, namely a contingent of young carnival participants who do not associate with the diablo. This is especially true among those who began participating in carnival during the 2000’s, many of whom got their start directly in Alibabá. It is this generational gap among Años Dorados participants that is, in my opinion, the source of the biggest local tension that is also indicative of widely held beliefs in other parts of the capital.

The tensions between adherents to the goals of the Años Dorados Movement and young people passionate about Alibabá and mambo music manifest themselves most readily when discussing whether or not Alibabá mambo groups should be allowed to accompany the outings. On 28 June 2015, the young musical director of an Alibabá group in North Santo Domingo posted the following comment to the Facebook group “CARNAVAL ORIENTAL:”



AHORA SE DISEN QUE QUIEREN QUITAR LOS ALIBABA DE LOS AÑOS  
DORADOS  
PREGUNTO Y QUIEN LOS PUSO QUIEN PATROCINA ALGUNA BANDA  
DE POR DIOS  
SE HABLA DE QUITAR COMO QUEEEEE ALGUIEN CONTRATA Y ESTE  
AÑO NO SE BA A UTILISAR PERO VEN ACA PONGANSE EN SU PUETO  
Y PA AGOSTO PONGASE SU DISFRAS Y SEA FELIZ  
LO DEMAS DEJELO VOLAR  
MAMBO MAMBO MAMBO MAMBO MAMBO MAMBO MAMBO

Now they are saying that they want to remove the Alibabá groups from the Años Dorados. So I ask, “Who puts them there?” “Who sponsors a band?” Good God, they talk about removal as thoughhhh someone contracted them and this year that they aren’t going to use [Alibabá bands]. So come here, put them in their place and in August, put on your costume and be happy. The rest just let it go [*déjelo volar*]. Mambo Mambo Mambo Mambo Mambo Mambo Mambo.

This comment evokes the unique nature of the Años Dorados in contrast to the municipal parades (namely its deregulated nature and reliance on self-patronage) as reasons enough to complain about the removal of Alibabá bands from the celebration. The question remains, what other reason is there to prohibit Alibabá music? A thread of comments made by three members of the group that follow the initial post clearly highlight the two most common arguments used for and against Alibabá. On the one hand, the outings would be sonically boring if Alibabá were not permitted. On the other hand, the presence of Alibabá music increases the likelihood that *tígueres* (delinquents) will create problems and disrupt an otherwise peaceful neighborhood activity (see Chapter 2). A sample of the comments is included below:

Sin mambo es un puro disparate.. Yo apoyo los dorados.. Pero ese mambo tiene q ta hay presente.. Hací q a la directiva de los años dorados piencen bien lo que tan haciendo...

olle olle el problema no es el mambo por que eso es parte del carnaval y a todos nos gusta el problema consiste en el grupo de antisociales que van a pedir a los colmado y le roban y atracan las personas le rebatan sus celulares MIENTRAS USTEDES TOCAN Y YO DOY VEJIGA Y TODOS ELLOS SE ESCONDEN DETRAS DE UNA BUENA MÚSICA QUE USTEDES NOS FRESEN EL MAMBO ES BUENO. POR QUE NOS GUSTA PERO QUE NO LE AGAN DAÑO A NUESTRO MOVIMIENTO DORADO AMEN

De una u otra forma los tigueres se pegan. Lamentablemente\* 1,000 diablos en la calle y q nada más se escuchan las campanas ? Super aburrido , vuelvo y lo repito, sin mambo yo no salgo

OLLE OLLE mi hermano el mambo es bueno porque ellos tocan y nosotros bailamos eso es lo que nos gusta

Claro, pero a mi q nadie le venga a decir q van a suspender el mambo Dike por los tiguere, a pesar de yo ser joven , ya soy veterano en esto, con los tiguere nadie puede, pueden ser 10 diablos, y se van a pegar 50 tiguere

Commenter #1: Without mambo it is a pure nonsense...I support the Dorados...But mambo has to be present...The directorate of the Años Dorados should think wisely about what they are doing...

Commenter #2: Listen, listen, the problem is not mambo because that is part of carnival and all of us like it. The problem consists of a group of anti-socials who are going to beg in the convenience stores [*colmados*] and steal from them and rob people [and] snatch their cellphones from them WHILE THEY ARE PLAYING AND I AM WHIPPING MY VEJIGA [*DOY VEJIGA*] AND ALL OF THEM HIDE BEHIND A NICE MUSIC THAT THEY OFFER US. MAMBO IS GOOD BECAUSE WE LIKE IT BUT PLEASE DON'T DO DAMAGE TO OUR 'DORADOS' MOVEMENT. AMEN.

Commenter #3: One way or another the tiguere join up [*se pegan*]. Lamentably, 1,000 diablos in the street and nothing more that the bells are heard? Super boring, I return to my point and repeat it, without mambo I am not coming out.

Commenter #2: LISTEN LISTEN my brother. Mambo is good because they play and we dance. That is what we like.

Commenter #3: Of course, but to me, nobody should come and say that they are going to suspend mambo because of the tígueres, even though I am young, I am already a veteran of this, with the tígueres, no one can, there can be 10 diablos and 50 tígueres are going to join up [*van a pegar*].

In these comments, one clearly sees both sides of the coin—namely that many believe carnival is lackluster without music, but also that Alibabá in particular draws an undesirable crowd.

In Chapter 2, I demonstrated how the barrio's association with delinquency, debauchery, and pick-pocketing negatively affects the perception of the individuals associated with Alibabá groups. According to my observations and remarks made by Alibabá leaders and group members, I have also shown that these problems are more due to the large crowds of young males in particular who come to watch the group perform rather than the Alibabá musicians themselves (see Chapter 2). Delinquency and robbery are a real concern at the Años Dorados, especially as the crowds grow larger as the outings proceed through more and more neighborhoods and the relatively narrow confines of the barrio streets keep people packed together (see Figure 4.7). Somewhat unfairly, the presence of any undesirable individuals is not blamed on the nature these carnival outings themselves, but squarely on Alibabá.

**Figure 4.7** Example of crowd density at an Años Dorados outing, note how the narrow streets within the barrio constrict the flow of pedestrians (photos taken in in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo, 10 August 2014)



In my experience, a legitimate concern for safety and creating a family-friendly atmosphere at the Años Dorados is exacerbated by the presence of Alibabá mambo groups because of the perceived characteristics of their purported fans. As one of the few (if not only) Americans to participate in an Años Dorados outing on 10 August 2014, Gil warned me that I would be especially targeted and that I should not bring anything with me—no phone, no wallet, and especially no camera. To be extra safe, he also enlisted the help of two female volunteers to escort me throughout the duration of the day’s procession through Los Mina. Happily, my experience was rather benign, in part because of my escorts but also the presence of other security forces monitoring the event. However, if the barrio carnival participants hold these beliefs about themselves, it is not a big leap to suggest that these assumptions about Alibabá fans inform the opinions of carnival organizers and judges outside of the barrio as well. Therefore, I conclude that although maintaining diversity and reaffirming identity are the official operating

principles driving carnival regulatory decisions that have indirectly limited the presence of Alibabá music in Santo Domingo, there exists enough evidence to suggest that there is also a desire to directly limit the presence of Alibabá music due to its association with an undesirable segment of the barrio population.

#### *4.3 A Confluence of Regulatory and Evaluating Practices: Judging Music and Dance at Santo Domingo Competitions and Festivals*

It was late afternoon on Dominican Independence Day, 27 February 2015 and families were enjoying outdoor activities on their day off from work and school. In the Juan Barón Plaza at the southern tip of the National District, children were flying kites as the Caribbean Sea lapped against the adjacent seawalls. Across the street stood an iconic monument, known as the Obelisk. Behind that, the Dominican Ministry of Culture was in clear view in the distance. Back in the plaza, a small, unassuming stage stood empty in the center of the square. This was the scene of the 2015 “Festival of Carnival Music,” even two hours after it was scheduled to begin. Only once the sun had finally begun to set behind the Obelisk, the competition began in front of a small crowd that had gathered around the stage.

In the previous sections, I examined how cultural policies and regulations enacted to promote diversity and reaffirm identity at carnival parades have worked to limit the presence of Alibabá groups and musical performance at these events. In contrast to parades whose goals are to display a diverse number of carnival characters and traditions, there also exist other kinds of carnival events whose primary goal is to motivate musical performance by specifically highlighting Alibabá’s unique relationship to dance and music. Since 2010, there have been an ever-increasing number of competitions and festivals dedicated to Alibabá music and dance. And yet, similar issues that have created tensions between carnival organizers, judges, and

participants at the parades seem to also exist at these festivals and competitions. In other words, the same factors that have limited Alibabá's presence in parades have also complicated the implementation of Alibabá festivals and competitions.

Competitions and festivals that highlight music and dance are an essential part of carnival activities throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. As discussed in the literature on Trinidad and Tobago, carnival music has intrinsically linked both the calypso rhythm and its performance on the steelpan (or in steel bands) since the 1930s. This connection was a result of the steelpan's popularity within lower-income Afro-Trinidadian neighborhoods in the capital, Port of Spain. According to Shannon Dudley, during the construction of a Trinidadian national identity between the 1960s and 1980s, the steelpan became a central emblem since “[many] narratives of the steelband portray the panmen’s defiant persistence as an analogue to Trinidad and Tobago’s struggle for independence” (2008, 15). In this way, the steel band and calypso became an important part of Trinidadian identity, especially in the capital city.

Nowadays, Panorama is perhaps the most famous carnival music festival in the world. First organized in 1963, the competition is now highly organized and preceded by a three-day conference on steelpan scholarship. Steel bands from around the world compete in Port of Spain in four different categories over the course of three rounds—including large conventional bands, medium conventional bands, small pan bands, and single pan bands. In 1986, the International Conference and Panorama (ICP) established specific rules in order to regulate the competition. For each band, a judge awards a maximum of 100 points based on the following categories: arrangement (40), general performance (40), tone (10), and rhythm (10) (see ICP 2015). Although a total of seven judges deliberate at the competition, the lowest and highest judges’ scores are excluded, and the total score of each band represents the combined total of the



remaining five judges (500 points maximum). The winners of each year's competition are subsequently posted on the website for the National Carnival Commission of Trinidad and Tobago, among others.

The Panorama competition is an important example of the potential success of carnival music festivals and competitions when the goals and values of the various stakeholders align. The ICP's strict governing of the competition has inspired panmen to transform their marching calypsos at carnival into steel band orchestral calypso arrangements at Panorama. Although Dudley argues that this has reduced calypso "to a spectator event," the version of steel band music performed on stage at Panorama has helped attract new performers and audiences from diverse class, ethnic, and religious backgrounds (2008, 22). This narrative has helped fuel the understanding of calypso as a truly nationally adored carnival music genre.

This is not the case for Alibabá dance and music, where there is little to no cohesion between the goals of festival organizers, judges, performers, or audiences. In what follows, I will look independently at the divide that this creates between the social and economic goals of carnival organizers and judges and those of carnival participants at three different events—the Music Festival and the Alibabá Choreography Competition in the National District, and the Grand Alibabá Dance Competition in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo. In this case, I argue that catering to the social goals of carnival participants at the local level has been more successful at encouraging musical performance than current efforts enacted at the national level.

#### Music Competitions: Regulations Favoring the Audience vs. the Performers

Competitions highlighting music and dance during Dominican carnival are not a new phenomenon. As I discussed in Chapter 3, the organizers of the National Carnival Parade in

Santo Domingo have sporadically held a national competition (sometimes referred to as “the National Dominican Carnival Anthem Composition Concourse”) to select an official carnival anthem for each year’s parade since its inception in 1983. Several of these selected anthems are still heard at Dominican carnival parades in the twenty-first century: “Baila en la Calle” (Dance in the Street) (1984-5) by Luis Días and Fernando Villalona, “Pipí en Carnaval” (Pipí in Carnival) (2001) and “Mi Patria en Carnaval” (My Homeland in Carnival) (2014) by Roldán Mármol, and “Gozando Carnaval” (Enjoying Carnival) by Marcos Caminero (2004) (Tejeda Ortiz 2008, 134-149). A majority of these anthems are carnival-themed merengues—the national popular music of the Dominican Republic (see Austerlitz 1997 and Chapter 3).

I contend that this competition favors the goals of carnival organizers over the merengue artists or the carnival public at large. This is because few if any performers have enough time to incorporate each year’s theme into their performance, mostly due to the short promotional period and limited proliferation of these pre-recorded songs (Tejeda Ortiz 2008, 139). In his 2011 article, José Antonio Aybar F. noticed this lack of official carnival anthems at Dominican carnivals, particularly outside the capital, and appealed directly to the artists:

But today, the artists worried about maintaining tradition with research projects and song promotion are those most absent from carnival celebrations, principally in Santiago, La Vega, and Bonao....But where are the true cultivators of carnival music, like Roldán, [José] Dulúc, Manuel Jiménez, and Marcos Caminero. They are the most absent at events where true cultural expressions are scarce.<sup>125</sup> (Aybar F. 2011a, para. 4 & 5)

Roldán and Caminero quickly banded together and responded the following day, putting the blame on MINC rather than the artists themselves for this lack of musical integration at


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<sup>125</sup> “Pero hoy, los artistas preocupados por mantener la tradición a través de trabajos de investigación y promoción de canciones, son los principales ausentes en las celebraciones de los carnavales, principalmente en Santiago, La Vega y Bonao.... Pero dónde están los verdaderos cultores de la música carnavalesca, como Roldán, Dulúc, Manuel Jiménez y Marcos Caminero. Son los grandes ausentes en eventos donde las verdaderas expresiones culturales son escasas.”

Dominican carnival (Aybar F. 2011c). In MINC's response the following day, the Director of Carnival and Cultural Management Ramón Lachapelle and the National Director of Folklore Xiomarita Pérez fired back that, indeed, MINC had been taking the appropriate steps to promote musical performance among performers and public alike since creating the Directorate of Carnival and Cultural Management in 2002 (Aybar F. 2011b). Part of this promotion involved the now defunct carnival reality TV show "Vive el Carnaval" (Long Live Carnival) (2011-2012). Moreover, in the attempt to create a more integrative carnival music competition that would speak to the carnival public, MINC organized its first Festival of Alibandas and Percussion Ensembles in 2010—offering an incredible grand prize of RD\$100,000 (approximately US\$3,000) cash for the winners (see Figure 4.8). However, over the past five years, the festival has not succeeded in attracting either a substantial number of carnival performers or a significant audience.

The first competition attracted an impressive number of competitors from Santo Domingo, plus an opening act featuring the guloyas dance drama and marching band from nearby San Pedro de Macorís. The festival was originally scheduled to take place on 30 October 2010 in the Juan Barón Plaza along the malecón, in advance of the carnival season, leaving plenty of time to promote the winners in time for the carnival parade. Due to delays, the actual festival took place on 18 February 2011 in the Mauricio Báez Club situated further north in Villa Juana (DN) barrio.

**Figure 4.8** Promotional materials for the 1st Festival of Alibandas and Percussion Ensembles, published by the National Directorate of Carnival, Ministry of Culture (and English translation)


**MINISTERIO DE CULTURA**  
*Hacia el Progreso con la Cultura*

# Primer FESTIVAL de Alí bandasy grupos de redoblanteros

El Ministerio de Cultura, a través de la Dirección de Gestión Cultural y Carnaval, convoca a todos los grupos de redoblanteros y las Alí bandas, al Primer Duelo de Redoblanteros 2010.


**El certamen tiene como objetivo fundamental:**


- Motivar la tendencia de la musicalidad del carnaval dominicano con bandas móviles a ritmos de marcha.
- Asentar un fenómeno musical que ha venido sucediéndose por una década y media en el gusto popular del carnaval dominicano.
- Afianzar la memoria sonora colectiva del Carnaval Dominicano.

