

# Bachata Life



**Social identity in the Dominican Republic  
through the lens of a musical tradition**

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# BACHATA LIFE

SOCIAL IDENTITY IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC  
THROUGH THE LENS OF A MUSICAL TRADITION

*Mia Katrine Tvete*



In memory of the great Haitian bachatero;

Robin Cariño

“If God wants me to have a large house or whatever before I die I’ll have it. But if he doesn’t want me to I’ll die like this, but with pride! I was a singer, a bachatero! A Haitian musician from el barrio. But I’m not going to die; I’ll never die because my songs will remain.”

(Robin Cariño)

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## TEXTUAL MEANS

- I have marked analytical and academic terms in simple quotation marks: for example ‘identity’, or ‘race’.
- Spanish words appear in *italics* with the following explanation/translation in parenthesis (...). I have left out the parenthesis (...) if I have explained the words above. However, the Spanish word will still appear in *italics*.
- Further explanation of terms or expressions that I find necessary, is put in parenthesis (...)
- Double quotation marks are used for terms which consultants utilized and which I have translated from Spanish: for example “shantytown”.
- I use **bold face** when I choose to strongly emphasize a term or word.
- Direct quotes which appear in the main text are marked with double quotation marks “...”. If the quote is not translated, but kept in Spanish to bring forth specific words, expressions or names, the quote is marked in *italics*. Direct quotes under 40 words is integrated in the text and emphasized with double quotation marks. Direct quotes which exceed 40 words are written in a separate paragraph with indentation.
- Long empirical quotes or ‘cases’ are marked as inserted paragraphs/sections in the text.
- Within quoted paragraphs in the main text I use my own words in brackets [...] to clarify the meaning of the statement.

# MAPS





## THE MUSICALIA EXPERIENCE

This afternoon I'll try to get hold of some bachata music in Musicalia – a big record store chain in the Dominican Republic. My goal is to come across bachata from one of my informants; Felix Cumbé. After some strolling around in the shop I spot one of his CDs. At the moment the sound system plays Latin music cranked to the max. With the chosen bachata CD in my hand I walk over to one of the assistants and ask her to put it on. For a second she seems reluctant but proceeds to fulfil my request. She asks me which song to play and I answer “*El inmigrante*”. Barely responding, she skips to the song and walks over to the counter. The music is on for a few minutes before the volume is suddenly turned down, which I notice but don't really pay much attention to. But after the first refrain the song is cut off. I find it odd and walk over to the counter to ask the assistant. The only response I get is a low mumbling which is incomprehensible to me. At my request she puts it back on and in any case, I'm satisfied because bachata fills the speakers again. This time it reaches the third verse before it is silenced once again! Something is definitely going on, but I don't know exactly what. Curious for an explanation, I return to the assistant, whom is now joined by another colleague. By now, they seem nearly embarrassed and outright bothered to put it back on again. They glance at each other with anticipation while attending a couple of other costumers. For the third time, the CD is stopped in the middle of the song. I compose myself and approach the shop girls. When I ask why they can't leave it on one of them answers that they like bachata but not all kinds of it. I explain that I understand her taste in music, but that I'm doing a research on the musical genre and that it would be of great help for me to listen to the lyrics. None of them seem to change their minds in spite of the additional information I give them. Obviously, they have decided not to play this bachata CD at all. One of them comments: “I have a thing for bachata, but there are different styles, you know. And we have to play what people like. We have costumers to think of.” Reluctantly, I express my comprehension and leave Musicalia. I understand that I'll have to enjoy this bachata music among someone else.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Musicalia episode provoked my interest in bachata. The shop assistant's behaviour astonished me, as I had expected to be able to listen to the CD like any interested customer. But instead, she cut it off even before I had listened to one whole song! The phrases "*El músico que no toque bachata, no come*" ("The musician who doesn't play bachata, doesn't eat" [is poor]) and "*El que quiere hacerse millonario, debería hacerse bachatero*" (He who wants to become a millionaire, should become a bachatero"), that I often had heard in the Dominican Republic, came to my mind; If bachata was lucrative and popular, why did the shop girls stop the music? I started questioning her reaction and wondered why she had done what she did and said what she said. What was it with bachata that made her keep me from listening to this genre in a public music store in the centre of Santo Domingo? It could not be the closing hours because it was early afternoon, nor could it be other customer's listening requests, because there were hardly anyone in the shop. Thus, I concluded that it was a matter related to the music itself. For some reason, the assistant seemed embarrassed, even annoyed, to play the bachata songs. Her colleague also seemed to be discontent with the bachata as she pouted in the corner behind the counter with her arms crossed.

This experience touches upon a great deal of the issues that will be prolonged throughout the thesis. The main focus deals with negotiation of Dominican and Haitian identity through musical expressions of bachata, and how music is used in the mobilisation of these social identities. This thesis will show that bachata identity is recognised among its practitioners and listeners to take on Dominican and Haitian versions. There is an ongoing battle over the power to define the "right" version of bachata, and Haitian bachateros fight for recognition in a society in which Haitians are placed at the bottom of a 'racialized' social hierarchy inherited from the colonial past. However, one argument is that Dominican and Haitian bachateros and their styles of musical performance are constantly interacting with each other across the social barriers of 'race'/ethnicity and class. This thesis argues that the performance of bachata is productive in bringing Dominican and Haitian male identities into being in a dialectical interplay. Simultaneously the gendered world of bachata reinforces female subordination in general. The major question concerns whether the performance of bachata may influence the negative image of Haitians among Dominicans, an image defined by particular constellations

among 'race'/ethnicity, class and gender. In order to understand the negotiation, is it necessary to look at the conditioning impact of the past as bachatero identities are not created in a vacuum, but within historical developments in which classificatory systems of 'race'/ethnicity, class and gender have crystallized.

In the following I extend on the thematic framework and how I approach the problem. Next, I account for the theoretical and analytical approach I have applied. Then, methodological reflections connected to the carrying out of this anthropological research will be examined. Finally, the reader will be informed of focus in chapters to come.