**Bases del concurso:**

- 1- La convocatoria es nacional.
- 2- Cada grupo participante deberá llenar una ficha de inscripción que estará disponible en la sede del Ministerio de Cultura, Dirección de Gestión Cultural y Carnaval, en horario de 9:00 a.m. a 4:00 p.m. de lunes a viernes. La fecha límite de inscripción es hasta el 16 de Octubre.
- 3- Una misma persona no puede participar como representante de varios grupos.
- 4- Se escogerá un jurado de premiación elegido por el Ministerio de Cultura.
- 5- El veredicto de los jurados participantes será inapelable y se dará a conocer el martes 2 de Noviembre del año en curso.
- 6- La cantidad mínima por grupo para participar es de 15 personas, máxima ilimitada.
- 7- Un mismo músico no puede participar en más de una banda.
- 8- La cantidad de instrumentos es ilimitada, (drums, trompeta, cencerro, güira, trombón, timbales, conga), entre otros afines al género.
- 9- El tiempo máximo de muestra es de 5 minutos.
- 10- El evento final se realizará el sábado 30 de octubre del año en curso, a partir de las 5:00 p.m., en la Plaza Juan Barón, Malecón de Santo Domingo D.N.

**PREMIOS** Gran premio único  
 RD\$100,000.00


**2019** SANTO DOMINGO  
 CAPITAL AMERICANA DE LA CULTURA


**LOTERÍA NACIONAL**  
 PUEDES ELEGIR TU SUERTE

Por la musicalidad del Carnaval Dominicano

**Figure 4.8 cont. (caption shown on previous page)**

**FIRST FESTIVAL OF ALIBANDAS AND PERCUSSION ENSEMBLES**

The Ministry of Culture, via the Directorate of Carnival and Cultural Management, calls all percussion ensembles and Alibandas, to the First Head-to-Head Snare Drummer Competition 2010.

The contest has the following fundamental objectives:

- To motivate the tendency of musicalness in Dominican carnival with marching bands playing a marching rhythm.
- To cement a musical phenomenon that has been happening for more than a decade and a half as the popular taste of Dominican carnival.
- To reinforce the collective sonic memory of Dominican carnival.

Rules of the competition:

1. The invitation is at a national level.
2. Each participating group should fill out a registration form that will be available in the National Directorate of Carnival office, located on the corner of Juan Parra Alba St. with El Puerto Ave., Santo Domingo, Dom. Rep. Open from 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. Monday through Friday. The registration deadline is before October 16.
4. No person can participate as a representative of various groups.
4. A jury for awarding the prizes will be selected by the Ministry of Culture.
5. The verdict of the judges will not be subject to appeal and will be known on Tuesday, November 2 of this year.
6. The minimum quantity to participate is 15 people per group, the maximum is unlimited.
7. A musician can only play in one band.
8. The number of instruments is unlimited (bass drums, trumpets, cowbell, *güira*, trombone, timbales, conga), among others that belong to the genre.
9. The maximum time allotment is 5 minutes.
10. The final event will take place Saturday, October 30 of this year starting at 5:00 P.M. in the Juan Barón Plaza, Santo Domingo, Santo Domingo Malecón.

PRIZES: Grand Prize only  
RD\$100,000.00

2010 Santo Domingo  
American Capital of Culture

For the musicalness of Dominican Carnival

National Lottery

The grand prize was awarded to “Villa Band” from Villa Consuelo (DN) under the direction of César Carvajal. Second place and honorable mention were awarded to “Biribanda” (Biri-band), from Capotillo (DN), under the direction of Bienvenido Correa. Other participating groups included: “La Banda Club Canela” (Cinnamon Club Band) from Guerra; “Los Rebeldes del Mambo” (The Mambo Rebels) from Villa Francisca (DN); “La Tropa Band” (The Troop Band) under the direction of Luis Roberto “Chachón” Torres, and others. A total of twelve groups participated in all. Additional special recognition was given to Chachón (creator of the Alibabá choreography), Nereida Rodríguez (the director of the guloyas), and Jhony Kenton (of the merengue band “Los Kentons”) “for their contributions to the rhythm of the Alibandas” (*Hoy Digital* 2011).

The real success of the first festival was that it took place at all and with so many groups participating—as such an event had little precedent, and that marching band music held little interest outside of the capital. The goal of the second festival would therefore be to further promote the idea of carnival music as an essential part of Dominican carnival. The Second Festival of Alibandas and Percussion Ensembles was held in 2013 (with no festival taking place in 2012). For that year’s festival, MINC combined the music competition with the Grand Opening celebration of carnival that took place in the Juan Barón Plaza on the Friday before the National Parade. The production level was beyond compare as this festival was a part of MINC’s new initiative, “Three Days of Carnival” (which included the Grand Opening, the Carnival King and Queen Gala Concert, and the National Parade). Both obelisks located along George Washington Avenue were dressed as carnival characters—with the “female” obelisk dressed as a robalagallina and the “male” obelisk dressed as King Califé (see Figure 4.9).<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> The classic Obelisk in Santo Domingo is referred to as the “male obelisk.” It was constructed in 1936. Conversely, the Monument for the Financial Independence was constructed in 1947 after then Dictator Rafael

**Figure 4.9** The two obelisk monuments dressed as carnival characters in advance of the 2013 National Carnival Parade, with (a) the “female” obelisk dressed as a robalagallina (a female character) and (b) the “male” obelisk dressed as Califé (a male character) (photos taken on George Washington Avenue, National District, 2 March 2013)



(a)



(b)

The celebration opened with a forty-minute presentation, detailing a brief history of Dominican carnival and a short demonstration of each of the principal carnival characters—diablos, Califé, Alibabá, indios, fantasy, and robalagallina, among others. This was followed directly by the music festival, which this time featured only eight groups now competing for cash prizes for first, second, and third places. The 2013 competitors included “Grupo Elite” (Elite Group) from Cristo Rey (DN), “Los Abusadores del Mambo” (Strongmen of Mambo) from Los Mina (SDE), “DCR Band” from Cristo Rey (DN), “Yuatallón” (Yua’s Battalion) from Sabana Perdida (SDN), “Biribanda la Revolución” (Biri-band The Revolution) from Capotillo (DN), “Villa Band” from Villa Consuelo (DN), “Banda Extrema” (Extreme Band) from Los Ríos (DN),

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Trujillo had paid off all of the Dominican Republic’s external debts (at the time). It is referred to by the nickname “female obelisk” because of the negative space between the two spires.

and “Ali-banda por Pasión” (Alibanda for the Love of it) from Villa Agrícolas (DN). I estimate that there were no more than 100 people in attendance at the event (not including the performers). These audience members were, however, very enthusiastic—dancing in small groups among the crowd, cheering, and chanting coros while their favorite band played on stage.

Half-way through the festival, the Minister of Culture José Antonio Rodríguez gave a short speech before introducing a short demonstration by Domingo “Pichilo” Velásquez Ramírez and Luis Emilio Valdez Medina—two influential percussionists and pioneers of Alibabá music from the 1970s. The festival closed with a brief concert by Marcos Caminero, performing his biggest carnival merengue hits before the winners were announced. “Villa Band” took first place for the second year in a row, followed by “Yuatallón” in second, and “DCR Band” in third. Many of the Alibabá performers and musicians that I spoke to cite the 2013 Festival as the best so far because it had the best balance between satisfying the audience and giving space to Alibanda groups.

The Third Festival was held on Dominican Independence Day, 27 February 2014. It featured several international artists including the Haitian-Dominican group “Chiling Banda and Marabou Dancer” (Chilling Band and Marabou Dancer) and “La Parranda de Lilliam” (Lilliam’s Parade Band) from Venezuela. The local competitors included only six Alibandas: the aforementioned Villa Banda, Yuatallón, Los Abusadores del Mambo, and Alibanda por Pasión, plus newcomers “Biomega de Mambo” (Biomega Mambo) from Villa Francisca (DN) and “Kiko y su Big Band” (Kiko and his Big Band) from Villa María (DN). Other percussion groups to perform also included “La Choco Banda,” (Choco-Band), a batumbalé group from Constanza, and the guloyas from San Pedro.



Keeping with the international spirit and the hope of attracting more musicians, the Fourth Festival was renamed “The Festival of Carnival Music,” held on 27 February 2015. However, new rules added to the competition show that MINC was also becoming more concerned with maintaining a sense of professionalism and spectacle, as the band members now needed to be in uniform and all the bands were required to be present at the plaza one hour in advance of the festival or risked being disqualified.

The Fourth Festival presented performances by local carnival musicians playing Alibabá, guloya, merengue, and reggaetón in addition to an invited brassband from Curaçao called “The Melody Makers” (specializing in a popular carnival rhythm known as *tumba*). The local competitors for that year numbered only five: “Yuatallón,” “Cocolos de Mambo” from San Pedro, “Imperio Clásico,” “Biomega del Mambo,” and “Los Abusadores del Mambo.” Despite the new regulations, no group arrived at the Plaza before 6:30 pm, and at least one group was neither in uniform nor had more than twelve members. Yet, for the sake of the festival, all were permitted to perform. The winners of the 2015 festival were the larger bands whose uniforms were not Alibabá costumes, but T-shirts with their ensembles names emblazoned on the front. The winners that year included “Los Abusadores del Mambo,” “Biomega del Mambo,” and “Yuatallón.”

It would seem that the current approach works against encouraging more Alibandas from attending the festival, inasmuch as they may lack the time, numbers, or economic resources to meet the minimum requirements. Therefore, a pattern has started to emerge. Despite the upward trajectory of the Music Festivals between 2011 and 2013, the grandeur of the 2013 festival was never duplicated. One reason is because MINC has not repeated the “Three Days of Carnival” event since then (with some contributing factors being the cost and time necessary to organize

it). Another reason is related the question of to whom these competitions and festivals are geared. First, the declining participation among local Alibabá at the Music Festival is indicative of a growing divide between the goals of MINC as organizer of the event and the Alibabá groups themselves. Based on my interpretation of the regulations for the 2015 festival, MINC's strategy for increasing the prominence of musical performance lies in creating a larger audience to appreciate it. This is evident from their efforts to both increase the professionalism of the local bands and invite professional carnival bands from abroad to perform.

Therefore, even as the festival organizers attempted to boost audience levels by increasing the international presence of the festival by inviting foreign bands to perform as well, the number of local bands that compete in the festival each year remained few in number and have come primarily from Santo Domingo or nearby San Pedro. More importantly, as the same certain groups have continued to win year after year, there is less and less motivation for new groups to risk the cost of participating with little guarantee of a payout at the end. According to César Carvajal (the director of two-time champion "Villa Band"), MINC has even unofficially tried to mitigate this factor by asking top bands not to compete anymore. This has certainly played a role in reducing the number of competitors at the 2015 festival as well—and has even likely contributed to consistently small audience sizes as well.

#### Dance Competitions: Evaluating Practices Favoring the Judges vs. the Performers

Competitions featuring dance and costume have also been popular during the spring carnival season, especially since the creation of the Grand Carnival Gala, held in the Grand Theater of the Cibao since 1990. Santiago-local Victor Erarte has been the producer and director of the event since its inception, which is also sponsored by the National Brewery, MINC, and the

*Banco Popular* (Dominican Popular Bank), among others. The Grand Gala attracts professional carnival dance troupes, performing choreographed dance routines to pre-recorded music for an audience that pays anywhere from RD\$500-\$1,000 for a ticket. The Gala is also broadcast live on the channel *Teleuniverso* throughout the country. Each year, fifteen or more fantasy groups participate, hailing from all over the country and especially from cities that have strong carnival traditions (see Figure 4.10). This competition is successful because, for the most part, there is clear agreement between judges and performers at the Grand Gala about what constitutes “fantasy.” Winners vary by year, and although some towns consistently place in the top groups, it is truly a national competition that is anyone’s game. Fittingly, winners of the Gala are also given the honor of participating in the National Parade. In 2010, the six winning groups came from the National District, Santiago, Mao, Puerto Plata, San Francisco de Macorís, and San Cristóbal. In 2015, the five winning groups came from Santiago, Mao, the National District, San Francisco de Macorís, and Bonao. It is important to note that one Alibabá group does compete in the Grand Gala every year—Miky’s fantasy-Alibabá group from Villa Consuelo.

**Figure 4.10** Numerous representatives of the winning groups from the Grand Carnival Gala 2010 riding atop the National Brewery's Presidente Beer Float during the National Carnival Parade (photo taken on George Washington Avenue, National District, 7 March 2010)



The decision to organize a choreography competition in 2015 dedicated to traditional-Alibabá was somewhat of a gamble. In reality, except for the rain, the scene of the First Annual Alibabá Choreography Festival was ideal. Taking place on the Saturday after Independence Day and one day before the National Carnival Parade, the Carnival Directorate Office had selected the 500-year-old Plaza España in the heart of the colonial zone as the center stage for the event. Unlike the Music Competition held the day before, this competition occurred within earshot of domestic and foreign tourists surrounded by cobble stone streets, colonial ruins, and four-star restaurants. The Ministry of Tourism (MITUR) and MINC (who were cosponsoring the event) made the event free and open to the public, and even put out plastic chairs to allow for public seating in the outdoor venue so that curious spectators could sit and watch some sixteen registered groups compete for cash prizes and a trophy for the winners. The inaugural

competition was dedicated to Chachón, who was lauded at the celebration as “the brightest star of the most important carnival expression over the last few years in the universe of Dominican culture.”<sup>127</sup>

The competition was scheduled to kick off around 6 pm, and was running mostly on time. By 5 pm or so, the stage was set, and some groups of around twelve dancers each were already present and rehearsing in whatever space they could find among the ruins. The second-place band “Biomega de Mambo” from the music festival the night before, and who hailed from nearby Villa Francisca, had been selected to play for all the dancing groups in order to provide a consistent musical backdrop and allow the judges to focus only on the quality of each group’s dance. The Ministries had also selected a well-qualified jury to judge the competitors on their overall choreography, thematic production, originality, and creativity. The top three cash prizes ranged from RD\$10,000-\$30,000 (approximately US\$222-\$666).

The judges included Jan Peter, actor, dancer, designer, and professor; Marlena Ivar, cultural director, dancer, and professor of ballet; Irena Corporán, director of popular participation in carnival, and cultural director; Verónica Frías, a dancer and choreographer from Venezuela; and José Manuel “Poto” Sánchez, famed choreographer from the first generation of Alibabá performers. The clear favorites going into the event was the group “La Leyenda de Alibabá” (The Legend of Alibabá) under the direction of Mariluz and Roberto Torres—the adult children of Chachón and current leaders of his former group. Their presentation was impressive, as one of the few groups to combine costumed children, women, and men in the choreography in addition to Roberto performing his signature flame-throwing act.

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<sup>127</sup> “el astro que más brilla de la expresión de carnaval más importante de los últimos tiempos en el universo cultural Dominicano.”

The judges deliberated the winners for an extended period after the end of the competition, long after the sun had set and with the only light source at their table to tally the totals coming from the external LED light attached to my video camera. The crowd and the participants were getting antsy, as each one of them surely believed that they had danced the best. Astonishingly, there was an upset victory by a recently-formed Alibabá group calling themselves “Los Vengadores de Cristo Rey” (The Avengers of Cristo Rey), who had impressed the judges with their sleek, unison choreography and Guy Fawkes masks and musketeer costumes. More surprisingly, “La Leyenda de Alibabá” came in third place behind “Los Abusadores de Carnaval” (The Strongmen of Carnival), a group from Los Mina. Whereas the judges easily dismissed the groups who wore no costumes at all, the long deliberation between second and third place had been mostly fueled by a disagreement over the choreography of a single dancer.

The debate boiled down to a member of “La Leyenda de Alibabá,” who had taken the stage to dance a short, hip-hop influenced break dance as a part of their planned choreography.<sup>128</sup> The judges could not agree whether this free-style dancing should be rewarded or penalized as inappropriate for an “Alibabá choreography” competition. Ultimately, the judges did not vote in their favor. Participating groups did not receive comment sheets from the judges on their performance in order to understand how they were scored or why they lost points (see Table 4.6). In the end, “La Leyenda de Alibabá” chalked up their disappointing result to usual unfair carnival politics. The Plaza was abandoned shortly after the conclusion of the dance competition, despite the fact that a popular music band took the stage to keep playing for the reduced crowd well into the evening.

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<sup>128</sup> A video of this performance can be seen on YouTube in “1er Competencia de Coreografía de Alibaba - La leyenda del Alibaba,” posted by Jessica Hajek, 4 March 2015 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOK5DI16aoc>).

**Table 4.6** Rules for participating in the 1<sup>st</sup> Alibabá Choreography Festival “Luis Roberto Torres (Chachón) 2015” (provided by the Carnival Directorate Office)<sup>129</sup>

|  |
|--|
| 1. The announcement will be at the national level.   |
| 2. Every participating group should fill out a registration form that will be available in the National Directorate of Carnival office, located on the corner of Juan Parra Alba St. with El Puerto Ave., Santo Domingo, Dom. Rep. Open from 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. Monday through Friday. |
| 3. The maximum time allotment for presentation is 3 minutes.   |
| 4. The number of dancers is between 12 and 16.   |
| 5. The National Directorate of Carnival will select one band for all participating groups.   |
| 6. The group members should be in uniform.   |
| 7. The judges [ <i>el jurado</i> ] will be selected by the National Directorate of Carnival.   |
| 8. A person cannot participate as a representative of multiple groups.   |
| 9. Dancers can only participate in one group.  |
| 10. The judge’s verdict will not be subject to appeal and will be known at the end of the Festival.  |
| 11. In terms of points, five (5) point will be given to the group with the best energy with the Public.  |
| 12. The last day to register will be Friday, February 6, 2015.   |
| 13. The prizes will be the following:<br>1 <sup>st</sup> Place RD\$30,000.00 Accompanied by a Trophy<br>2 <sup>nd</sup> Place RD\$20,000.00<br>3 <sup>rd</sup> Place RD\$10,000.00   |

What happened at the choreography competition is indicative of a consistent divide between the goals of carnival organizers and judges (to uphold things as they are or decide how

<sup>129</sup> “1. La convocatoria será a nivel Nacional.  
 2. Cada grupo participante deberá llenar una ficha de inscripción que estará disponible en la sede de la Dirección Nacional de Carnaval, ubicado en la calle Juan Parra Alba Esquina Av. El puerto, Santo Domingo, Rep. Dom. En horario de 9:00 A.M. a 4:00 P.M de lunes a viernes.  
 3. El tiempo máximo de presentación es de 5 minutos.  
 4. La cantidad de bailarines es de 12 a 16.  
 5. La Dirección Nacional de Carnaval escogerá una banda para todos los grupos participantes.  
 6. Los integrantes de los grupos deben estar uniformados.  
 7. El jurado será elegido por la Dirección Nacional de Carnaval.  
 8. Una persona no puede participar como representante de varios grupos.  
 9. Los bailarines solo pueden participar en un grupo.  
 10. El veredicto de los jurados será inapelable y se dará a conocer al término del Festival.  
 11. Dentro de la puntuación se entregarán cinco (5) puntos al grupo con mayor energía con el Público.  
 12. La fecha límite de inscripción será el viernes 6 de febrero de 2015.  
 13. Los Premios serán los siguientes:  
     1er Lugar RD\$30,000.00 Acompañado de un Trofeo  
     2do Lugar RD\$20,000.00  
     3er Lugar RD\$10,000.00”

they should be) and the goals of the participants (to innovate and advance the genre as they always have). As in many instances, with a lack of transparency in judging practices (the rules even clearly state that “the judge’s verdict will not be subject to appeal”), the leaders of a group that does not win blame the personal politics of the judges on the final decision rather than any potential short-comings of their own performance. This is reminiscent of the tensions that arose between carnival judges and traditional groups at the 2015 East Santo Domingo municipal parade. At that parade, traditional groups who incorporated non-traditional music in their performances were disqualified. In similar fashion, the Alibabá group who incorporated non-Alibabá choreography into their performance were also penalized.

This is part of the reason why smaller Alibabá dance competitions held during the summer carnival season are proving to be so successful, despite the fact that they often come with no cash prizes for the winners. One such event is the Alibabá Dance Competition that is part of the Urban Parade held in Los Mina (see Figure 4.11). The Urban Parade is organized annually by Enrique “Momón” Scharbay and his associate Wilkins Garabote (who is also a part of his “Imperio Clásico” Alibabá group). Now in its fifth year, the mission of the Urban Parade is to celebrate urban culture, with an emphasis on two genres most associated with the barrio—rap and Alibabá.



**Figure 4.11** Publicity for (a) the Urban Parade and (b) Alibaba Dance Competition on 18 October 2015 (designed by Joselito Gil, posted by Joselito Gil to the Facebook group “CARNAVAL ORIENTAL”)



(a)



(b)

For this competition, dance groups come from various neighborhoods surrounding Los Mina, including from East Santo Domingo and North Santo Domingo. Similar to the national choreography competition, each dance group is accompanied by a single Alibanda. In 2014, the competition was scheduled for two days, on October 12 and 19, and was accompanied by Octavio Mercado’s mambo group from Tamarindo (SDE). However, unlike the national competition, which requires a group of twelve to sixteen dancers, the Los Mina competition is for smaller groups of a maximum of three or four dancers (called “4x4,” or four-on-four in reference to basketball). This increases the number of contestants who can perform—as it is easier to organize and choreograph fewer people. Due to its central location within the Los Mina barrio, it also encourages more dancers to compete who may otherwise not be able to afford to travel to the National District. The fact that this competition takes place in October gives it the

additional bonus of not having to compete with the attention of other carnival activities. It also means that the competition occurs towards the end of the Alibabá summer carnival rehearsal period, meaning that groups have had time to try out and master new choreography in advance.

As discussed in Chapter 2, I explored two important factors that have reinforced the popularity of Alibabá within the barrios of Santo Domingo. First, the equal prominence of choreographed dances and music routines alongside costumes requires that these groups spend more time together year round than most carnival groups, and results in stronger social cohesion within its membership. Second, this intense form of social cohesion found among Alibabá groups is helping to create alternative resources for its members and communities, and thus offers a new kind of barrio social identity. The awards ceremony for the Fourth Alibaba Dance Competition that I observed in November 2014 makes this relationship more evident.

After the competition in October, the awards ceremony was scheduled to coincide with a fundraiser bazaar that was held on November 23. The fundraiser took place all day in the central park in Invivienda (SDE), selling tickets that could be exchanged for home-cooked food, soda, or face painting with proceeds going to the neighborhood's Alibabá group. Around 4 pm, the awards ceremony for the competition winners began. Both Momón and Gladys Olea (Manager of Culture and Folklore in East Santo Domingo) gave speeches about the significance of Alibabá in their communities, followed by a demonstration of the dancing skills of each winning group before receiving a trophy, but no cash prizes, for their efforts.

The winning groups were surprisingly diverse. Third place went to a group of three young boys from North Santo Domingo calling themselves "The Guayumberos." Second place went to a group of four older males from East Santo Domingo known as "La Brecha de Los Farallones" (The Impression from Los Farallones). The winning group was comprised of three

adolescent males from East Santo Domingo called “Dibudibay,” who dressed and performed in a highly effeminate style. For the Alibabá group from Invivienda, the fundraiser and awards ceremony was a success. Although the competitors did not receive cash prizes like those offered by the national competition, the Invivienda group raised money from the proceeds to put towards the already mounting expenses in preparation of the spring carnival season. More importantly, this event was easily attended by friends, supporters, and curious neighbors who simply lived within earshot of the park.

#### *4.4 The Presence of Musical Performance at Carnivals in Santo Domingo*

My intentions have been to demonstrate that the status of public performance practices that successfully combine costume, dance, and music can be better understood by evaluating the goals and values driving the decisions of the various stakeholders involved. Tracing the history of decisions related to regulating participation and judging “musicalness” of carnival groups in Santo Domingo reveals the complex relationship between carnival organizers, performers, and audiences with regard to the performance of live music in a variety of carnival celebrations in the city. Although I suggested that carnival organizers have internalized a hierarchy that has favored promoting diversity and maintaining tradition over encouraging innovative musical performance, I have not done so with the intent of criticizing these regulatory and evaluative decisions or claiming that Alibabá should be treated more like samba schools, steel band, or even carnival groups in Barranquilla. Rather, I am attempting to explore the divide between the desires of Alibabá performers, carnival spectators, and Dominican carnival organizers in Santo Domingo that has resulted in none of the three groups realizing their goals. However, it matters most because of the aspiration of Alibabá leaders to be accepted as “cultural executors” and because

of a continued and concerted effort by the Ministry of Culture to include more musical performance in carnival activities.<sup>130</sup> In the next chapter, I consider some alternative ways that Alibabá performers could adapt to current carnival regulations and evaluating practices that could better achieve their own needs while still appeasing the goals of event organizers, judges, and audiences.

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<sup>130</sup> “ejecutores culturales” (Edward Herrera Taveras, interview, 13 June 2015); Francisco Arias, interview, 15 February 2015; and Francisco “Alex Boutique” Blanco, interview, 26 November 2015.

**CHAPTER 5**  
**MEDIATING MAMBO: INCLUDING ALIBABÁ AS A TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY**  
**SPECTACLE**

As an ethnomusicologist, my primary motivation for studying Alibabá music and dance in Santo Domingo has been to better understand the practice in its social context and in doing so, to define what Alibabá is (as a performance complex) and what it means to its practitioners (as a social enterprise). The time spent interviewing musicians over the course of my dissertation research afforded me some insight into their ideas regarding the state and status of Alibabá in Santo Domingo. Through this process, I discovered that one of the primary concerns of group leaders is that they feel neither they nor their music is appreciated. Not surprisingly, this issue of value emerged as a central theme in many of my interviews and conversations with Alibabá leaders and group members.

Many of my interlocutors feel that their contributions and hard work are underappreciated not just by audiences outside of the barrios, but also by carnival organizers themselves. For instance, one member of the Facebook group “CARNAVAL ORIENTAL” posted a short diatribe on 26 November 2016 that was critical of carnival organizer’s seeming neglect of carnival performers:

Abusos , abusos , y mas abusos , y que es lo que pasa con los organizadores de los distintos carnavales de la capital ? Coño , nosotros ni hacemos nada malo , promovemos nuestra cultura , promovemos el arte , promovemos elaboraciones de trajes de carnaval , promovemos ritmos únicos de nuestro país , como el Alibaba , promovemos el baile , promovemos historias , promovemos personajes antiguos , nosotros los carnavaleros somos una escuela , aprendemos muchísimas cosas q algún día nos podrán ayudar en nuestras vidas . El carnaval promueve la no delincuencia , son cientos de jóvenes q en vez de estar haciendo malos coros por ahí , están con una pistola , pero de silicon . aguantando quemones , pasando malas noxhes , pasando hambre , solo por amor al carnaval.

Entonces , yo digo y me pregunto , que es lo q le sacamos nosotros al carnaval ? Vistosidad ? No creo , salir en tv ? Eso no basta , desfilan ? Pppssss ! Solo cojemos pikes , vemos como nos atropellan . vemos como pisotean nuestros trabajos , no nos valoran , nosotros somos la sangre nueva del carnaval , tienen q darnos nuestro lugar y nuestro respetos.

Abuse, abuse, and more abuse, and what is happening with the organizers of different carnivals in the capital? Dammit, we haven't even done anything wrong, we promote our culture, we promote art, we promote productions of carnival costumes, we promote our country's unique rhythms, like Alibabá, we promote dance, we promote stories, we promote traditional characters, we the carnival participants are a school, we learn so many things that one day will be able to help us in our lives. Carnival promotes non-delinquency, there are hundreds of young people that instead of hanging in bad crowds over there, they have a gun, but a glue gun, putting up with disappointments, overcoming bad nights, overcoming hunger, just for the love of carnival.

So, I ask my question, what is it that we get from carnival? Showiness? I don't think so, being on TV? That is not enough, parading? Pssh! It just provokes us, to see how they run us over, we see how they trample on our work, they do not value us, we are the new blood of carnival, they have to give us our place and our respect.

Even the leader of one of the most award-winning Alibabá groups, Miky, echoed this sentiment as he too struggles to feel valued. During an interview, he mentioned, "Carnival performers, as

the cultural executors that we are, we fuel the culture of the country and as showcases for our talent, we don't feel valued.”<sup>131</sup>

In the previous chapters, I presented Alibabá's meaning for its performers and fans and its importance in their lives. For instance, the social cohesion and sense of belonging generated by participating in Alibabá is an important way that some barrio residents overcome economic shortages and youth delinquency, as well as a way to cope with the daily risk of accidents, food insecurity, health crises, and death. Moreover, as a social enterprise, participating in Alibabá represents one of the few opportunities for barrio residents to learn to play music or to dance. Having the support of the community and an established, albeit informal, system of learning has generated a certain kind of social capital for its practitioners within the barrios and helped to maintain the Alibabá groups currently active throughout Santo Domingo. Based on my experiences in the field and listening to these leaders, Alibabá performers are now aware that they may have reached a limit, and “maxed-out” their social capital. These performers now want access to social mobility, recognition, and prestige that have previously been and still are out of reach.<sup>132</sup>

My ethnographic study of Alibabá suggests that this segment of the population is still socially excluded from much of daily life in Santo Domingo.<sup>133</sup> More acutely, I posit that this exclusion arises from the degree with which to include aspects of barrio identity in a larger discussion of Dominican identity. While ethnographic research methods helped me to determine

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<sup>131</sup> “Los carnavaleros, como ejecutores culturales que lo que somos, fomentamos la cultura del país y como exhibidores de nuestro talento, no nos sentimos valorados” (Edward “Miky” Herrera Taveras, interview, 13 June 2015).

<sup>132</sup> For a more in-depth discussion on the distinctions between social, cultural, and symbolic capital, see Bourdieu (1984 and 1986).

<sup>133</sup> In her contribution to a trailblazing half-issue for the *Yearbook for Traditional Music* on music and poverty, Klisala Harrison defines social exclusion as the “exclusion from participation in ‘mainstream’ economical, political, and cultural life; indicators of social exclusion are unemployment, low income, poor housing, poor health, high crime, and low education level.” (2013, 4; see also Mabughi and Selim 2006, 187).

what problems exist for these performers, further actions are required for developing solutions. To suggest, then, that this project could address these issues necessitates something of a paradigm shift in order to determine how, and to what degree a scholar can intervene, and furthermore, the ethical implications of applying scholarly knowledge for the social, cultural, or economic benefit of this community. In addressing these questions, I am guided by the principles of the branch of ethnomusicology referred to as “applied ethnomusicology” in my quest to serve as an intermediary between the Alibabá community and carnival organizers in order to advocate for performers and this practice in a socially responsible and equitable way.

My past efforts collaborating with the Alibabá community have been relatively small-scale and indirect, such as curating and informally sharing videos of public events taken in the field via social media sites such as Facebook and YouTube. As a student of ethnomusicology within the School of Music at the University of Illinois, my forays in the field relied heavily on my Western classical training as a performer to engage with musicians in the Dominican Republic and learn to play Alibabá (see also Bendrups 2015). As a form of more equitable knowledge exchange, I offered classical saxophone lessons to my principal drum instructor in exchange for snare drum lessons during my time spent in the capital for my dissertation research in 2014 and 2015 (see Hajek 2015).

Pertinent to this chapter is a more robust consideration of directly advocating on behalf of the Alibabá community. This dissertation, as a written document, also represents a form of advocacy for the groups, providing both musical transcriptions and a social history of the practice. Yet, ethnomusicologist Jeff Todd Titon recommends that, in order to be a more comprehensive advocate, one must be willing and able to step away from a role as an unbiased observer and adopt a more partisan political stance (2015a, 7). Admittedly, I began my field



research in a privileged position since my credibility as a foreign scholar granted me welcomed access to Dominican carnival organizers and government policy makers—especially the director of the Carnival Directorate Office, Ramón Lachapelle. My relationship with the Alibabá community took much longer to develop, and finally came about through my collaboration with Joselito Gil and Enrique “Momón” Scharbay in addition to my participation in the Alibabá group “Imperio Clásico.” It is only through this partnership that I had the opportunity to directly access performers, which consequently made me more sensitive to their situation. In thinking about the question of why practices like Alibabá should be supported, it is important to keep in mind that its value has less to do with the nature of its sound or choreography, and more to do with the impact of these practices on the lives of their performers and fans.

With this in mind, this chapter uses applied methods to discuss solutions to specific questions about Alibabá’s future in Santo Domingo. Given that Alibabá performers want to be valued, what is happening to prevent this and what can they do about it? The answers to these questions are based on the musical knowledge that I presented in the previous three chapters coupled with a discussion of which factors are currently driving this social exclusion, and relevant projects regarding the inclusion of musical practices from marginalized Dominican communities in the past.