### ***Dominicans and Haitians on Hispaniola – Introduction to the field***

Dominicans and Haitians have a long history of difficult coexistence on the island of Hispaniola, and music has over centuries been vital in the negotiation of identity (Deive 1992, Davis 1994, Austerlitz 1997). The Dominican Republic is located on the eastern two-thirds of the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, bordering Haiti. Hispaniola is the second largest of the Greater Antilles islands, and is situated west of Puerto Rico and east of Cuba and Jamaica. Haitians have been migrating to the Dominican Republic since the turn of the nineteenth century. The first immigrants were persuaded or forced to work under harsh conditions in *bateyes* (areas for sugar cane workers on the plantations). Many Dominicans assume that all workers on sugar cane plantations and all residents of *bateyes* and poor provincial *barrios* (neighbourhoods) are Haitian, although the labourers in the sugar industry and the population in the *bateyes* and *barrios* are ethnically diverse, "including second- and third- generation Dominico-Haitians and even Dominicans without Haitian ancestors" (<http://www.hrw.org/>, February 5, 2007).

Since the 1980's, after the Dominican sugar industry decline, diversification and growth of the Dominican economy and Haitian political and economic problems, immigrants have continued to cross the border. They still find work in sugar plantations and other agricultural businesses, but more recently also in construction, tourist industry and informal sector (Wooding & Moseley-Williams 2004:14).

From a demographic point of view, Haitian immigrants constitute a substantial part of the Dominican population. The history of colonial settlement and immigration has created a culturally diverse Dominican society. Demographically, the ethnic groups are officially



registered to be 73% mixed (European, African and Taino ancestry,) 16% white and 11% black (<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>, January 18, 2007)<sup>1</sup>. However, regarding the size of the Haitian population, there are major disagreements. The number of residents of Haitian decent and recent immigrants varies from 150 000 to 3 million<sup>2</sup>. The estimates are mostly ideologically motivated. The reference to high numbers is particular for Dominican nationalists negative to Haitian immigrants. It creates an image of Haitian immigrants and their descendants as a large, threatening group ('the others') which is not assimilated into Dominican society. The controversy over deciding the size of the Haitian immigrant population is connected to two factors. One is the lack of precise official migration statistics and recent census figures. The other is the disadvantage of not distinguishing between immigrants – those being born in Haiti, and Haitian-Dominicans – individuals of Haitian ancestry but born in the Dominican Republic. Some of those who see the immigration as negative refer to both Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian decent as *los haitianos*, a term associated with the “barbaric” and “inferior”, as opposed to Dominicans who are “civilized” and “superior”. The “Haitian”-label is characteristic to parts of society and state authorities (Wooding & Moseley-Williams 2004:32-33). The *haitiano* reference is rooted in the political and economic transformations on Hispaniola, and the dictatorship period of Ramón Leonidas Trujillo (1930-61). His ideas were taken further by Joaquín Balaguer and “his stated belief in the corrupting effect of the mixture of people from the two countries” (Wooding & Moseley-Williams 2004:33).

The valuation of cultural diversity is by no means causative in its own terms, but linked to larger economic and political forces and must be understood in the wider context of historical transformations (Wolf 1982:387). Cultural diversity and how it is categorized to describe the social world reflect power relations. Power is embedded in political and economic structures, however individuals also generate power. As social beings we ascribe meaning to phenomena as they do not have meaning in themselves. The ability to ascribe meaning – to name and value things, acts, ideas and disseminate this ascription – is a source of power. In this sense the managers of ideology strongly influence the categories through which the social world is

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<sup>1</sup> Howard argues that the proportions 65 % *mulato* (mainly white/black mix), 15 % white, 15 % black and 5 % Libanese/Chinese, are often quoted figures (Howard 2001:3).

<sup>2</sup> A moderate 2003-estimate is 416,737. PNUD; *Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo*. (United Nations Development Program), *Informe Nacional de Desarrollo Humano: Hacia una inserción mundial incluyente y renovada*. Santo Domingo, República Dominicana: Oficina de Desarrollo Humano, Dominican Republic 2005, <http://portal.onu.org.do>).

to be perceived. Once phenomena are categorised, power is required to maintain them in their right place. Possible challenges have to be sanctioned in order to protect categorical ideological positions (Wolf 1982:388). As we shall see later, there has been a continuous battle on how to ascribe meaning to/define Dominicaness, and music has been an important battlefield in this struggle.

Caused by cultural contact between many different continents, the Dominican Republic as for the Caribbean in general, holds musical genres of great diversity<sup>3</sup>. Here, music and dance are very much a prominent part of everyday life. During colonial times in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century, Africans were sent as forced labour to Hispaniola. Maroons<sup>4</sup> escaped across the border to the Dominican Republic because of lowlife expectations on Haitian plantations. The movement of Haitians to the much less populated Dominican Republic is also present today, as Haitians hope to escape grim life situations in their country. Although Haitians are a minority in the Dominican Republic, there are large African expressions in Dominican culture, from religious practices to vocabulary, from cuisine to music and dance. Still, there is a tendency among Dominicans to ignore this. Haitian involvement and influence on the different music streams – compared to the Dominican – is a source for investigating such aspects of this culture and its people.

Thematically, this thesis deals with identity and music as a lens through which Dominican society can be seen. The Latin<sup>5</sup> music and dance genre – **bachata** – occupies a large space in Dominican society; it is often heard in streets, buildings, cars, households, and shops and it is widely practiced. Bachata is a typical Dominican expression which traditionally has been scorned by dominant classes. Characteristics associated with the genre are low-class people, marginality and poor barrios. Lately, however, the stigmatisation of the music, its performers and audience has declined and today it can even be described as a trendy genre. This makes people see new possibilities for recognition through bachata. Besides the search for acceptance, involvement in music is a way of coping with everyday life; it has a vigorous capacity to create senses of belonging but also estrangement. A main purpose of this thesis is to look closely at bachateros' social position and discover how different groups of people - Haitians and Dominicans - make sense of their world through this genre. I will

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<sup>3</sup> See Kenneth M. Bilby's exploration of the Caribbean as a musical region (Bilby in Mintz & Price 1985).

<sup>4</sup> A Maroon (Spanish *cimarrón*) was a runaway slave in the West Indies, Central America, South America, or North America.

<sup>5</sup> For further exploration of the category "Latin music" and its connections to racial and ethnic aspects, see Deborah Pacini Hernandez (2002).

concentrate on how the intersection of class, ethnicity and gender is relevant in the world of bachateros and their ‘significant others’, and raise questions such as: How do Dominican and Haitian bachateros understand themselves and others through the use of bachata? Can we, by viewing bachata as a vehicle, understand the relationships between particular ethnic, class and gender expressions? How are these expressions tied to historical processes? And in what ways is place in the background of identity negotiation? These are large questions upon which I cannot extend equally, however they will all be central in the thesis.