### *5.1 Overcoming Social Exclusion: Santo Domingo’s Social Geographies and Carnival Audience Politics*

As a performance complex, Alibabá has proven to be a compelling object of music-centered, ethnomusicological inquiry. In the previous chapters, I primarily focused on how several interrelated social factors (including an economic crisis, an increase in urban crime, and shifting cultural policies) have impacted and shaped Alibabá at rehearsals, parades, and

competitions in the twenty-first century. More importantly, I have come to realize that the Alibabá community itself, including the performers and their audiences, is also greatly affected by these external social factors.

In her article “Poverty as Danger” (2009), Erin B. Taylor explores how poverty in particular has become a locus of danger in Santo Domingo—as it is considered an indicator of increased likelihood of engaging in criminal activities. In Chapter 2, I focused on how negative attitudes impact the perception of Alibabá as a musical practice. I explained how the contemporary discourse of crime and poverty in the barrios of Santo Domingo has resulted in law enforcement treating Alibabá rehearsals categorically similar to honking horns and recorded music blasting from massive speakers—all subject to noise-ordinances. I also identified how Alibabá’s association with specific bodies (predominantly young males) and a specific part of the city (the barrios) has shaped current interpretations of the practice within Santo Domingo. More pertinent to my discussion here, these attitudes also affect Alibabá performers personally. One contributing factor to this is the city’s social geography (i.e., the politics of deciding who belongs and where people go), which has restricted movement within the barrios. This in turn has had a particularly palpable effect on Alibabá groups, who depend on visual and auditory proximity in order to attract an audience.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the success of early Alibabá groups was based in part on their ability to mobilize and gain visibility, especially within a walkable radius between several contiguous neighborhoods during carnival parades in the 1970s and 1980s. As recounted by Gustavo “Tico” Batista in his memoir:

During this time there were few Alibabá groups and they were also competing amongst themselves with much determination to see who could attract more fans [*público*] to the streets...principally the barrios of Villa Francisca, Villa Consuelo, San Carlos, Villa María, and Villa Juana, looking for other groups to compete with and take their fans

away from them...; that was a sample of the competition that existed to be the best and most popular carnival group...In this way the fame of Alibabá kept growing from barrio to barrio, arriving all the way to Villas Agrícolas.<sup>134</sup> (2013, 31-32, 34)

Based on my personal experience in 2015, members of “Imperio Clásico” now tend to only feel safe within the vicinity of their own neighborhood and are less likely to spend time in unfamiliar parts. As a part of my fieldwork, I accompanied the group as they performed throughout East Santo Domingo. The group always assured me that I was safe in their base of operations in Los Mina—although non-locals consider the neighborhood to be one of the most dangerous in the city (see Herrera 2012). They were less sure when we traveled to rehearse or to perform in nearby neighborhoods like Katanga, Villa Duarte, or Sabana Perdida; there was always a specific point at which the group’s feelings of insecurity would peak when the crowd became too large (and members would begin to tell me to put away my camera and guard my purse).

There were also occasions when the group traveled beyond our immediate surroundings and asked me to stay behind all together. On one such occasion, the “Imperio Clásico” musicians were contracted to accompany a political march through the Las Enfermeras neighborhood—one of many squatter barrios that have sprouted up more recently along the banks of the Ozama River in East Santo Domingo. Although I had every intention of recording the event, several of the male musicians requested that I wait with a group of female dancers just outside of the neighborhood entrance. I am unsure whether this was because I was a foreigner or because we were all females, but I do know that even the musicians perceived this area to be so dangerous that they were not looking forward to playing there.

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<sup>134</sup> “En este tiempo existían pocos grupos de Los Alí Babá [sic] y siempre estaban compitiendo entre ellos con mucho empeño para ver quien atraía más público a las calles...principalmente los barrios de Villa Francisca, Villa Consuelo, San Carlos, Villa María, y Villa Juana, buscando al otro grupo para competir quitándole público...; ese era una muestra de la competencia que existía por ser el mejor y más popular grupo de comparsas....De esa manera la fama de Los Alí Babá continuó creciendo de barrio en barrio, llegando hasta Villa [sic] Agrícolas.”

I contend that this limitation on the geographical range in which an Alibabá group may feel comfortable performing (albeit often self-imposed) is preventing more audiences from seeing the positive features of these bands. A conventional solution to this obstacle would be to increase access to safe and secure rehearsal and performance venues to perhaps counter their negative image. In fact, as discussed in Chapter 4, MINC has been working since 2010 to promote staged presentations of Alibabá music and dance—first within the barrio, and subsequently at public plazas in the Colonial Zone and along the malecón, George Washington Avenue. This has given Alibabá groups access to more secure spaces to play. However, even though these events are free, attendance is chronically poor.

To me, this indicates that simply creating more performance opportunities may not be enough to overcome Alibabá's image problem among its current or potential audiences. As an advocate and admitted fan of Alibabá, I am compelled to consider alternative ways to better engage audiences to increase attendance at these events (a goal of both performers and event organizers). Huib Schippers offers some insight into this matter, suggesting that together, performers and organizers can achieve some stability for a practice through “a combination of changing values and attitudes, technological developments, and/or audience behaviors” (2015, 144). I find Schippers' ideas to be applicable to analyzing Alibabá audience behaviors in order to change their attitudes with the assistance of recording technology. To accomplish this, it is important to consider certain questions that drive the behaviors of carnival audiences in Santo Domingo. What are their interests? What are their concerns? As a member of the audience at various carnival events during my fieldwork, my answers to these questions are based on participant-observation that I conducted and the results of a sociodemographic survey of the National District published by the Dominican National Statistics Office (ONE, 2009).

Every year, MINC includes a paragraph in the National Carnival Parade program detailing the level of security at the event. In 2015, MINC touted over 2,500 security forces comprised of members of the National Police, the Santo Domingo Municipal Police, and the Tourist Police (POLITUR), and private security guards, among others (MINC 2015, 3). Nevertheless, one of the biggest concerns that may be influencing attendance at these kinds of carnival events continues to be the audiences' anxieties regarding carnival's association with the streets, large crowds of young males, and crime. Of all places and activities included in a survey carried out by the National District City Council in 2008, city residents had the worst perception of carnival; only 30% of respondents perceived carnival celebrations to be "very secure or secure," whereas 39% perceived carnival to be "insecure" (ONE 2009, 9).<sup>135</sup> I can also attest to residents' apprehension at other carnival events beyond the National Parade. On one occasion while attending the East Santo Domingo carnival parade in February 2013, my male companion and several spectators around us all warned me to watch my camera because they were convinced that the carnival participants would try to steal it right from my hands. Later that week, I convinced my female roommate to go with me to the Music Festival. Although her apartment was a mere two blocks from the Juan Barón Plaza, she insisted on returning home at 9 pm and later admonished me for staying out by myself in the streets until 11 pm.

In thinking about changing public attitudes toward Alibabá as a practice, I propose that carnival organizers and Alibabá practitioners could better address spectators' negative perceptions by reevaluating the audience's demographic data (i.e., age, class, nationality, etc.)

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<sup>135</sup> In comparison to other places included in the survey, the public transportation system was perceived to be "very secure or secure" by 38% and "insecure" by 28%, the neighborhood where they lived was perceived as "very secure or secure" by 55% and as "insecure" by 11%, and all other urban recreation activities in the National District were perceived as "very secure or secure" by an astounding 67% and "insecure" by only 5% of respondents (ONE 2009, 9).

and also their knowledge about, and expectations for, what they are listening to. In lieu of conducting general surveys or small focus groups, this can be accomplished through ethnographic audience research. This method is an equally valuable alternative that draws on observations regarding demographics, knowledge, and expectations to understand audience behaviors. For example, the typical attendant of the National Carnival Parade in Santo Domingo (with an almost-even male-to-female ratio) is a young Dominican who resides in the National District or Santo Domingo Province (*Departamento de Estadísticas Culturales* 2009, 6-8).<sup>136</sup> Based on my own observations of the crowds at Alibabá events in particular, at least half of the audience consists of the friends and family of the performers that accompany the groups to the competitions (see Figure 5.1). Knowing this, the current audience of carnival events and Alibabá competitions are most likely individuals that are very familiar with the practice and, therefore already have certain expectations of what they will see and hear at the event. The next logical step would be to determine if Alibabá fans would be interested in investing even more dedicated time and energy and more actively engaging with performers (Kelly 2004, 1-16).

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<sup>136</sup> According to a survey carried out by the *Departamento de Estadísticas Culturales* (Department of Cultural Statistics), there were approximately 550,000 visitors at the 2009 National Carnival Parade in Santo Domingo. Of these, 92% were from the Dominican Republic, 72% were residents of the National District or Santo Domingo Province, and 50% were aged 19-35 years old with 48% male/52% female (2009, 6-8).

**Figure 5.1** “Biomega de Mambo” (Biomega Mambo) warming up before a crowd of Dominican youths at the 1st Festival of Alibabá Choreography (photo taken in the Plaza of Spain, National District, 28 February 2015)



In various other cases, performers, entertainers, and event organizers have used observations regarding an audience’s demographics and expectations to more successfully encourage audience members to interact, connect, and identify with them at an event. For instance, Jennifer Baker (2016) describes how the St. Kitts Music Festival was revamped in 1999 in order to appeal more to the actual attendees—black women and their families, including return migrants residing in North America. As a result of a better audience analysis, Baker describes how the organizers of the 2013 Festival began presenting “an array of musical performances of black, male, heterosexuality that was especially geared to a perceived heterosexual female audience” (272). This move translated into shifting away from international groups, which tend to cater to white foreigners in general, and towards popular English-language Caribbean artists like Beres Hammond, Shaggy, and Konshens which were more attractive to North American black women (274). Likewise, Jane Desmond’s (1999) work describes how the presentation of Hawaiian hula at tourist luau shows at beach resorts (i.e., staged presentations within the tourist

area) for white Mainlanders differ drastically from the Merrie Monarch Hula Festival (i.e., staged presentations outside of the tourist area) for Hawaiian natives.

Thinking about how to engage the audience as a way to shift public attitudes about Alibabá has contributed to my interest in experimenting with a project that would focus on technology in the form of producing, distributing, and promoting audio/visual recordings through social media sites like Facebook and YouTube. By approaching Alibabá as a resource to be mobilized rather than a community in need, it may be possible to present Alibabá “mambo” (a term already used in association with its music and dance) as a product that could be valued independently of the perceived social disorganization of the barrio (i.e., by bringing sounds to people). Moreover, a second potential outcome of a coordinated effort to share mambo recordings could have a reciprocal effect, where listening audiences seek out the very places and events where Alibabá can be found (i.e., by bringing people to sound).

### *5.2 Advocating for Mambo: Developing Inclusion Strategies through Applied Ethnomusicology*

Before one can begin a project to promote recordings of mambo music, one must first select from the variety of Alibabá’s performance contexts. Of course, one of the many perils of engaging in applied ethnomusicology as a white American female scholar working in the Dominican Republic is sponsoring Alibabá music and dance for my own self interests, objectifying the very community that I claim to support, or even engaging in veiled colonialist agendas (Titon 1992, 320; Dirksen 2012, para. 28). Other opponents of applied ethnomusicology may argue that this work also promotes elitism, the wrong kinds of nationalist sentiments, and other political agendas (Titon 1992, 320; Dirksen 2012, para. 2 and 6). During my field work in Santo Domingo, I became increasingly aware of the unequal access to power that existed



between me and my interlocutors. I recognized my own privilege as I was able to use my U.S. passport and credit cards to travel to and from the field with ease—paying only US\$10 upon arrival for a 30-day tourist visa and the occasional fee when departing for overstaying my visa. Upon completion of this dissertation, I will be able to pursue an academic career and continue to publish on the topic of Alibabá music and dance. I have also come to terms with the limited direct benefits that my work could offer the Alibabá community. Even if Alibabá performers or carnival organizers choose to consider my ideas, it is possible that none of them will result in a positive outcome.

While these tendencies may be unavoidable facts, it is still possible for foreign scholars to work to the benefit of a musical community within this system. Whether they are folkloric, nationalist, or popular in nature, all forms of cultural projects are imbued with political agendas and processes of selection and exclusion. Short of moving to the capital city and dedicating the next few decades of my life to the cause of Alibabá, my ability to serve as a full-time advocate to develop such a project is also limited. As an alternative, my efforts as an intermediary at this juncture may best be served by helping to initiate a plan that, if so desired, Alibabá performers could carry out themselves (Davis 1992, 370). As a result, an important part of my research for this project was also to listen to and document the concerns and perspectives of Alibabá performers themselves in order to determine what is at stake for these individuals, establish a more equal partnership, and set the stage for more meaningful advocacy in the future (Titon 2015a, 7).

Whereas my position as an ethnomusicologist allowed me to act as a liaison between performers and organizers, it was my first-hand experience that led me to believe that there could be other outsiders and tourists, like me, who could become fans of Alibabá if only given the chance. Therefore, how can I, as an American ethnomusicologist—and a white female—

advocate best for a musical practice like Alibabá in a way that is sensitive to social and cultural contexts different from my own? In the case of Santo Domingo, this includes distinctive interpretations of issues like race, class, and gender, not to mention musical tastes and aesthetics. In the realm of ethnomusicology, applied scholars have been particularly sensitive to not only address problems facing musicians around the world, but also discuss how to raise awareness of cultural diversity and suggest actions for these artists to challenge their circumstances (Sheehy 1992, 334; Dirksen 2013, 46). In general, these ethnomusicological interventions approach inclusivity from one of three vantages: top-down, bottom-up, or middle-out. Since not every strategy is equally applicable to every case, in what follows, I briefly explore the work of several scholars and their applied projects to discuss the relevance of their inclusion strategies to the case of Alibabá.

### Mambo Recordings and their Implications for Cultural Tourism

Historically, applied researchers have commonly engaged in top-down cultural policy interventions as a means to promote a specific cultural expression or performance practice of a marginalized community. On occasion, these projects focus on entertainment law and copyright as a way to give a sense of ownership to the communities often at the center of our research endeavors (Seeger 1992; McCann 2001; Stobart 2011). Other projects of this nature epitomize a kind of public sector folklore, undertaken by folklorists, anthropologists, and ethnomusicologists alike, who are interested in documenting a selected practice or cultural expression (see Sheehy 1992; Schippers 2015; Titon 2015a). While these endeavors are an important part of documenting and valorizing cultural heritage and diversity, it can take decades for a performance practice to gain sufficient cultural capital to warrant such an undertaking. More importantly, as I

demonstrated in Chapter 3 with the case of the Cocolo Dance Drama tradition, the immediate and long-term positive benefits for these communities can also vary greatly.

There are also a number of applied ethnomusicologists who engage in the tourist realm, and must often contend with similar ethical implications of commoditizing cultural expressions, such as its folklorization for staged presentations (see Dirksen 2012; Titon and Pettan 2015; and Wissler 2015). In response, I have demonstrated that Alibabá is a performance complex that has already lent itself well to a variety of situations and audiences without much outside intervention. With this in mind, I am interested in putting forward some ideas about how the Ministry of Culture or the Ministry of Tourism could intervene to serve their long-term goals to maintain tradition, promote diversity, and motivate musical performance at carnival through a tourism campaign focusing on recordings of Alibabá mambo music, costumes, and dance.

For me, one of the biggest questions that remains in regard to Alibabá is whether or not such a campaign could ever be marketable. Without question, tourism is an important industry in the Dominican Republic, attracting over 4.3 million foreigners (from North and South America, Europe, the Caribbean, and Asia) and more than 500,000 Dominican non-resident tourists and generating over US\$4 billion annually (ONE 2016a). In spite of this, according to Sydney Hutchinson, “The potential to develop Dominican music, dance, or other cultural expressions as sources of tourism revenue has, by and large, not been realized” (2014, 151). Based on my observations during the course of my research on Alibabá, I believe that this lacuna in terms of organized marketing to tourists also goes hand-in-hand with the lack of precise branding of the Dominican Republic’s unique cultural expressions (e.g., food, clothing, art, dance, music, etc.).