### ***Theoretical and analytical approach***

This thesis centres bachata music as a means for identity construction, negotiation and articulation of differences. The dialectic between sameness and difference will be fundamental in the understanding of bachatero identity. The simultaneity explains how bachateros can recognize each other through bachata practice across class and ethnic lines, but that there are also significant ways in which Haitian and Dominican bachateros differ from each other. In the following, I introduce the main theoretical and analytical perspectives in order to understand the previous problems. Central terms are social identity, class, ethnicity/ ‘race’ and gender. I suggest that these terms are suitable for the understanding of local music identity formation and my informant’s self-comprehension. The terms can elaborate on bachatero’s statements and actions, and illustrate important aspects of musical life in the Dominican Republic.

### **Social identity**

People have been interested in matters of ‘identity’ for a long time. It is definitely not a novelty to humankind. In social science, the theme made its entry in the 1990’s, and since then anthropologists have made ‘social identity’ one of their main research focuses (Jenkins 8-11). In this thesis I use ‘social identity’ and ‘identity’ interchangeably, giving same meaning. The emphasis is on identity as a social phenomenon, not the depths of the individual (biological) mind. We must therefore investigate identity as a social process taking place **between** people. Jenkins sums up various investigators’ understandings of identity in his book *Social Identity* (2006) – drawing especially upon Mead, Goffman and Barth. He also problematizes ‘identity’ further with his own terms. Jenkins informs that ‘identity’ offers a

Latin root – *identitas* – from *idem*, and it has two main senses; on the one hand it refers to sameness. On the other it involves difference (4:2006). For something to be **the same** it has to be **distinct** from something else. This understanding portrays identity as two-sided; similarity and difference are two sides of the same coin. In a continuing **process** they influence each other and neither of the sides determines the other (Jenkins 2006). George Herbert Mead argued that it is important to include others' perspectives in order to develop a self (Mead 1934). This two-sidedness of social identity is suitable in the analysis of how Haitian and Dominican bachateros negotiate bachata identity, and how the 'social self' is handled within collective identities. Sometimes bachateros emphasize their belonging to a certain **collective** class and ethnic group. In other situations they dissociate themselves from this identity in order to have a "unique" and **individual** style. Throughout the thesis, I will refer to tensions between individuality – collectivity, differentiation – sameness, and, change – stability in bachata life. These relations deal with a persistent issue in social disciplines; the agency – structure problem, or choice and constraint if one likes. I will reflect on how bachateros' identities are the result of the dialectic between these two approaches.

Jenkins explicitly refers to Goffman (1959) and his approach to identity formation as performances on a stage. Goffman discerns 'back-stage', which Jenkins calls 'internal moment'/'self-image', and 'front-stage', which Jenkins calls 'external moment'/'public image'. 'Back-stage' is where one, to some degree, is free from presentation and perceptions from "people out there". Here one can rehearse the presentation before trying it in public. 'Front-stage', on the other hand, is where private performer and public audience meet and where they **negotiate** the performance of identity (Goffman 1959). These stage terms are analytically separated, but as I will show throughout the thesis, the division is not as strict in real life. The negotiation takes place within what Goffman calls 'the interaction order', which organises/structures actors' interactions – however, it does not determine human behaviour. In 'the interaction order' performer and audience try to define the situation and agree upon a common perception. Through impression management people try to influence others' perception of their identity in order to receive acceptance for who they are (Goffman 1959, Jenkins 2006). Social acceptance involves that the bachateros' identity performances are acknowledged and confirmed by others. In line with this, I approach the bachateros' identity constructions as **performative** and I will show how their use of class and ethnic perceptions through music changes in different situations.

In agreement with Goffman, Jenkins sees identity formation as a result of social interaction. Both perceive identification as a social action, it is never a unilateral process because there is always an audience (Goffman 1959, Jenkins 1997). Jenkins states that identity is our perception of who we are and of who others are, and, reciprocally, others perceptions of themselves and of other people (which includes us) (Jenkins 5:2006). Similarly, Haitian bachateros view themselves and others in a specific way, as do Dominican bachateros. Identities are best understood as a dialectic between unique individuality and shared collectivity, or in others words, between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ processes. ‘Internal’ identifications reflect ‘self-description’, while ‘external’ identifications implies ‘public image’, that is others’ identifications of you. This is a unified model where both perspectives are similarly important and they are routinely entangled with each other (Jenkins 15:2006). Actually, both aspects are part of each other, so Haitian musicians may have both individual **and** collective characteristics, and the same goes for Dominican bachateros; they can be a bit of both.

Jenkins draws on Barth (1969) who is also inspired by Goffman. Barth (1969) suggests that identifications, especially ethnic, happen at their boundaries, in the meeting between internal and external. As Jenkins states, this emphasises the never-fixed aspect of identity, it is rather, at least potentially, situational, relational and transactional (Jenkins 99:2006). In this aspect, the seemingly stable categories of bachata, ethnicity and class, are continually changed through social interaction. Yet, they are shaped by structural ideas which constrain my informants’ identity formation. In other words, the bachateros are not totally free identity-makers.

The contrasting process of identity production, the ‘internal’ and ‘external’, can be further illuminated by the analytical distinction between ‘group’ and ‘category’. Group identification is a matter of **self description**, by individuals of themselves as a collectivity – it is internal. People must share something significant in order to talk about a membership of a group. Category identification is a matter of **description of others** as a collectivity – it is external (Jenkins 2006:86). Group identification and categorisation can influence each other, and they are very much likely to do so (Jenkins 2006:21). Power relations influence this dialectic. In theory, none of the terms have priority, but this does not mean that each is equally important in every situation. One will probably dominate, and **which** one is a question of power differentials (Jenkins 2006:101). And if there is difference, there is hierarchy and thus

struggles over what is best/right and worst/wrong. In this thesis I deal with these struggles over the right and wrong way to be a bachatero.

In the prolongation of the ‘group’/‘category’ dialectic, is the relation between Jenkins’ terms ‘nominal’ – referring to name, and ‘virtual’ – referring to an experience or practical meaning. Identification does not just deal with a name that is ascribed/described to someone, it also deals with the differences the name makes for people (Jenkins 2000:76-77). For example, my informants are all bachateros (nominal), but that means different things to them in practice (virtual). So, nominally they are the same, but virtually they can be different. The virtual changes from time to time, from situation to situation, even if the nominal stays the same (Jenkins 1997, 2006). What is perpetual, however, is the **consequence** identification has for people; it is consequential in terms of allocation of resources (Jenkins 2006:174). How the bachateros are identified may have consequences for what and how much they receive. Being described as a bachatero with or without access to certain resources has to do with what it feels like to be that kind of bachatero.