Not surprisingly, this overall absence of cohesive domestic branding often translates into imprecise international representations of Dominican cultural expressions. Fortuitously, the fact

that Dominican musical practices are not clearly defined outside of the country has worked to the advantage of some Alibabá performers in unexpected ways. Even though I argued in Chapter 2 that these performers and their groups are firmly rooted within their neighborhoods, I soon became aware that these places represented nodes within transnational networks that linked the Dominican Republic to the U.S. and beyond. Therefore, the similarities between many elements of Alibabá and more familiar genres (including merengue, samba, and Latin pop music) have created opportunities for these performers to make connections in light of international audiences' tendency to conflate or confuse Dominican musical practices. Ultimately, Alibabá performers have had some coincidental success in presenting their practice abroad on both CDs and in music videos, but there is simply no apparatus to connect what the audience is seeing and hearing back to Santo Domingo, to its carnival practices, or to Alibabá.

Sonically, Alibabá musicians have had the most crossover success through recordings of contemporary Dominican merengue. In fact, much of the popular music coming out of Santo Domingo over the last twenty years has a direct lineage to the Alibabá rhythm. Consider Antonio Peter de la Rosa, better known by his stage name "Omega el Fuerte" (Omega the Strong), who surged onto the Dominican music scene in 2006 with his group "Su Mambo Violento" (His Aggressive Mambo). Omega is one of the most successful Dominican mambo artists, even achieving some success abroad and on the Billboard Hot Latin chart with the re-release of his third album *El Dueño del Flow, Vol. 2* (The Master of Flow) in 2011. Since then, Omega has recorded collaborations with Cuban-American rapper Pitbull and the Puerto Rican reggaetón artist Daddy Yankee. Omega's hits include "Alante, Alante" (Go on, Go on) (2006), "Si No Me Amas" (If You Don't Love Me) (2008), a cover-version of Daddy Yankee's "Si Tu Te Vas/Que

Tengo Que Hacer” (If You Go/What Do I Have to Do) (2009), and “Merengue Electrónico” (Electronic Merengue) (2009).

Omega was born in the central province of Bonao, but grew up in Pantoja, a district of Los Alcarrizos in Santo Domingo. Omega was once a member of an Alibabá band known as “La Primera” (The First), who accompanied a diablo group called “Los Unicornios” (The Unicorns) in Herrera, West Santo Domingo. According to the group’s leader José Ramón “Momón” Garcés, Omega was inspired to form his own group after seeing an Alibabá band from the National District. In 2005, La Primera even recorded a carnival anthem “Compadre Pedro Juan” (Buddy Pedro Juan) with Omega singing lead vocals, which became the principal theme of Los Unicornios.<sup>137</sup> Omega’s rendition combined melodic elements from the classic merengue típico “Compadre Pedro Juan,” fast Alibabá mambo rhythm, and newly composed coro-style lyrics such as “Pa’riba, pa’bajo/P’al centro, pa’dentro/El coro de La Primera/Como mambo violento” (Up, down/Center, in [a famous Spanish drinking toast]/The La Primera coro/Like an aggressive mambo)—foreshadowing the name of his solo act. As an extension of Alibabá mambo, Omega’s musical style grew into a fusion of fast merengue and dembow (the preferred term for Dominican rap or reggaetón) that has now come to characterize much of the popular music being produced by contemporary artists from the urban centers of the country, and especially in Santo Domingo. Today, this genre is referred to locally as *merengue de calle* or *merengue callejero* (street merengue) because a vast majority of the performers hail from the inner-city neighborhoods of the Dominican Republic’s urban zones. Thanks in part to Omega’s success,

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<sup>137</sup> José Ramón Garcés, interview, 28 February 2015.

residents of Santo Domingo also refer to this genre as “mambo,” but are for the most part unaware of Alibabá’s influence.<sup>138</sup>

Visually, while Alibabá’s impressive costumes, flashy dance moves, and marching bands makes it easily recognizable and identifiable as a carnival group, it does not make the practice obviously “Dominican.”<sup>139</sup> The song “Taboo” (2011) by Puerto Rican reggaetón artist William Omar “Don Omar” Landrón Rivera serves as a case in point. This song reached the No. 1 spot on Billboard’s Hot Latin Songs chart, undoubtedly receiving a boost in popularity because it was featured on the soundtrack for the Hollywood blockbuster *Fast Five* (or *Fast & Furious 5*), set in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Musically, Don Omar’s rendition of “Taboo” is a remix of “Lambada” (1989) by the French group Kaoma. Lyrically, Don Omar performs renditions of the original verses and chorus in both Spanish and Portuguese and new rap lyrics in Spanish.<sup>140</sup> The instrumental accompaniment of the song combines the accordion riffs from the lambada version, plus samba instruments, including *caixa* (snare drum), *quica* (friction drum), and *surdo* (bass drum). This sonic snowballing makes the song a perfect fit for the movie, both capturing a Brazilian-feel and a carnival environment, and exemplifying a pan-Latin American appeal.

The official video that accompanies the song continues in the same vein. Directed by acclaimed Dominican-born director Marlon Peña, the majority of the video features Don Omar shot on location at two beach resorts (Casa de Campo, La Romana and Juan Dolio) and the Colonial Zone (DN) in the Dominican Republic; the remainder of the video features scenes from

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<sup>138</sup> Two prominent local scholars of Santo Domingo’s music have acknowledged this connection (see Tejeda Ortiz 2008, 220 and Díaz 2012, 34).

<sup>139</sup> The Alibabá group featured in the video is from Villa Consuelo (DN), under the direction of Edward Francisco “Miky” Herrera Taveras. The group was recommended to Don Omar’s production team by the Reality Show “Vive el Carnaval de Noche y de Día” (2011-2012). Miky’s group won the grand prize in the inaugural competition with his Alibabá-themed group “Fantasía de un Gladiador” (A Gladiator’s Fantasy).

<sup>140</sup> Kaoma’s version in turn was an unauthorized cover of the song “Chorando Se Foi” (1984) by Brazilian artist Márcia Ferreira, which itself was a Portuguese version of the original tune “Llorando Se Fue” (1981) penned by the Afro-Bolivian folk group Los Kjarkas.

the film, shot on location in Rio de Janeiro (Peralta 2011, para. 14). The plot of the video is reminiscent of Kaoma's video and revolves around Don Omar and his childhood first love. As can be seen in Figure 5.2, the audience is introduced to the music video with an aerial shot of Copacabana beach before Don Omar's character enters the scene, working as a waiter at a beach resort. The blonde female protagonist recognizes Don Omar and their eyes meet, right as he quits his job and departs from the resort.

The illusion of Rio in this video is attained because the scenes are set up in such a way to call Brazilianness to the minds of the audience, even though most of these scenes were shot in the Dominican Republic. This is because the characteristics of the country's beaches juxtaposed with the city's layout and demographics tells a story that is strikingly similar to Rio. The remainder of the video follows the main female protagonist on her journey in the footsteps of Don Omar through what the audience believes to be Rio's favelas, but is actually the Colonial Zone of Santo Domingo. Along the way, the protagonist runs into a capoeira group practicing on the beach, crosses paths with soccer-playing youths, and runs into a wayward "samba" band before finally falling into the arms of Don Omar at the very end (see Figure 5.2). Surreptitiously, this samba band is actually an Alibabá group from Villa Consuelo (DN), under the direction of Edward "Miky" Herrera Taveras. The group was recommended to Don Omar's production team by the producers of the now-defunct Reality Show "Vive el Carnaval de Noche y de Día" (2011-2012).<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Miky's group won the grand prize in the inaugural competition of the Reality Show with his Alibabá-themed group "Fantasía de un Gladiador" (A Gladiator's Fantasy).

**Figure 5.2** Images from the music video “Taboo” by Don Omar starting in Rio de Janeiro with (a) Copacabana Beach, followed by scenes shot in Santo Domingo with (b) a capoeira group on a beach, (c) Don Omar singing with an Alibabá band and dancer in the background, (d) kids playing soccer in the barrio, and (e) an Alibabá group parading in the street (screenshots taken from YouTube video posted by DonOmarVEVO, 12 April 2011)



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)



(e)

The result of this lack of a clear domestic branding strategy appears to be that, even when unique Dominican cultural expressions and images of Santo Domingo itself are presented in full force, they are rendered somewhat indistinguishable from other Caribbean places and people.



Enrique Iglesias's Spanish-language and English-language videos for "Bailando" (2014) serve as an excellent case in point because the songs' commercial success is so noteworthy. To date, the Spanish-language version has over 1 billion views on YouTube and the song spent a record-setting twenty-six weeks in the No. 1 spot on Billboard's Hot Latin Singles chart. Not to be ignored, the English-language version of the video has over 200 million views and the song reached No. 12 on the Billboard Hot 100 list.<sup>142</sup> Two "behind-the-scenes" short films were also produced, which explained where the videos were filmed, who the artists were, and what it was like in each location.

In many ways, the Spanish-language and English-language versions of the video are couched in imagery that is specific to the Dominican Republic. Iglesias's video was filmed in Santo Domingo in and around the Colonial Zone and San Carlos (DN). Throughout the video, the audience is presented with images of the Dominican flag and bottles of Dominican rum, and is introduced to places in the capital that locals would be very familiar with—the malecón, the "Las Américas" Tunnel, and the outdoor market along Paris Street in San Carlos.<sup>143</sup> In other ways, this video visually sustains a pan-Latin feel that recasts the location as more generically "Caribbean." Iglesias's video was directed by Cuban producer Alejandro Pérez, and features a varied cast of performers, including: Spaniard Iglesias, Cuban singer-song writer Descemer Bueno, the Cuban reggaetón group Gente de Zona (People from the Neighborhood), and Jamaican hip-hop artist Sean Paul (for the English-language version). More interestingly, Bueno first recorded a version of the song and made a video in Cuba in 2013 with Gente de Zona and dancers from the Ballet Liza Alonso and the National School of Dance. While scenes featuring

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<sup>142</sup> There are also two versions of the song that feature Portuguese-language recording artists, Luan Santana (from Brazil) and Mickael Carreira (from Portugal), which are not central to my discussion here.

<sup>143</sup> Iglesias has a partnership with the Dominican rum company *Ron Atlántico*, and bottles of its rum are strategically placed throughout the music video.

the dance companies were reshot in Havana for Iglesias’s videos, the common Spanish colonial architecture found in both Santo Domingo and Havana make it difficult to distinguish which scenes were shot where (Legañoa 2014, para. 27).

For Alibabá performers, the confrontation between this marked and unmarked Dominican identity in the video comes to the foreground around minute [1:38] of both the Spanish-language and English-language versions of the video, with a cameo by Chachón. It is not surprising to me that Alibabá’s most affable and eccentric character appears in this video, as his personality and skills as a dancer help make him stand out in a crowd and attract a lot of attention—even from Enrique Iglesias (see Figure 5.3). During the scenes shot in the market, one catches glimpses of Chachón not just in the crowds, but dancing side-by-side with the video’s Cuban choreographer Roclan González in center frame of the camera (see Figure 5.4). While this is an impressive feat, the individual merits of neither Chachón nor González are made evident in the video.

**Figure 5.3** Luis Roberto “Chachón” Torres dressed in a fantasy-Alibabá costume at the awards ceremony for the 2012 National Carnival Parade (photo taken in the Eduardo Brito National Theater, National District, 9 March 2012)



**Figure 5.4** Images from “Bailando” by Enrique Iglesias featuring (a) Chachón (circled) and (b) Chachón (left) with Roclan García (right) (both circled), filmed on Paris St. in the San Carlos barrio of the National District, Santo Domingo (screenshots taken from YouTube video posted by EnriqueIglesiasVEVO, 11 April 2014)



I am curious about the possibility of planning a larger-scale project that would require the involvement and cooperation of multiple parties (such as MINC, MITUR, carnival organizers, carnival performers, etc.). The goal of such a project would be to help these entities tap into international tourist markets and transform Alibabá costume, dance, and music into a destination—or what Rommen calls a “sonic emblem” (2014, 2)—through carefully recrafting marketing narratives that would take advantage of preexisting popular media (including the aforementioned examples). Nevertheless, since there are only three instances of such Alibabá cross-overs into the international market (as of 2017), spearheading this kind of top-down cultural tourism project may not yet be practical at this point in time.

### Alibabá Performance Outside of Carnival: Politics, Sporting Events, and Dominicans in New York City

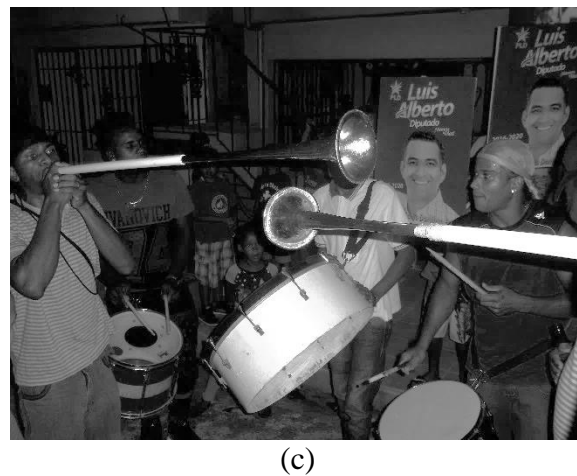
In contrast to the top-down approach, other applied scholars have undertaken applied projects from the bottom-up, partnering with musical communities on the ground to raise awareness of their cause. In some cases, these scholars are primarily dedicated to listening and documentation as a form of advocacy, such as Josh D. Pilzer’s (2015) work on survivor’s music

among Korean comfort women. In much of her work in Haiti, ethnomusicologist Rebecca Dirksen (2013) examines the ways that musicians have built value through direct community engagement—what she calls “community action”—and empowerment through the arts. More specifically, Dirksen documents the efforts of a rap collective called Wucamp to “educate the public through music and community service” (particular regarding material poverty and access to water) in both pre- and post-earthquake Port-au-Prince (50). She argues that musicians can often be the harbingers of their own inclusion through civic engagement, without the direct involvement of outside actors. Because many Alibabá bands already have direct contact with Santo Domingo audiences as contract performers at political events and sports games, engaging with Alibabá performers directly also merits consideration. Therefore, it is necessary to explore if increasing a social media presence of these activities on YouTube or Facebook in these other performative contexts could help recast Alibabá groups and their mambo rhythm as a valued part of Santo Domingo’s more diverse soundscape and cultural identity.

During the summer of 2015 and spring 2016, I spent several weeks with the musicians of “Imperio Clásico” during the height of the political campaign season. Early on, I observed that the musicians were almost exclusively contracted by the *Partido Revolucionario Moderno* (Modern Revolutionary Party, PRM). This was, in part, motivated by the leader of the group, Enrique “Momón” Scharbay, who was himself a PRM candidate for East Santo Domingo city councilor. By the spring, the band was accompanying a wider variety of events for many different parties, including the *Frente Popular* (Popular Front) and the *Partido de la Liberación Dominicana* (Dominican Liberation Party, PLD). The lack of party loyalty among the musicians is less of a political decision and more of an economic one, as groups will play for which ever party pays for their services (see Figure 5.5). This sentiment was echoed by another Alibabá

band leader in Sabana Perdida, North Santo Domingo, who often played for the *Partido Revolucionario Dominicano* (Dominican Revolutionary Party, PRD), but not exclusively.

**Figure 5.5** Select members of Imperio Clásico accompanying political marches for various deputy candidates, including (a) Adriano Rojas, PRM (photo taken in San Luis, Santo Domingo Province, 3 July 2015), (b) Marlon Palaez, PRM/Frente Popular (photo taken in Villa Duarte, East Santo Domingo, 1 May 2016), and (c) Luis Alberto, PLD (photo taken in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo, 2 May 2016)



The mambo rhythm has seemingly made its way into the political sphere because of Alibabá bands' ability to serve either one of two functions. First, these bands act as heralds for meet-and-greet political marches, where candidates walk through a targeted neighborhood in order to meet with their constituents, shake hands, and pose for photos. I accompanied "Imperio

Clásico” on several of these multiple-hour walks through neighborhoods like San Luis, Katanga, Las Enfermeras, and Villa Duarte. True to form, the sound of the mambo rhythm draws crowds of people to the streets in this context as well. Second, Alibabá bands may serve to entertain a seated audience at political speeches while waiting for the candidate to arrive. In the weeks before the election in May 2016, I attended a political event with members of “Imperio Clásico” in support of Alfredo Martínez, PLD candidate for East Santo Domingo mayor. That day, Martínez had scheduled five speeches around East Santo Domingo, and contracted the band to play at one of the final events in Los Mina. The group rallied the audience as they patiently waited for the candidate to arrive, albeit several hours late. Either way, political events are one important way that Alibabá performers are currently introducing new audiences to mambo music.

There is also an indication that the mambo rhythm is making its way into the sports world in Santo Domingo. At a community level, Alibabá bands often play in the stands in support of various sports activities that take place between carnival groups during the carnival off-seasons. For example, members of “Imperio Clásico” and “Los Rebeldes de Mambo” (The Mambo Rebels) played for a friendly basketball tournament between two Alibabá groups from Villa Duarte and Villa Faro, East Santo Domingo in May 2016 (see Figure 5.6). At the citywide level, the two professional baseball teams in Santo Domingo also contract Alibabá bands to play in the stadiums during games. Currently, “Imperio Clásico” plays for *los Tigres de Licey* (the Licey Tigers).<sup>144</sup> The Dominican Winter League (LIDOM) baseball season in the runs from October

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<sup>144</sup> According to the team mythology, in 1907, the founders of the Licey team were looking for a five-letter word that could easily fit on the jerseys. The brother of one of the founders suggested the name “Licey” after a stream located near La Vega in the North that often flooded and made it difficult and dangerous for people to cross. However, several sports historians in Santo Domingo refute this legend (*Listín Diario* 2016, para. 1-3).

until December, in order to not compete with the Major League Baseball (MLB) season in the United States. Conveniently, this is also during the carnival off-season, so Alibabá bands are more available to play.

**Figure 5.6** Select members of the Alibabá bands “Imperio Clásico” and “Los Rebeldes de Mambo” playing for a friendly basketball competition between two Alibabá groups (photo taken in Villa Duarte, East Santo Domingo, 4 May 2016)



These endeavors speak to the potential for better integrating mambo music into the city’s soundscape. There is a common belief among Dominican men in the barrios that the only way to earn a decent income and get ahead in life is either in politics or baseball. Therefore, the prestige of these professions means that playing mambo rhythms to accompany political events and at baseball games is a great way to increase the music’s presence and social capital in contexts outside of carnival. For example, Alibabá bands that accompany political events enjoy legal protection against noise ordinance violations. This is because politicians either obtain the proper permits to hold such a raucous event or find other means to not be bothered by local police. Moreover, the mambo rhythm seems to be a natural fit at professional sporting events to rally fans in support of their favorite team. Unfortunately, Alibabá bands overall are still not reaping much in the form of long-term benefits from these activities. Opportunities for more Alibabá

bands to secure these contracts is limited—whether due to the fact that elections only happen once every four years, or that there are just two professional baseball teams in Santo Domingo – Licey and *los Leones del Escogido* (the Escogido Lions).

The possibility may also exist for Alibabá to experience something of a rebirth in New York City, where its strong connection to barrio culture could be mitigated by its adopted home in places like Manhattan and the Bronx. In July 2015, I spent four weeks in New York City conducting preliminary ethnographic research among Alibabá performers, musicians, choreographers, and costume designers. One of the biggest changes to the practice is that Dominicans do not celebrate carnival in New York City, thus these groups primarily perform at a number of Dominican Day parades and festivities that are planned throughout the summer months in boroughs like the Bronx and Manhattan, and neighboring cities like Patterson, New Jersey. During my time in the city, I had a chance to attend the 2015 Bronx Dominican Day Parade with some members of the Alibabá group “Unión Carnavalesca” (Carnival Union) and the band “Mambo 809” (see Figure 5.7). The group performed side-by-side with other carnival characters (such as diablos and robalagallina), Dominican dembow artists riding on floats, and marching political groups.



**Figure 5.7** Select groups participating in the 2015 Bronx Dominican Day Parade, including (a) the Alibabá group Unión Carnavalesca and Alibabá band “Mambo 809,” (b) a political group “Consejo de Campaña PRM” (PRM Campaign Council), and (c) dembow artist Mozart la Para (photo taken in the Bronx, New York, 26 July 2015) (photos taken in the Bronx, New York, 26 July 2015)



(a)



(b)



(c)

Participation in these Dominican Day activities may actually be working in Alibabá’s favor, as groups are presented in the context of a general “Dominican” identity, rather than a more specific association with carnival, the barrio, or even Santo Domingo. Moreover, the fact that many of these performers are learning Alibabá in New York may be contributing to recontextualizing it as a “Dominican” practice. For instance, while many band members in groups like “Mambo 809” and “Unión Carnavalesca” were born in the Dominican Republic, not

all are originally from Santo Domingo, and these groups include individuals from La Vega, Santiago, and San Pedro. Even for those members who grew up in places like Los Mina, most has little to no exposure to Alibabá until they arrived in New York City.

I also observed some key differences between Alibabá in Santo Domingo and in New York that may be impinging on Alibabá's manifestation in the city. For starters, there are no active Alibabá groups that are complete, rather there are an assortment of smaller groups who primarily specialize in only one element (either dance, costume, or music). According to Juan Carlos Peralta, the origin of Alibabá in NYC dates back only to 2004, when Peralta formed the first local group "Los Clásicos del Swing" (The Swing Classics). Peralta grew up in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo before moving to Brooklyn in 1994. It was not until Peralta met a fellow transplant from Villa Duarte a few years later that Peralta decided to add musicians to his roster, establishing "Mambo Bakano" (One Cool Mambo) in 2006-2007. At its peak in 2007-2008, Peralta reports that "Los Clásicos del Swing" had about sixty members. Since moving to Jersey City, New Jersey, Peralta has had a more difficult time managing the group and convincing new members to join.<sup>145</sup> It is also hard for long-term members to stay active, as many have gotten jobs and moved away from Brooklyn. I can attest to the difficulties of traversing the city. In order to attend one of the group's rehearsals, I had to travel for about an hour by subway from Washington Heights in Manhattan to the east side of Brooklyn.

More recently, Adrian Rosario formed the second Alibabá band in the city. Rosario grew up in San Pedro de Macorís and mostly played Dominican folk music (including *gulo* and *palos*) before moving to the Bronx in 2008. After playing with "Mambo Bakano," Rosario split from the group and formed "Mambo Alibabá 809" in 2010. Currently, "Mambo 809" has a full

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<sup>145</sup> Juan Carlos Peralta, interview, 16 July 2015.

complement of around twenty musicians, including snare drums, bass drums, tamboras, güiras, cowbell, trombones, and cornetas.<sup>146</sup> As an independent Alibabá band, Rosario does not have a stable roster of dancers. This is why, in part, Rosario has teamed up with costume designer Sandy Coco and his “Unión Carnavalesca” since the summer of 2015. Coco is originally from Villa Consuelo, but moved to Washington Heights in 2009 to join his mother and other siblings who were already residing in Manhattan. Coco started leading his own Alibabá group in the National District in 2003 and was influential in integrating more fantasy elements into the Alibabá costumes (see Chapter 4.2). Even since moving to New York, Coco continues to manage his group with the help of José Miguel de la Rosa in Villas Agrícolas (DN). Coco’s brother, Máximo “Cuchuken” Coco also played Alibabá snare drum before moving to Washington Heights, and now plays with Rosario in “Mambo 809.”<sup>147</sup>

Reflecting on what I learned about Alibabá in Santo Domingo, it is possible that the environment of New York City is uncondusive to the practice gaining much traction. As I demonstrated, the nature of Alibabá’s intense rehearsals necessitates living in close proximity to one’s group members and a lot of free time. Therefore, while political activities, sporting events, and Alibabá groups in New York City represent an important avenue for some Alibabá performers to more directly engage with a larger audience and overcome their social exclusion, the potential for outside intervention and support for the practice outside of carnival events is also limited at this time.

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<sup>146</sup> Adrian Rosario, interview, 17 July 2015.

<sup>147</sup> Sandy Coco, interview, 26 July 2015.

## ¿Y Ahora?: Engaging the Ethnomusicologist, Musical Communities, and Cultural Organizations from the Middle-Out

Borrowing a popular phrase from Alibabá, I ask, “¿Y ahora?” Now what? If anything, the presence of Alibabá in so many realms is a positive sign that these musical communities and cultural organizations may be willing to work together to achieve their goals, which may seem different, but are in fact intertwined. There are several precedents where ethnomusicologists have actively partnered with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or other cultural institutions in order to collaborate with and on behalf of specific musical communities. One example of this is an approach that Samuel Araújo calls “sound praxis,” or the articulation of research, action, and cultural policies (Araújo and Cambria 2013, 28). Araújo is a champion for long-term participatory ethnography and innovative strategies for revaluing the musical lives of marginalized communities living in some of the poorest neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro. His primary efforts over the years have focused on his collaboration with the Ethnomusicology Lab at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and the Center for Studies and Solidarity Actions of Maré (CASM).

In the Dominican Republic, Martha E. Davis provides another example of a scholar who has dedicated a majority of her career to activism, in this case by advocating for Afro-Dominican musical practices in Santo Domingo and promoting reciprocity between foreign scholars and local musical communities. In the 1980s and 1990s, she worked to publish a weekly folkloric-themed column named “*Cuadros Folklóricos*” (Folkloric Scenes) in the *El Caribe* newspaper, released her book on the Dominican *salve* tradition, coordinated the bi-weekly folkloric program “*Sábados Folklóricos*” (Folkloric Saturdays) at the Museum of the Dominican Man, and operated the recording and publishing company *Ediciones Ethnicas* (Ethnic Editions) in order to repatriate her field recordings to the communities who collaborated in her research projects

(Davis 1992, 372-376). Davis still resides part-time in Santo Domingo and is active as a member of the Social Sciences and International Affairs Commission at the Academy of Sciences of the Dominican Republic.

This “middle-out” approach has also had some success in supporting cultural expressions associated with Santo Domingo’s barrio residents—particularly rap and reggaetón music. Since 2012, the Dominican Ministry of Culture has supported the annual *Convocatoria Nacional de Proyectos Culturales* (National Convocation of Cultural Projects, CNPC), granting monetary awards for grass-roots cultural projects. The CNPC has awarded approximately US\$6 million in total to over 300 projects across the entire country. One such project was *Letratón* (a play on words blending the Spanish word “*letra*,” meaning lyrics, with “reggaetón”), who first received an award of approximately US\$2,000 over a two-year period (2013-2014) as a part of this initiative. Organized by local musicologist Rossy Díaz, *Letratón* is a “neighborhood gathering of young writers” in San Carlos whose mission is to stimulate literary and musical creativity by supporting emerging artists through workshops, presentations, and sports tournaments dedicated to encouraging alternative forms of literacy within Santo Domingo’s barrios.<sup>148</sup> While *Letratón* no longer receives government funding, Díaz reports that the event continues (and is now in its fifth iteration) because of “barrio inertia” and community volunteers (personal communication, 22 Dec 2016). This project explicitly works to valorize urban cultural practices from within the community and to give voice to a generation of young musicians. As stated by Díaz, “We have always believed in barrio culture, that it is historically important and also relevant because of its intercultural nature.”<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> “Encuentro Barrial de Jóvenes Escritores” – more information about *Letratón* is available on its website: <http://letraton.blogspot.com>.

<sup>149</sup> “Siempre hemos creído en la cultura del barrio, que es históricamente importante y además relevante en su interculturalidad...” (Díaz 2016, para. 2)

The relative success of the Letratón project makes me cautiously optimistic that a similar small-scale Alibabá project could also have a similar effect—even with only a small amount of start-up funding. Of all its performance contexts, I believe that focusing on better integrating recordings of mambo music into carnival parades is the best strategy at this point in time because a majority of Alibabá groups participate in these events. In the cases of other carnival music, this has most often been accomplished through featuring these rhythms and/or melodies in carnival anthems. To better flesh out a feasible project, I use the past successes and current strengths of Alibabá to provide the foundation of such an intervention between performers, organizers, and audiences in Santo Domingo that focuses specifically on recordings of mambo carnival anthems.

### *5.3 Carnival Anthem Recordings on CD and Facebook: Implications for Inclusivity*

Alibabá already has many strengths working to its advantage, which includes its popularity among barrio residents and the social capital it creates, plus its performatic characteristics, which encourage innovation and forming fusion groups that have only multiplied its resilience thus far (see Zolli and Healy 2012; Titon 2015b). There are certain lessons that can be learned from the relative success and limitations of past attempts to record Alibabá carnival anthems. In terms of what support is still needed for Alibabá, it is best to begin by analyzing what has already worked and where there is still room to improve. What could Alibabá performers accomplish by doing things differently on their own? What could Alibabá performers potentially do in collaboration with carnival organizers? How could an ethnomusicologist such as myself best serve as an intermediary in this process?

The carnival anthem “Mambo Alibabá” (2001) represents an appealing case showing that collaborations between carnival organizers and carnival bands can have a positive audience

response. The involvement of the Bayahonda Foundation (along with individuals like Roldán Mármol and Dagoberto Tejeda Ortiz) was instrumental in providing the impetus for this recording, while the legacy of this anthem is a testament to the ingenuity of Alibabá musicians themselves. In Chapter 3, I conducted a musical analysis of “Mambo Alibabá,” by Alex Boutique and Los Reyes del Carnaval (The Carnival Kings), and demonstrated how this song successfully blended newly composed mambo rhythms with melodies inspired from other popular songs and chants associated with carnival, including the merengue carnival anthem “Baila en la Calle” (1984/1985). Moreover, I credited its permanence within the contemporary Alibabá repertory because other Alibabá groups continue to copy and reproduce coros (rhythmic and melodic elements) from this anthem. After the success of “Mambo Alibabá” in 2001, Boutique composed and recorded seven other Alibabá tracks that featured the mambo rhythm in order to release his first album, *Mambo Alibabá* (2002), with his orchestra, now billed as “Los Reyes del Mambo” (The Mambo Kings). Moreover, several coros from other tracks on the album are still staples in the contemporary Alibabá repertory, such as “Dame Luz” (What’s Up) and “El Concón de Ana” (Ana’s *Concón*; “concón” refers to the buttery burned rice that sticks to a pot after cooking, but is also slang for female genitalia).

At the same time, Boutique’s successes among performers, organizers, and audiences also set a precedent for the formation of Alibabá orchestras that could perform gigs outside carnival events. Subsequently, Boutique was invited to perform his hit “Mambo Alibabá” as the opening act for the Johnny Ventura 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Concert in Santo Domingo in 2002. The orchestra was the only group to perform all three nights of the concert event (March 1 – 3) in the presence of Johnny Ventura and other top Dominican acts like Cuco Valoy, Milly Quezada,

Fernando Villalona, Kinito Méndez, and international artists like Celia Cruz (Cuba), Grupo Niche (Colombia), and el Gran Combo (Puerto Rico).<sup>150</sup>

As a result, Boutique and “Los Reyes del Mambo” paved the way for other Alibabá orchestras from Villa Francisca, including “Alibabánda” (directed by Marcos Keppis), plus “Jacubanda” (directed by Jovanny Brito), “Alibanda” (directed by el Chowí and Griselito), and “Puro Mambo” (directed by Franklin Chea). All of these orchestras self-produced and recorded mambo-inspired carnival anthems that were independent of their carnival activities. However, maintaining full Alibabá orchestras became more difficult following the economic restrictions that radiated from the 2003 banking crisis. The aspirations of music directors like Boutique and other orchestra leaders at the time were sidelined as the cost of having the best musicians became too expensive. Furthermore, according to Boutique and Pedro Thompson, middle-class patronage and investment in Alibabá groups and orchestras dwindled along with the public interest in buying carnival music recordings after the crisis.<sup>151</sup> Boutique retired from carnival altogether in 2008 and, although he released his second album *El Regreso a Casa* (The Return Home) with “Los Reyes del Mambo” in 2013, he no longer specializes in mambo music.

While direct, outside support for mambo carnival anthems all but disappeared after 2003, Alibabá groups have continued to perform and record songs on their own and with commercial rap artists. These endeavors are important, because they highlight the successful strategies that organizers and performers can tap to reintegrate Alibabá recordings into carnival events should they so wish. For example, an important shift in Alibabá performance as a response to the economic crisis was a return to the performance of mambo music as an extension of Alibabá

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<sup>150</sup> Francisco Blanco, interview, 25 November and 26 November 2014. Johnny Ventura & Associates and Ares Multimedia released a DVD of the concert in 2005.