According to Jenkins (2006), the model of social identity can be applied to understand various identity expressions of differentiation, like gender, age, class and ethnicity/‘race’. I will, however, focus only primarily on class and ethnicity/‘race’ which my informants used in order to give meaning to their own and others people’s identities. The interaction is anchored in the dichotomy between ‘Us’ and ‘Them’; namely Haitian and Dominican musicians. Humans classify the social world because it is a practical strategy to order chaos. Classification and ideas of inclusion and exclusion create order, and the type of order created is connected to the social system in general (Eriksen 1993:62). One can say that “the classification of populations as a practice of state and other agencies is powerfully constitutive both of institutions and of the interactional experience of individuals” (Jenkins 24:2006). Categories can be seen as organized within classification systems. Examples of categories which I am interested in are bachatero, black, white, Dominican, Haitian, low-class, middle-class etc. I chose to understand categorisation as a matter of naming things (including social groups) and it implies the power to name.

In light of what I have said so far, the different musicians’ acting out of created categories marks and establishes social distinctions. Bachateros work established categories through performances and the result is identities which gives meaning to themselves and their ‘significant others’. Imbedded in this defining process, there is a continuous struggle over the

meaning that is to be articulated and associated with bachatero identity. The battle implies power relations, as categorisation is about access to recourses. As my informants have different perceptions of the content of social categories, they negotiate – through interaction – how the categories should be represented and understood, and they do it by drawing upon resources they have or that they can obtain. What they perceive as the correct ways to define a specific class and ethnic category, which in some situations can be seen as a resource, will be a central theme.

### **Ethnic/‘racial’ identity**

It is helpful to think of the above-mentioned identity theory as connected to anthropological literature on ethnicity. The most important and relevant contribution to discussions on ethnicity, is probably the book “Ethnic Groups and Boundaries” (1969) by Barth and collaborating authors. It challenges earlier structural ways of looking at culture where distinct ethnic groups and people were thought to maintain their culture through isolation from others. Barth, on the other hand, analyses how three different ethnic groups in North Pakistan (Swat valley) exist because of a continuous **interacting process** with each other. He is interested in how identity is created at the **boundaries** between groups and perceives social identity as somewhat fluid and situational, and stresses the processual aspect of this formation. He is more concerned with the processes that generate collective forms, than the cultural stuff of definite historical group characteristics like knowledge, values and beliefs. What is more is that people can move in and out of ethnic groups while the boundaries persist (Barth 1969). This resembles Jenkins’ ‘virtual’ and ‘nominal’ distinction; even though people live their lives distinctly, they can still be called by the same name.

In agreement with Barth and Goffman, Jenkins understands identity as a process, and it thus indicates identity as something which is being “worked on”. Like Jenkins, I will show that even though identity is changeable, there are some identities that can be more persistent than others, for example ‘racial’/ethnicity. This is because this category might be an original dimension of self-identification. In that case, it would be described as **primordial**, which is essential and unchanging, rather than **situational** (Jenkins 2006). Drawing on Barth again, Jenkins argues that it is a matter of playing upon ethnicity in terms of over and under communication – making ethnicity matter or not in specific situations. But whether this strategy is highly accessible, is related to history and locality (Jenkins 2006). The issue of

stable versus changing identities is a topic for much anthropological debate. Jenkins positions himself somewhere in between and says that identity formation is always a negotiation between ‘being’ and ‘becoming’, ‘nominal’ and ‘virtual’, and ‘structure’ and ‘agency’.

Until now I have used ethnicity and ‘race’ interchangeably. However, it is necessary to clarify the relationship between the analytical terms as they are important to the understanding of social and cultural identity in Dominican society. Mintz – who writes about the role of ethnicity and race in Caribbean social formations – states that;

“So-called race relations have to do with perceptions of others which are based on physical differences; these differences are thought of as diagnostic features of membership in groups, called ‘races’. Race is a socially-constructed category. But those who endow it with everyday meaning usually treat it as if it were biological bedrock, not as if it were socially constructed. [...] It is the assumptions about inheritable physical differences that underlie and support social behaviours having to do with what is called ‘race’. In contrast, ethnicity has to do with culturally-determined features, such as language, dress, cuisine, and like aspects of social behaviour, which are not determined by physical differences” (Mintz 1996:41).

In everyday life, what we refer to as ‘race’ and ethnicity interact in processes of categorization and self ascription of membership in groups. In fact, Dominicans use an indigenous term *raza* – literally meaning ‘race’ – in which ethnicity, ‘race’, and also nation and culture (Krohn-Hansen 1995) are brought into interplay in categorization and group membership. This I come back to. Physical differences and ethnic characteristics are frequently perceived as one (Mintz 1996:41). Examples of racial traits, such as eye colour, hair colour/form/texture, face/body structure and skin colour can imply perceptions of how a group and its individuals **are** –taking the outside in. Because ‘race’ involves perceptions of origins, it is believed that personal characteristics are passed on through generations – through the blood – so that ancestors are decisive for someone’s identity. More specifically, such traits are viewed as natural and enduring. Ethnicity does also deal with perceptions of people in terms of origins, however, ethnicity is a wider organisational principle or classification than ‘race’ (Jenkins 1997:22). Ethnicity can incorporate race, nation, language, food, dress codes, music, aesthetics, kinship and religion (Howard 2001:2). Ethnicity may or may not include perceptions of ‘race’. In other words, if ethnicity can be seen as a universal or basic phenomenon, ‘race’ is not. Under some circumstances, like in the Caribbean, ethnicity can be racialized and the two meanings are therefore difficult to separate in everyday life Dominican



society (Mintz 1996, Duany 2006:223). The explanation for the interconnection must be viewed in a wider historical and local context (Jenkins 1997, 2006:77). In this sense, a problematization of colonialism, slave trade and Trujilloismo in the Dominican Republic is vital to the understanding of the interlaced terms of ethnicity and ‘race’ in Dominican society.