<sup>151</sup> Francisco “Alex Boutique” Blanco, interview, 26 November 2014; Pedro Thompson, interview, 11 August 2014.



group carnival events. Post-crisis, mambo bands also shifted away from melodic instruments, replacing the bottle and trombone of the Alibabá orchestra with homemade cornetas and adding the timbales as the lead instrument. Overall, Alibabá bands' instrumentation became more flexible—with groups again as small as two snares and one bass drum, to bands with upwards of twenty percussionists—depending on what resources were available.

One important contribution of the corneta's success in the Alibabá marching band is that it represents a cheap alternative for groups that could neither afford to purchase trumpets or trombones, nor afford to pay musicians who could play them. According to Alberto "Beto" Fernández, brass players were requesting a salary upwards around US\$500 to perform with an Alibabá group up until the end of the 1990s.<sup>152</sup> As more Alibabá groups began to form as a result of the formalization of carnival parades in the National District and expansion into the Santo Domingo provinces, groups with minimal resources incorporated the corneta into their groups in place of brass instruments altogether.<sup>153</sup> The corneta is now ubiquitous in most Alibabá bands. An unintended effect of the corneta was that, by the time they became able to invest once again in professional instrumentalists, Alibabá bands were much more interested in the complexities of the mambo rhythm rather than the intricacies of melodies.

As a result, current Alibabá bands have focused on hiring professional percussionists rather than brass players. According to Luis "Navidad" Reyes, Alexis Núñez (from Villa Francisca) was the first Alibabá leader to hire Bebe Timbal, a young, but professional timbal player, for his group in 2009 (see Figure 5.8).<sup>154</sup> The timbal's flexibility makes it a highly sought

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<sup>152</sup> Alberto "Beto" Fernández, interview, 7 August 2014.

<sup>153</sup> According to Navidad, first most likely in barrios in the Federal District outside of the core Alibabá neighborhoods (like Guachupita and Villas Argícolas slightly to the north) before entering Villa Consuelo by the end of the decade and in a majority of Alibabá groups by 2005 (Luis Félix "Navidad" Reyes, interview, 26 November 2014).

<sup>154</sup> Luis Félix "Navidad" Reyes, interview, 26 November 2014.

after instrument for Alibabá bands because it can double the snare drums on its higher-pitched drum, double the tambora on its lower-pitched drum, and add cymbals and additional cowbell accentuation with its auxiliary percussion. Since 2011, the timbal drums (and the musicians who perform on them) have become a centerpiece of the Alibabá rehearsal and in particular the staged Alibabá music and dance competitions. Although much less common, Alibabá bands will on occasion bring timbal drums to a carnival parade and set up the band right in front of the judge's stand to play until all their costumed dancers have passed by.

**Figure 5.8** Bebe Timbal (front left) leading a rehearsal of “Los Abusadores del Mambo” (The Strongmen of Mambo) (photo taken in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo, 26 November 2014)



Alibabá bands in their current form have flourished after the economic crisis and are once again staples of Santo Domingo carnival parades. Moreover, these bands have begun to expand again, adding trombones, conga drums, and even piano for staged performances at the music competition. Still, these bands have not yet begun to record carnival anthems on their own in the same way that Alibabá orchestras did. Rather, over the past several years, more and more commercial rap artists have recorded carnival anthems featuring Alibabá bands. These more

recent anthems also provide some insight into several possibilities for how Alibabá groups and carnival organizers might better integrate mambo music into carnival activities.

In the 2010s, local dembow artists began contracting these smaller, more portable Alibabá bands to provide the rhythmic backdrop for their rap lyrics in a new generation of mambo carnival anthems. These collaborations include Black Jonas Point and the musicians from Mariluz Torres' band for "Vejigaso" (a double entendre for a playful slap by the *vejiga* of the diablo cojuelo character and for having sex) (2012), El Chima en La Casa and "Los Abusadores del Mambo" for "Y Ahora" (Now What) (2013), Yulissa La Gata and "Los Abusadores del Mambo" for "El Pito" (The Whistle, figuratively referring to cunnilingus) (2015), Bacanito and "Imperio Clásico" for "Tu No Va Bebe" (You Aren't Going to Drink) (2015), Malcriao and "Imperio Clásico" for "Bimbolo" (slang for a young male's genitalia) (2015), and El Chuape and "Imperio Clásico" for "Dame Banda" (a play on words between the Dominican expression meaning "leave me alone" and the word for "band") (2016). Logistically, each of these anthems was released in January in advance of the spring carnival season. Sonically, each anthem features an Alibabá band consisting of snare drum, bass drum, and corneta (and in one instance, also timbal drums) laying down a fast mambo groove over which the artist raps.

These commercial rap artists' greatest strength is how well they speak to their primary audience. Most of these artists were born and/or raised inside the barrios of Santo Domingo themselves, and capitalize on a wide range of imagery to appeal directly to individual listeners who also live in the barrio. For example, Joan Ozuna, aka "El Chima en la Casa" (Chima in the House), recorded one of the most popular of these anthems, "Y Ahora," for the 2013 spring carnival season. Born in Los Mina, East Santo Domingo, El Chima had regular contact with

Momón's group, "Imperio Clásico," until 2008, when he left to pursue his music career full time. The video for "Y Ahora" was filmed in East Santo Domingo (in the Guaricano and Los Mina neighborhoods) and features "Los Abusadores del Mambo" from Los Mina.

More importantly, "Y Ahora," has a number of striking similarities with the form of "Mambo Alibabá." In addition to playing a constant mambo rhythm, the band also plays an introduction with the corneta (performed by Navidad) imitating a trombone corte from Boutique's "Mambo Alibabá." During an interview with El Chima, he also reported that the title of the song was inspired by a popular Alibabá coro ("y ahora"), while a verse of El Chima's rap borrows from the chant of another popular carnival character (robalagallina).<sup>155</sup> Among their fans, these anthems are popular because of their overt ties to Dominican carnival (with videos replete with costumed carnival dancers) and lyrics that include more direct references to daily life in the barrio, sex, drug/alcohol consumption, and guns. Moreover, the scenery of the videos that accompanies all of these anthems is set within the barrios and features local residents as spectators in the background (see Figure 5.9).

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<sup>155</sup> Joan "El Chima" Ozuna, interview, 10 July 2015.

**Figure 5.9** Images showing barrio setting and position of the artist vs. Alibabá band in the videos for (a) Black Jonas Point “El Vejigaso,” (b) El Chima en la Casa “Y Ahora,” Yulissa la Gata “El Pito,” (d) Bacanito “Tu No Va Bebe,” (e) Malcriao “Bimbolo,” and (f) El Chuape “Dame Banda”<sup>156</sup>



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)



(e)



(f)

<sup>156</sup> Screenshots taken from YouTube videos: “Black Jonas Point - Vejigaso - Video Oficial HD 2012,” posted by BlackjonaspointTV, 23 January 2012 ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jc4fK\\_Tm0Qg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jc4fK_Tm0Qg)); “El Chima - Y Ahora (Video Oficial) (Tema Oficial de Carnaval Dominicano),” posted by ElChimaenlacasa TV, 10 January 2013 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjMbMg4hJVw>); “Yulissa La Gata El Pito Video Oficial Carnaval 2015,” posted by Yulissa la gata, 23 January 2015 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8B2NZ2BqoU>); “Bacanito Tu No va Bebe Video Oficial Carnaval 2015 By Jay J P Films,” posted by PROD BY JAY J P (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YhRP4yazx4M>), 16 January 2015; “El Malcriao - Bimbolo (Video Oficial) Dir. MARRONHD,” posted by MARRON HD, 22 January 2015 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6YLjb7G6Mt8>); and “El Chuape Dame Banda ( Carnaval Dominicano 2016 ),” posted by ElChuapeHD, 17 January 2016 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IdyftxzEECo>).

Not surprisingly, one of these contemporary productions' greatest limiting factors is that these commercial artists intend to perform these mambo anthems as top-billed acts in concerts held after carnival parades—not during. In fact, the inclusion of Alibabá bands in these anthems is ancillary to the career goals of the rap artists. As can be seen in the aforementioned video screenshots, the rap artist is front and center with the band either behind him/her or off to the side (see Figure 5.9). Moreover, according to El Chima, artists record the bands once in studio and for the video, but opt to simply rap over a pre-recorded mix at concerts rather than paying bands to accompany them live—something El Chima did for “Y Ahora” and his 2014 mambo carnival anthem “Míralo ay” (Look Over There).<sup>157</sup> Several other examples of popular mambo anthems focus entirely on the artist and simply remixed mambo tracks from earlier recordings of Alibabá orchestras, including La Nueva Escuela's “Carnaval Dominicano 1a” (#1 Dominican Carnival) (2013), El Mayor Clásico's “El Calizo” (The Flip-Flop, an innuendo to female genitalia) (2015), Super Kenny's “Como Tú Te Menea” (How You Shake It) (2017).

At the same time, the combination of the setting, commentary on barrio life, and Alibabá has fortified these mambo anthems as a part of a specifically local identity rather than a more general Dominican one (since the consumers and producers of these anthems are the same and represent only one segment of the population). This means that Alibabá bands can assume that such carnival anthems are appealing to local audiences who already have some knowledge and expectations for what “carnival” looks and sounds like. Something for bands to consider, then, is that carnival anthems give the audience the ability to add their collective voice to the event in a way that fosters both personal identification and sense of group belonging.<sup>158</sup> In many other cases, carnival anthems present an opportunity for the audience to participate in the celebration

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<sup>157</sup> Joan Ozuna, interview, 10 July 2015.

<sup>158</sup> This is what Benedict Anderson refers to as an “experience of simultaneity” or “unisonance” (1983, 145).

by learning the lyrics in advance and singing them alongside their favorite performers. For example, at carnival parades in Rio de Janeiro, samba anthems help to create a group's identity (e.g., "Portela's theme") and then help audiences to identify with that group. This also means that every year at Rio carnival, there are as many carnival anthems as there are competing samba schools.

Thus far, carnival organizers have never considered having carnival bands themselves record annual carnival anthems. Now more than ever, Alibabá bands have enough of a presence to take on a more interactive role with carnival anthems themselves (see Table 5.1). In recent years, Alibabá groups have adopted more permanent names for their bands that are often independent of the group's costume theme (or the name that appears in the program), which often changes every year. Not only do these bands now have the potential to endorse an identifiable band name associated with a specific part of the city, they could also reach out to new potential fans with a larger preponderance of carnival anthems every year.

**Table 5.1** Names and locations of Alibabá bands in Santo Domingo as of February 2017

| <b>Alibabá Bands</b>  | <b>Location</b>          |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1. El Biomega del Mambo (Biomega Mambo)                               | Villa Francisca (DN)     |
| 2. Los Villanos de Mambo (The Mambo Villains)                         | Villa Francisca (DN)     |
| 3. Los Temibles del Mambo (The Terrifying Mambo)                      | San Carlos (DN)          |
| 4. La Villa Band (The Band from Villa Consuelo)                       | Villa Consuelo (DN)      |
| 5. La Unión del Mambo (The Mambo Union)                               | Villa Maria (DN)         |
| 6. Los Sultanes de Villas Agrícolas (The Sultans of Villas Agrícolas) | Villas Agrícolas (DN)    |
| 7. Los Vengadores del Cristo Rey (The Cristo Rey Avengers)            | Cristo Rey (DN)          |
| 8. Los Rebeldes del Mambo (The Mambo Rebels)                          | Tamarindo (SDE)          |
| 9. Los Hechiceros del Mambo (The Mambo Wizards)                       | Invivienda (SDE)         |
| 10. Imperio Clásico (Classical Empire) <sup>159</sup>                 | Los Mina (SDE)           |
| 11. Los Abusadores del Mambo (The Strongmen of Mambo)                 | Los Mina (SDE)           |
| 12. Mambo Villaduartero (Villa Duarte Mambo)                          | Villa Duarte (SDE)       |
| 13. La Era de los Músicos (The Era of Musicians)                      | Sabana Perdida (SDN)     |
| 14. Yuatallón (Yua’s Battalion)                                       | Sabana Perdida (SDN)     |
| 15. Los Reyes de Herrera (The Kings of Herrera)                       | Herrera (SDO)            |
| 16. Los Reales de Mambo (The Mambo Royals)                            | Pantoja (Los Alcarrizos) |

The musical content of each Alibabá band’s carnival anthem would be left to the discretion of the musicians and their group leaders. My contribution, as an advocate for this practice, would be to assist in making and distributing audio/video recordings of these anthems in order overcome the social geography of the city and get these sounds to their intended audience. The eventual goal of such a project would be for these recordings to entice people to attend Santo Domingo carnival events in person. As in the cases of carnival anthems in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, Port-au-Prince, Haiti and even in Notting Hill, England,

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<sup>159</sup> Since 2016, the musicians of “Imperio Clásico” have also competed under the same “Los Sin Rivales” (The Without Rivals).



this effect is best achieved when the recordings are mediated representations of music that listeners can anticipate hearing at carnival that year—whether it’s at a parade, a music or dance competition, or some staged concert or show. On occasion, the recordings are equally as popular as the carnival events themselves. In his chapter “The Disc is Not the Avenue” (2005), Frederik J. Moehn presents both the history of samba enredo at Rio carnival and an ethnography of the recording of the album *Sambas de Enredo 1999* as a way to attract audiences to hear samba performed live “in the avenue.” Historically, each samba school competing in the annual samba parade in Rio presents a new anthem every year. These anthems were then recorded and distributed (first on records, then on CDs starting in 1990) and played on the radio months in advance of the event so that the audience could sing along with their favorite group (such as Portela, Beija-Flor, Imperatriz, Salguiero, or Mangueira).

The annual *Sambas de Enredo* albums have typically sold very well. While early *Sambas de Enredo* albums were originally semi-live outdoor recordings of samba schools, declining sales pushed producers to shift to professional musicians in recording studios in the 1990s (Moehn 2005, 62). The domestic label Top Tape produced the *Sambas de Enredo* albums in the 1970s-1980s, but now these recordings are produced by the international label Universal Music. This reinvestment in carnival anthem recordings has resulted in increased sales. In the 2010s, the *Sambas de Enredos* albums have consistently reached number one for a week or two in February on the Brazilian Association of Record Producers’ (ABPD) Weekly Top 20 Album chart.<sup>160</sup> *Sambas de Enredo 2014* even spent eleven weeks in the top spot from January until April.

In lieu of an international production company and substantial economic investment, in most cases carnival anthem recordings are actually much less important than the carnival event

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<sup>160</sup> Visit <http://abpd.org.br/> for more information about ABPD Weekly Top 20 lists.

that they promote. As an example, in her book *Governing Sounds* (2007), Jocelyne Guilbault discusses the relationship between calypso music recordings and carnival competitions in Trinidad in the 1970s and 1980s. Guilbault argues that, in this case, the Trinidadian government emphasized the annual Panorama music competition, and recordings served as a means of increasing attendance at the competition. According to the Guilbault, calypso composers had to have their song recorded to play on the radio prior to the competition in order to compete (85). To do so, calypsonians made their songs available for public sale in advance of Panorama in relatively small batches (approximately 200-1,000 units) of fairly low quality recordings (86). Guilbault reasons that the government and musicians deemphasized recordings of carnival anthems in this way because live performance at Panorama was, is, and has always been the primary focus.<sup>161</sup>

There seems to be an opportunity here to give Alibabá groups the tools they may need to in order overcome the social geography of the city and to better integrate Alibabá bands into these anthem recordings. What might such a project for Alibabá look like? To save on production costs and lost revenue due to piracy, I also recommend a low-cost strategy that uses social media sites like Facebook to distribute audio/visual anthems at the beginning of the spring carnival season (in January). Much as with the precedent set by the previously-mentioned reggaetón videos, the goal would be to record these bands in their neighborhood rehearsal spaces in order to capture not only the performers, but also the audience. The vast majority of younger Dominicans that I spent time with in Santo Domingo access the internet on their cellphones, favoring messaging applications like WhatsApp and social media sites like Facebook. Currently,

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<sup>161</sup> Today, calypso composers post more polished recordings of their Panorama pieces on the Internet rather than distribute physical recordings. Nevertheless, these recordings are still not full arrangements, and typically feature a main vocalist, one or two pan players, and midi accompaniment. Visit <http://www.panonthenet.com/> for more information and to listen to calypsos for this year's Panorama competition.

many Alibabá bands are already recording themselves at rehearsals and performances using cell phone cameras, and later posting these low-quality videos to Facebook groups like “CARNAVAL ORIENTAL” (with over 5,000 members), “Carnaval Nacional Dominicano” (with over 1,000 members), or Facebook community pages like “UCADI Carnaval del Distrito Nacional.”