I will henceforth not make use of a further disjunction between the terms ‘race’ and ethnicity. The above deconstruction has only severed the purpose of explaining why – under particular circumstances, such as in the case of the Dominican Republic – ‘race’ and ethnicity should be viewed as conflated. Michael Banton argues in favour of a separation between ‘race’ and ethnicity, where the former refers to external categorisation of others/them, while the latter stresses internal group identification/us (Banton as referred to in Jenkins 1997:23). This approach might be helpful, however in the case of Dominican society, it is not beneficial. It is inadequate for an explanation of Dominican and Haitian bachateros identity management, because it fails to acknowledge that ‘race’/ethnicity is part of **both** category and group; group identification and social categorisation are inseparable. An oversimplification of ethnicity as connected with positive/good forces, and ‘race’ with negative/bad notions, will be to miss the point of the terms’ simultaneity and reciprocity (Jenkins 2006, Howard 2001:190). And simultaneity is exactly what Jenkins argues for when he explains identity (re)production (ibid).

Bachateros and their music are absorbed into Dominican racial culture. The racialized classification system recognized throughout Dominican society is characteristically a continuum of perceived physical differences, ranging from whites-skinned to dark-skinned. Haitians are in many respects placed outside of the racial continuum whereas other nationalities may be absorbed into the system. One example is that a dark-skinned Afro-American of U.S. origin would be permitted to assimilate into the race continuum whereas a lighter skinned Haitian would not. Dominican bachateros can be placed along the Dominican continuum relative to their perceived physical appearances, whereas Haitian bachateros are so to say located outside of it; they belong to a fundamental different *raza*, meaning a conflation of ‘race’, ethnic group, nation, and culture. The Haitians are the negative blueprint of the Dominican, its major ‘other’ (Brendbekken 2003). Black Dominicans are seen to belong to another ‘race’ from that of the Haitians, and Dominican blacks can be whitened by Hispanic values and economic progress. As I will show throughout the thesis, “whitening” is much more problematic for Haitians, as they are a race apart, located outside what is perceived as Dominican (Howard 2001:71). However, this thesis will show that “whitening” processes do

take place also among Haitians (cf. also Brendbekken forthcoming); A bachata career may figure as one example.

If the relationship between ‘race’ and ethnicity is difficult to grasp, the relationship between them and nationalism is equally complex. I will not dwell on a detailed discussion of this here, but restrict myself to say that the emic word *raza*, as used in Dominican society at both popular and elite level, can mean nation or people. *Raza* is widely embedded in daily discourse, and can be viewed as conflated with nation, people and ethnicity (Krohn-Hansen 1995:70, Howard 2001). Under ‘racial’ categories the Dominican state can celebrate similarities, and it roots its nationalistic project in collective perceptions of a Dominican white ‘race’, as opposed to a Haitian black ‘race’. The state controls people within this given framework and can thus legitimate class, ethnic/‘racial’ and gender differences between Dominicans and Haitians.

### **Class identity**

Another central concept to anthropological concerns and to this thesis is class. The majority of my informants clearly belong to *la gente popular* (the ‘popular’ class). They are drawn from the working classes and from the urban ghetto of the unemployed or underemployed. Most informants referred to *clase baja* (low-class) when ascribing social position to them selves and to other *bachateros*. The narrative world of bachata lyrics clearly refers to low social standing and the problems and pleasures it generates.

In the classic “Distinction” (2005), Bourdieu connects taste and style with differing habitus. Bachata competence has to do with habitus, which can be described as “embodied culture”. He tries to combine the perspectives on class formation from Marx and Weber. First I will briefly deal with these scholars before returning to how I use Bourdieu's perspectives on class in this thesis. Two main contributions to the debate about class in social theory come from Karl Marx and Max Weber. They differ to some extent in their understanding of the term, but their analyses are often combined - and further developed - in contemporary anthropological studies. Marx emphasises economic aspects of class, as its definition is based on differences in the distribution of productive means in relation to ownership. Even though an exclusive focus on economic resources as the explanation for social differentiations is inadequate, relationship to property or materiality (e.g. access to bachata arenas, instruments, studios, cars and houses) is important in the analysis of bachatero life. Moreover, such class identification

will be analysed as brought into being and negotiated through performance. Further, Marx distinguishes between ‘class **in** itself’ (*an sich*) as a category, and ‘class **for** itself’ (*für sich*) as a group. The first is a collectivity identified and defined by non-members, while the last is a collectivity identified and defines itself by its members (Jenkins 2006:21). To Marx, the existence of these two principles creates class struggle, and they influence each other. Which one dominates (category or group) is a question of power relations in the overall society. The central aspect is eventually that Marx related peoples’ self perceptions and perceptions of others to socioeconomic structures.

Weber has a somewhat different approach to class. He sees an exclusively economic emphasis as insufficient for explaining social inequalities. He is also preoccupied with education and politics as important aspects of class identity. Weber stresses that people must feel attraction to common values and beliefs in order to talk about class belonging, but that it is not evident that members share the same political interest just because they belong to a specific social class. How people perceives themselves and how others perceive them, central to Webers’ approach.

My uses of Bourdieu will deal how a colonial past has laid grounds for upper-class tastes, and that these still influence the bachateros daily lives. Due to a well-established class system, people in the Dominican can recognise each other in terms of this category. I will show that good versus bad taste is defined by those in power, and that this classification system functions to locate Dominican and Haitian bachateros within the social order. However, an important point, is that taste function to restrict agency, not to legitimise social differences forever.

## Gender identity

In nature, male and female are distinct. Yet – the biological differences lead to differentiation in the distribution of privileges and duties in society. In social science, a prevalent distinction is the one between **sex** (a person’s biological identity) and **gender** (an aspect of a person’s social identity), and it is the latter which has been prioritised under the anthropological analytical lens. In the same way as ‘race’ is not predetermined, but socially constructed, gender is also a socially constructed category. Gender is best understood as a relation, where men’s identity is constructed towards that of women’s and *vice versa* (Eriksen 2001:153). Ortner and Whitehead (1981) argue that the categories men : culture :: women : nature are

good to think with as universal analytical tools. Drawing upon Michelle Rosaldo, Ortner and Whitehead argues that the division between male/female and culture/nature should be seen in relation to the division between private versus public; Universally, there seems to be a tendency whereby men are connected to public institutions and politics, whereas women are associated to caretaking of children and family (ibid 1981). This being, an all too rigid separation between dichotomies fails to acknowledge that negotiation of gender relationships varies cross culturally, and that the categories influence each other simultaneously (Jenkins 2006).