I have some indication that there is also desire for higher-quality, pre-arranged recordings of Alibabá groups. During my field research, I used a Zoom Q2HD video recorder specifically because of its high audio fidelity rather than its image resolution. One such recording I made of a planned rehearsal of the “Los Abusadores de Mambo” in Los Mina on 26 November 2014 currently has over 180,000 views on YouTube (the most of any of my field videos).<sup>162</sup> As a favor to me, Navidad organized a demonstration of the group’s current repertoire. The popularity of this video among Alibabá performers and fans far surpasses the popularity of all of my other field videos that were not staged. For instance, my second most popular field video on YouTube is the “Los Abusadores de Mambo’s” performance at the 2013 Music Festival, but only has 15,000 views.<sup>163</sup> Before starting such a project, I would still consult with (1) first generation Alibabá musicians like Alberto Fernández (who works at the Ministry of Culture) and César Carvajal (a well-respected music director who works with several Alibabá groups), (2) the carnival unions (like UCADI and UCOSDE), and (3) Ramón Lachapelle, the director of the Carnival Directorate Office, to more systematically record all currently active Alibabá bands and post higher-quality videos to Facebook.<sup>164</sup> In my opinion, making downloads of these videos in

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<sup>162</sup> “Abusadores del Mambo, dir. Navidad, Parque Los Mina SDE,” posted by Jessica Hajek, 27 November 2014 ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AcN\\_RHp7T3k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AcN_RHp7T3k)).

<sup>163</sup> “2o Festival de Ali-Bandas - Los Abuzadores del Mambo,” posted by Jessica Hajek, 11 March 2013 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITMBLuKLMY>).

<sup>164</sup> UCADI is the acronym for the *Unión Carnavalesca del Distrito Nacional* (National District Carnival Union). UCOSDE is the acronym for *Unión de Comparsas Santo Domingo Este* (East Santo Domingo Carnival Group Union).

audio-only format available would be an added bonus for performers and fans who may want to store their favorite anthems on their cellphones to listen to without an internet connection (or having to use data).

The propositions I have discussed above may focus on Alibabá bands, but only because they represent a musical resource that currently requires the least amount of intervention and would be relatively cost efficient to mobilize at carnival events. Admittedly, I am offering relatively modest suggestions so that, if they wanted to, Alibabá groups and organizers would have enough momentum to continue recording carnival anthems in the future on their own. Moreover, I resisted offering more comprehensive overhaul of carnival regulations as a way to discourage the limiting of carnival bands' innovative spirit. My objective is that once a precedent is established to incentivize Alibabá, some public attitudes regarding Alibabá may begin to change as well. To accomplish this, I put forward ideas regarding how mambo carnival anthems could better target an audience of young Santo Domingo residents who already attend carnival events. One of the key characteristics of Alibabá is that its popularity is able to draw a crowd in the barrios. Therefore, it would be prudent for Alibabá groups and carnival organizers who hope to persuade these fans to attend carnival events in other parts of the city to take advantage of social media sites like Facebook in order to reach these eager listeners.

Admittedly, I am primarily promoting the goals and desires of carnival performers. This was a conscious choice, in part, to acknowledge that over-extended carnival organizers may already be doing their best with the means available to them. Although carnival groups in Santo Domingo are in need of many resources, it would seem to me that supporting a feeling of being valued is a suitable first step. In this way, small but meaningful changes to music's place at

carnival celebration may rekindle some amount of trust and mutual respect between parties to everyone's benefit.

#### *5.4 The Capital of Carnival: Alibabá Music and Dance as a Social Enterprise and Performance Complex*

This dissertation represents the culmination of intensive ethnographic fieldwork to document Alibabá bands in Santo Domingo, interview prominent group leaders and event organizers, and analyze primary sources on the topic of carnival in the capital city. These activities formed the basis of my theoretical and applied analysis of Alibabá, allowing me to demonstrate that Dominican carnival practices can have both an inherent value for the people who are passionate about them and, more importantly, an apparent value for those who may be discounting them. I argued that Alibabá group leaders and members are actively challenging negative perceptions of young men in the barrios by creating opportunities in the face of economic crises and insecurity. I also reasoned that, while scholars and commercial artists have been the primary actors in articulating Santo Domingo's soundscape, Alibabá performers have been essential in its interpretation. Through a discussion of advocacy and an analysis of social exclusion factors, I detailed the strengths and weaknesses of the Alibabá community (including its performers and fans), which served as the basis for some possible suggestions to motivate musical performance at Santo Domingo carnival celebrations.

As a performance complex, Alibabá takes place in a variety of spaces, both in the streets and on stage, and is driven by collective action and changing tastes. As a social enterprise, Alibabá is one way that members and fans create alternatives to the many uncertainties within the places where they live. More importantly, in thinking about mediating mambo, a bigger

picture emerges in regard to social and cultural values in Santo Domingo writ large. According to their website, the Dominican Ministry of Culture's current mission is to:

Integrate the multiple actors of the cultural process into the construction of a National System of Culture, in order to develop the distinct manifestations that create and recreate the cultural identity of the Dominican nation...[and] to construct, in the Dominican nation, a democratic and diverse cultural citizenship that provides opportunities for creative and intellectual development, founded in cultural rights.<sup>165</sup> (MINC 2017, para. 2 and 3)

With increasing consistency since the 1960s, Dominican folklore scholars and anthropologists have invested in documenting and promoting their autochthonous forms of expressive culture in order to shape the image of the Dominican identity. With the limited funds that are currently available, most are directed primarily toward more traditional expressions—and Alibabá remains one of many practices in the country that has not yet received much scholarly attention. It is not my intention here to position Alibabá as a more worthwhile practice than, say, diablo carnival groups or the *guloyas*, but to attest that Alibabá has an apparent value as a carnival music in other social realms outside of the *barrios*. While the inclusion project I presented in this chapter was unsolicited, it is nonetheless opportune. As I see it, the future success of Alibabá resides in its ability to bridge the desires of the Dominican people and the Dominican state, while at the same time not limiting the potential creativity or spontaneous nature of regional carnival practices.

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<sup>165</sup> “Integrar a los múltiples actores del proceso cultural en la construcción de un Sistema Nacional de Cultura, para desarrollar las distintas manifestaciones que crean y recrean la identidad cultural de la nación dominicana...[y] construir, en la nación dominicana, una ciudadanía cultural, democrática y diversa, que brinde oportunidades al desarrollo creativo e intelectual, fundamentado en los derechos culturales.”

## GLOSSARY

**Alibabá** – 1) in the Dominican Republic, a carnival practice that emerged in Santo Domingo in the 1970s, with Middle-Eastern, Asian, or Greco-Roman inspired costumes, accompanied by a group of musicians; 2) in Alibabá, the name of one kind of choreography where dancers' arms are extended in an L-shape.

**Alibanda** – in Alibabá, the musicians who accompany the group, typically comprised of snare drum, bass drum, *tambora*, *güira*, cowbell, and sometimes *timbal* (see also *mambo*).

**alisado** – 1) smooth; 2) in Alibabá, the name of one kind of choreography used as a transition between dance moves without having to stop.

**ayuntamiento** – 1) city council; 2) in the Dominican Republic, seat of local government such as the *Ayuntamiento del Distrito Nacional* (ADN) (National District City Council) in Santo Domingo.

**bachata** – traditional Dominican dance and song in 4/4 meter characterized by a slower tempo and lyrics on the topic of love, often accompanied by a *conjunto* of musicians including guitars, bongos, and *güira*; one of the national musics of the Dominican Republic.

**barrio** – 1) neighborhood; 2) In Santo Domingo, refers to a poor area within a city or *sector*; may also refer to one of several smaller units within a neighborhood called a sub-barrio, for example, Villa María is a sub-barrio of Villa Consuelo in the National District.

**batumbalé** – 1) in the Dominican Republic, a girl's baton twirling practice common to many cities, accompanied by male musicians playing snare and bass drums; 2) Among Dominicans, a term used interchangeably with *baton ballet*.

**bombo** – 1) bass drum or kettle drum; 2) in Alibabá, a term used interchangeably with *drum* to refer specifically to the bass drum.

**botella** – 1) bottle; 2) in Alibabá, an instrument that provides rhythmic and semi-melodic support to the percussion instruments.

**Califé** – in Dominican carnival, the king character whose costume includes an oversized top hat and black suit, performed in blackface with white-painted eyes and mouth.

**carnavalero** – a carnival participant.

**carnestolada** – 1) springtime carnival celebrations, following the Catholic calendar; 2) in the Dominican Republic, the carnestoladas instead coincide with two national holidays, Dominican Independence Day in February and Restoration Day in August.

**cencerro** – cowbell.

- cimarrón** – 1) runaway slave; 2) in the Dominican Republic, a term used refer to traditional Afro-Dominican carnival practices that often take place during Holy Week or in the summer.
- cocolo** – 1) Among Dominicans, a term used negatively to refer to dark-skinned immigrants in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; 2) Among Dominican populations of British Antillean descent, a self-identity marker; 3) in the Dominican Republic, pertaining to *Teatro Cocolo Danzante* (Cocolo Dance Drama Theater) from San Pedro de Macorís (see also *guloya*).
- colmado** – 1) shop or store; 2) in the Dominican Republic, a store similar to a U.S. convenience store that provides seating for customers to eat, drink, or play dominoes and offers amplified music for dancing.
- comparsa** – carnival group; participants in these groups are often referred to as *comparseros*.
- conjunto** – 1) group, band, or ensemble; 2) in music, a term used to describe small groups of musicians in contrast to large orchestras, especially for genres like Dominican merengue or American jazz.
- convivencia** – 1) cohabitation or communal living; 2) In Santo Domingo, a term used more specifically refer to social cohesion and interdependence among neighbors.
- corneta** – 1) cornet or trumpet; 2) in Alibabá, refers to an instrument constructed out of PVC piping and a semi-truck air horn, sometimes with a detachable *boquilla* (mouthpiece) that is also made of PVC piping; comes in a variety of sizes and can either be monotone (tuned to a single pitch, like a natural trumpet) or melismatic (adjustable length to play many pitches, like a trombone).
- coro** – 1) choir, or chorus; 2) in the Dominican Republic, coro is used figuratively to refer to one's group of friends, entourage, or fans; 3) in Alibabá, refers to a number of pre-composed, vocal or instrumental interjections on top of the *mambo* groove rhythm.
- corte** – 1) cut or break; 2) in Alibabá, refers to one of many pre-composed percussion rhythms that are used to add variety to the *mambo* groove.
- delincuencia** – 1) delinquency or crime; 2) in Dominican urban centers, young males in particular who are considered to have a propensity for crime are referred to as *delincuentes* (delinquents) or *tígueres*.
- diablo cojuelo** – 1) limping devil; 2) in Dominican carnival, a variety of common traditional characters including the *diablos tradicionales* (traditional devils) from Santo Domingo, *diablos cojuelos* from La Vega, and the *lechones* (pig devils) from Santiago.



**gagá** – 1) for Dominicans, a term for Haitian rara—a Holy Week/Lenten season street festival included dance and music, played by Dominican-Haitians, accompanied by tall single-head drums and bamboo and metal trumpets playing hocket melodies; 2) in Dominican carnival, a traditional group that performs during the *carnefoladas*.

**galleros** – 1) a cockfighting fan; 2) in Dominican carnival, a traditional group of males with costumes that evoke rural clothing and who simulates a cockfight, often with live roosters.

**güira** – Dominican metal scraper that provides rhythmic support in many styles of Dominican music; not to be confused with the Cuban wooden scraper (*güiro*).

**guloia** – 1) in the Dominican Republic, one kind of traditional Afro-Dominican Christmastime masquerade tradition among the descendants of British Antillean immigrants, especially in San Pedro de Macorís; 2) for Dominicans, the term used to describe all *cocolo* traditional rhythms and dances; 3) for Alibabá, the rhythmic impetus for the *mambo* rhythm; 4) in Dominican carnival, a traditional group that performs during the *carnefoladas*.

**indios** – 1) Indians or natives; 2) in Dominican carnival, a traditional group whose costumes are evocative of native populations that once lived on the island such as the Taínos or Arawaks.

**lechón, lechones** – 1) suckling pig; 2) in Dominican carnival, the variety of *diablo cojuelo* character from the northern city of Santiago.

**malecón** – 1) seawall; 2) stone-embankment built along the waterfront of a Spanish colonial city; 3) in Santo Domingo, refers to George Washington Avenue, the street that runs parallel to the wall.

**mambo** – 1) in Latin music, a popular dance genre from the 1940s and 1950s; 2) in Alibabá, a term used to refer to a group's musicians and the rhythm that they play; 3) in the Dominican Republic, a term used to refer to contemporary urban *merengue* music, also known as *merengue de calle* and *merengue callajero* (street merengue) (see also *Alibanda*).

**mangulina** – traditional Dominican dance accompanied by song and music similar to merengue, but in 12/8 meter rather than 4/4.

**mariposa** – 1) butterfly; 2) in Alibabá, the name of one kind of choreography where dancers' arms are extended outwards and move inwards like butterfly wings.

**merengue** – traditional Dominican dance and song in 4/4 meter, often performed by full orchestras or *conjuntos* of saxophone, trumpets, *güira*, and *tambora*; one of the national musics of the Dominican Republic.

**monos** – 1) monkeys; 2) in Dominican carnival, a traditional group common in Santo Domingo whose costumes resemble large monkeys or gorillas with fur made out of shredded plastic bags.

**Muerte en Jeep, Muerte en Yipe** – 1) “Death in a Jeep”; 2) in Dominican carnival, a traditional character from Santo Domingo.

**palo, palos** – 1) Afro-Dominican spiritual music found throughout the country typically played on three tall single-head drums and accompanied by *güira* and singing to bring on possession in a medium; 2) for Dominicans, a term for this genre of music used interchangeably with *atabales*; 3) the name used to refer to the *palo* drums; 4) the name of the sticks used to play the *tambora* drum.

**pitador** – 1) whistler; 2) in Alibabá, a term used to refer to the leader of a dance block who uses a whistle to indicate the choreography.

**redoblante** – 1) snare drum, either concert or field/marching; 2) in Alibabá, snare drummers take on additional roles, such as *primero* (first-part) if they play the *cortes* or *segundo* (second-part) if they maintain the *mambo* groove.

**repicando, repique** – 1) ringing; 2) in Alibabá, a term used to refer to playing rim shots on a snare drum or *timbal* added as an embellishment on top of the *mambo* groove.

**robalagallina, roba-la-gallina** – 1) “steals the hen” or chicken thief; 2) in Dominican carnival, a traditional female character performed in drag with exaggerated breasts and buttocks.

**Se me muere Rebeca** – 1) “Rebecca is dying on me”; 2) in Dominican carnival, traditional female character common to Santo Domingo and Santiago.

**sector, sectores** – 1) sectors, section of a city; 2) in the Dominican Republic, a political unit bigger than a *barrio*; 3) in Santo Domingo, lower-class and working-class sectors are often referred to as *sectores populares*.

**tambora** – 1) two-headed traditional drum featured in many styles of Dominican music, especially *merengue*, traditionally positioned horizontally in the lap, where the right hand strikes the drum head with a *palo* stick and the left hand strike the drum head directly; 2) for Alibabá, the tambora is carried upright, and both hands strike only one side of the drum with *palo* sticks.

**tíguere** – 1) tiger; 2) for Dominicans, a term used to refer to a young, streetwise, urban male, but often implying a ladies’ man, a hustler, or a thief; 3) the act of being a *tíguere* is referred to as *tigueraje*.

**timbal, timbales** – paired, single-head drums played with sticks common to many genres of Latin American dance music; drums are placed on a stand and played stationary, and often include auxiliary percussion instruments (such as a cymbal or cowbell).

**vejiga** – 1) bladder; 2) in Dominican carnival, a traditional accessory of the *diablos cojuelos* typically made out of a dried-out, hardened pig bladder that is used to playfully slap passersby (called a *vejigazo*); *diablos* from La Vega only carry one, whereas *diablos* from Santo Domingo carry upwards of a dozen.

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