In the Caribbean literature on gender and the household, scholars have stressed the prevalence of gender antagonism and the high frequency of broken relationships. This is also reflected in the worlds of bachata. A central organizing theme in bachata lyrics concerns the difficult relationship between men and women. Women are either the victims of unfaithful men, or they are themselves deceitful *prostitutas*. The way in which gender relationships are portrayed in bachata songs brings to mind Wilson's "Crab Antics" (1973) and his Providence Island model, that has strongly influenced later studies of Caribbean societies in general. He distinguishes between two contrasting and conflicting moral systems; "respectability" and "reputation", where the first is connected to women, and the second to men. "Respectability" is oriented towards the home, family, church-going, stability, self-restraint, sexuality and cleanliness, whereas "reputation" is connected with the street, trickery, virility, eloquence, performance of music, fighting and drinking. Basing the development of the dual value system in colonial explanations, Wilson argues that slave women could more easily advance socially than men, because they could bear a slave-master's child. "Respectability" is therefore closer connected to hierarchy, while "reputation" is guided by equality (ibid.). Wilson's dichotomies have been criticised of being too categorical (Barrow 1986, Besson 1993, Miller 1994). As I will show in chapter 3 and 4, "respectability" is not equivalent to middle- and upper-class, white and women. Nor is "reputation", synonymous with low-class, black and men. Independent of class, race or gender identity, everyone has to act in accordance with **both** moral systems, to a bigger or lesser degree. This ambivalence is in line with how Jenkins views social identity as dialectic and ambivalent.

What can be concluded after this examination of central terms is that there are blurring boundaries between them. Dominican society is class and 'race'/ethnicity-, but also gender oriented, and they may crosscut each other. How 'racial'/ethnicity, class and gender

differences and similarities articulate with each other depend on interactions of agency and structure, and must be seen in relationship to power. Construction, reconstruction and negotiation of categories must always be seen in light of an interpreting significant other (cf. Jenkins 2006). As will be demonstrated, bachateros seek the universal need for acceptance, indeed in different ways and with different explanations, by contrasting themselves against somebody else. Anthropologists' interest in Otherness, concerns 'alterity' (latin *alterare*, from *alter* 'other', <http://www.askoxford.com>), which is about how people understand themselves in contrast to someone else. I was, during the fieldwork, a 'significant other' to my informants, as much as they were to me. This thesis is a result of our interaction. In the following, I will therefore focus on who I was to my informants and how this is related to methodological issues and social identity.

### ***Methodological reflections***

In the following I concentrate on methodological matters, with especial focus on my initial motivation for field work in the Dominican Republic, establishment with fields and informants, my role and collection and interpretation of information.

### **Why music and the Dominican Republic?**

Different cultures, languages and ways of living have for as long as I remember, been an interest of mine. A reason for this might be the culture-curious family I come from, where fascination for cultural expressions has been distinct. As I come from a musically interested family, we generally brought home local music from the places we visited. This music was added to our already large rock, blues and pop LP-, cassette- and CD-collection. There was seldom a quiet moment in our house because music was played at any time, at any volume. By listening to unfamiliar tones and rhythms, I got used to many different musical genres which were not typically heard in Norway. To fuel my musical interest, I played the piano and sang in a choir for a couple of years. A typical childhood activity was also to eagerly record myself and friends on cassettes, pretending to be Mariah Carey, Whitney Houston or singers from the group Deep Forest. Still, no day goes by without listening to music or humming along to a song on the radio.

Dancing has also always been a passion of mine. To my excitement, my family built a room on top of our barn, which we called “the dance attic”. I spent many hours there, with my mum, friends or alone in front of a big mirror trying to make fancy moves. That was definitely one of my favourite places to spend my time after school. In order to learn more dancing, not just inventing funny steps of my own, I have attended dancing classes at several periods during my life.

Language was another decisive factor when choosing fieldwork locality. After high school, I spent three continuous years in Paris, Madrid, London and Oxford, in order to “grow up”, experience other cultures and last but not least, learn languages. My stays abroad gave me the opportunity to learn French, Spanish, and to improve my English.

Besides these factors, it was quite accidental that I chose the Spanish-speaking Dominican Republic. I was determined to do an investigation on music in a place where I could practice my languages, and develop them further. With this approach, this country seemed a perfect place, as both Creole<sup>6</sup> and (Dominican) Spanish<sup>7</sup> are spoken here, and musical activity is prominent. Of equal importance was my fascination for cultural mixes. I was fascinated by the cultural blend in Latin America as a multi-cultural continent. My main interest was how musical genres reflect such a complex society. In this aspect, the Dominican Republic offers a fascinating field, as cultures and traditions from at least four different continents are mixed here. Never in doubt that my music-hobby and interest for cultures could be an important motivation for my investigation, I decided to combine personal interest and work, which turned out to be a considerable driving force throughout my fieldwork.

I had some presumptions about the field before I started my research. These were not only about language and music, but also about principles of social differentiation, like race/ethnicity, class and gender. Influenced by the reconciliation process I had this, probably somewhat naïve, original working hypothesis that music could reconcile people despite grim and hostile circumstance between Haitians and Dominicans. Thinking back, I guess I assumed that interaction through music could have a conciliatory effect where social distinctions were

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<sup>6</sup> Haiti has two official languages, Creole and French. Haitian Creole – a French based language with African, Spanish and English derivations – is the major language spoken throughout Haiti. I experienced that there were major differences between the French that I had learned and French-based Haitian Creole, however I was able to understand it to some extent. Communication between me and my Haitian informants was not affected by my lack of mastery of Creole, as it turned out that all of them spoke Dominican Spanish as well, and were happy to talk to me in that language.

<sup>7</sup> Spanish is the official language in the Dominican Republic.

perceived as secondary. However, the belief in solely unity and sameness did not correspond with my ethnography. I experienced that **differences** are also articulated through bachata, and that music is used to mark identity towards an alter ego. The relationship between sameness **and** difference became important in my understanding of identity and bachata.

### Accessing the fields

This thesis is the result of a fieldwork in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic, lasting from January – July 2005. I will now account for the development of this field project, taking into account the entry into the field and the establishment of informants and their social networks. This information is important as it concerns thematical, theoretical and methodological approaches which implicates the research as a whole.

When I was in Norway, I was eager to get in touch with someone connected to Latin America. I racked my brains but could not think of anyone. Fortunately, my mother came to my rescue, and suggested that I call her childhood friend Petter Skauen, who has worked for several years on Hispaniola as a conciliator and peace advisor. Without hesitation – though wanting to share first hand experiences, good advise and smart precautions over a meal before my departure – Petter decided to help me getting in contact with his friends and colleagues in the Dominican Republic. I was fortunate to “be sent” by him, as he had carefully and with an extraordinary ardour worked up a social network with an organisation specialised in Dominico-Haitian interrelations – SSID<sup>8</sup> in Santo Domingo. It was a good starting point; the executive leader of the association, Lorenzo Mota King who had a large social network, offered to put me in contact with musicians he knew. In addition, the people involved in this organisation, possessed in-depth information about interrelations between Dominicans and Haitians which was of great value to me throughout the research period. Besides, they were of great help during the practical-settling-in period, by finding an apartment which I rented during the stay.

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<sup>8</sup> The Santo Domingo-based SSID (Servicio Social de Iglesias Dominicanas) is an organisation which runs several development projects in poor areas throughout the country. They collaborate with the government and other relief organisations, on projects which deals with health, education and environment.

My initial project focus was on *merengue*<sup>9</sup>, however this musical genre turned out to be inconvenient if I wanted contact with Haitian immigrants. Merengue is through Dominican society defined as the national music *per se*. Discussing the thesis with Lorenzo, he wisely advised me to change to bachata, as more Haitians are involved in this music. “Merengue is too white”, he said. Moreover, in bachata I could easily find a context representing the ‘Others’; the Dominicans, as bachata is a popular genre among both groups. The fact that some genres are better intakes than others in order to study Haitians said a lot; it is a strong indicator that music, ethnicity and class are interconnected. To fit my approach to the problem, I decided to revise my project. Simultaneously, experiences throughout the fieldwork period lead to further development of the research questions. In light of this, we can say that method, analysis and theory are mutually influencing each other (Thagaard 2002:64).

I will now give an introduction to informants and their locations<sup>10</sup>. Some resulted as key informants and very good friends indeed, while others I had the opportunity to meet only once or twice. The presentation begins with the Haitian field and continues with the Dominican field. The thesis may show signs of that I entered the Dominican location later than the Haitian one. Thus, it tends to focus more on the Haitian than the Dominican bachateros, however, this is due to practical *de facto* circumstances, such as the short time span provided. Logically, this can have restricting effects on the carrying out of fieldwork and consequently the result of the thesis. Retrospectively, however, I established close relationships with my Dominican informants and feel it provides a good enough basis for the comparative analysis between the two contexts. Both fields are suitable as intakes for analysis of identity management, and especially class, ethnicity/‘race’ and gender. These conceptions of identity management are domains in local everyday Dominican life which makes it possible to build informant networks based on them.

Establishment with the Haitian field was rather spontaneous. As Lorenzo personally knew merengueros, but no bachateros, I had to start the search for informants and locations. The “three-months-blues” struck me after one month. This experience gave me an idea of how overwhelming, stressful and complex fieldwork can feel. Out of despair, I showed up at “*El*

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<sup>9</sup> Another typical Dominican musical genre. See chapter 2 for further reading on *merengue*.

<sup>10</sup> I refer to all informants by their real names. They preferred non-fictive names because they hoped the thesis could increase their prestige and acknowledgement. I perceive this as ethically defensible because I act in accordance with the agreement between me and my informants. Also, I have clarified this with NSD (Norwegian Social Science Data Services).



*Museo del Hombre Dominicano*”<sup>11</sup>, and inquired for the Director. He seemed a bit surprised, as an unfamiliar girl unexpectedly ran down his office. Fortunately, he was an anthropologist himself and had experienced how frustrating the getting-admittance-period might be. He kindly invited me to sit down, and we briefly discussed my thesis. He agreed on the genre-change, and I asked him whether he knew of any Haitian bachateros I could make acquaintance with. He mentioned his Dominican anthropologist colleague, Juan Rodriguez<sup>12</sup>, who resided in a low-class Dominico-Haitian barrio and had been involved in bachata. He could probably put me in further contact with Haitian musicians. The meeting with Juan was a turning point in my establishment with a field. After this meeting, the scope widened up and the so-called “snowball” started rolling. Gradually, I got to know my Haitian<sup>13</sup> informants and their social and geographical milieus where bachata was central to the social gathering. This gave me an important possibility to observe how people express and experience this genre of music.

I have chosen to use “*El Barrio*”/“*el barrio*”/“*the barrio*” (neighbourhood(s)) as a mutual name for three neighbourhoods, where my Haitian informants lived. Characteristically, the locations are very much alike, regarding way of life, music and class and ethnic conditions, and on this basis I decide not to pay much attention to differentiate between these three locations throughout the thesis. For now, however, I introduce them separately as it avails the understanding of the step-by-step field accessing process.

One of the fields is eastern-located, while the two others are located in the western part of Santo Domingo. Juan offered to take me to his neighbourhood; the eastern barrio. Here, I met Juan’s good friend **Ramón Cherie Yegome** (among friends: **Ramoncito** or **Cariño**) (38), who became one of my key bachata informants. Ramón is a low-class dark-skinned bachatero, born in the Dominican Republic, who lives with his Haitian wife and their kids in a small house. In addition, he has plenty of kids with other neighbourhood women. In this

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<sup>11</sup> *El Museo del Hombre Dominicano*, (The Museum of Dominican Man), conserves the largest collection of objects from the Taino culture, worldwide. The museum functions as a study and investigation centre for anthropology and archaeology.

<sup>12</sup> Juan is employed at *El Museo del Hombre Dominicano*, and a professor of anthropology at the private catholic university of *La Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra* (PUCMM), department of Santo Domingo

<sup>13</sup> Another term used by individuals and the state is “Dominico-Haitian”. The state has clearly political motivations behind the different uses and inclines towards the use of “Haitian” to legitimize social, economic and political imbalance between the ethnic groups. My Barrio informants seldom used the term “Dominico-Haitian” to define themselves. However, in conversations they talked about the meaning of the term and concluded that their identity was both Dominican **and** Haitian because they had incorporated many Dominican values, ideas and beliefs (See footnote 69 for the right to Dominican citizenship).

neighbourhood, Ramón is a man of importance; he has charisma and knows his way around. He has performed bachata for many years and is a well-known musician at the local neighbourhood venues. However, he performs sporadically as there are limited demands. Consequently, Ramón has uneven and little profit. Linguistically, he speaks both Haitian Creole and Dominican Spanish. It was also in this barrio where I first met the group “*Las Bachateras del Swing*”, a female bachata group consisting of **Neri** (35), and **Minosca** (35). They are two of few Dominican women in bachata. It was interesting for me to establish contact with them in order to understand gender formation through music, and connect this to my primary focus on class and ethnic/‘race’ identity. Both of them are white-skinned Dominicans, and Neri is half Spanish. It seems to me that people, at least those in bachata, have heard of them, however they receive few performing offers and the venues they play at are often low-class.

I wanted to move around in a wide social terrain, something which could enable an understanding of the bachata milieu in a wider social and cultural context, with particular focus on class and ethnicity. Therefore, I made use of Ramón’s social networks and was introduced to his bachata friend **Robin Cariño** (40) who resided in one of the eastern low-class barrios with his Haitian wife and children. Robin is half Haitian, half *cocolo*<sup>14</sup>, born in the Dominican Republic. He is a popular bachatero in his barrio. His knowledge of Haitian Creole is average, while his Spanish is fluent. Despite bad health, he travels to other parts of the capital where he has an audience. Unlike Ramón, Robin has CD’s for sale in official music stores and people recognise his name. Robin has a fairly permanent band with which he performs and he has produced 14 CDs. His earnings and prestige are higher than Ramón’s, however both can still be described as living a socially and economically marginalised life.

Through Robin and Ramón I was introduced to their friend **Felix Cumbé** (47), another Haitian bachatero living in one of the low-class eastern barrios. He and his family live in a block house and they have a private car which Felix uses when he is performing. Born in Haiti, he migrated to the Dominican Republic at the age of 13. Felix is more famous than the two other bachateros and he has a large Haitian, but also a smaller Dominican, audience. His Haitian origin and love-related themes are subjects in his bachatas. He has CD’s for sale in official shops and means for production. Undoubtedly, Felix’s charisma and skills have been

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<sup>14</sup> *Cocolos* refers to migrants working on the British sugar plantation of Hispaniola.

crucial in his bachata career. He has an unmistakable Haitian accent when he talks and sings, and he speaks both Creole and Spanish.

The compound of these three locations is rather similar. The two first-mentioned are probably the most socio-economically marginalised, however Felix's barrio is not much better. Socio-demographically, they are all inhabited by many low-class Dominicans and people of Haitian origin. Basic services are poor; health care and schooling are deficient, and water and power outages happen frequently. Barrio residents find work in the informal economy, selling sugar cane, clothes, perfume, CD's or performing music in the streets. The housings vary from block houses to squats made of zinc, tinsplates or wood, densely constructed together, only separated by muddy roads. The main road is usually asphalted, and the many different means of transportation and people in the streets make the barrios lively and noisy, both day and night. Music, mainly bachata, and to a lesser extent merengue, is heard from *colmados* (neighbourhood stores), carwashes, houses, minibuses and cars driving by; it is everywhere. People are playing dominoes, dancing, and drinking in the bars, women are running errands to buy food and children are playing or helping with family chores. For me, it was important to be as mobile as my Haitian bachateros, so wherever they moved, I went with them. Their mobility can be seen as expressions of class, ethnic and gender identity.

I knew that my research focus on identity would benefit from having a contrasting field; a Dominican location to compare El Barrio to. It should represent the counter-point; an ethnic group and class distinct from the Haitian. In this way, I would have better conditions for exploring social differentiation. As Gupta and Ferguson (1997) point out; in our postcolonial, mobile and changing world, fieldwork in the Malinowskian sense is being challenged. It is no longer sufficient to think of the field as a remote, ahistorical and territorially isolated place. They argue that a "well-developed attentiveness to location would preserve and build upon [...] aspects of fieldwork tradition (Ibid.:36). I agree when they suggest that;

Fieldwork reveals that a self-conscious shifting of social and geographical location can be an extraordinarily valuable methodology for understanding social and cultural life, both through phenomena that would otherwise remain invisible and through acquisition of new perspectives on things we thought we already understood" (Ibid.:37).

In accordance with Gupta and Ferguson, I moved around with my informants to wherever they went, rather than restricting research to a confined territory. I wanted to combine different sites because the Haitian field is not cut-off from the rest of Dominican society. Their identity is constructed against somebody else's, and therefore I chose to focus on these 'significant others' as well.

As with the establishment with El Barrio, access to the Dominican field was very random. An article in a Dominican newspaper put me on track. It informed about bachata contests at Barceló Lina – one of Santo Domingo's best hotels. My presumption of this venue was in accordance with what I experienced when I got there; only Dominican bachateros performing in a fashionable context. After my first night as a spectator, I approached some of the participants to ask if they wanted to be part of the bachata study. Some were more reluctant than others. A reasonable interpretation for this scepticism is that I "came out of the blue" with nobody introducing me. Obviously, they would question my intentions and consequences of being involved. Nevertheless, I would argue that my genuine interest, fascination and admiration for bachata functioned as a source for reliance. Most of them expressed their satisfaction, and somewhat positive astonishment, for a white, Western, young woman's engagement in their lives. In this way, my attention and curiosity positively affected the building of mutual trust between informants and anthropologist.

As time went by, I managed to make good friends with **Alejandro Montero** (27), a light-skinned Dominican middle-class bachatero who has been involved in this genre for a few years. He participated in the competition in hope of a bachata career. In addition to rehearsing bachata in his friend's studio, he goes to university and works as a salesman. Alejandro wishes to learn English and incorporate it into the lyrics of his self-composed bachatas. Alejandro has known the Dominican bachatero **Javier Alberto Lopez** (25) for three years, and they have performed and composed bachata together for a while, in Javier's studio. Javier also participates in the competition and wants to devote his life to bachata. He has won previous bachata contests in Santo Domingo. A third Dominican bachatero who became my informant is **Randi Rumbardi** (39) who has a middle-class background. Like the other Dominican bachateros, he stresses the importance of distance to low-class barrio bachata, even though they acknowledge that they are all bachateros and thus have something in common.

The Hotel is of high standard and aims at a middle/high class clientele. Piccolos, good service, casino, piano bar and swimming pool make it one of Santo Domingo's most attractive and prestigious hotels. Besides, it is located in a busy middle-/high-class neighbourhood, on one of the capital's major boulevards. Nearby are the commercial and financial zones of Santo Domingo, and the "intellectual" *Plaza de la Cultura* which is the site of the National Theatre, National Library and some of the capital's largest and best museums. Bachateros and audience participating at the contest are "whitened" by the characteristics of the arena and its location. I observed my informant's rehearsing at the hotel and it was important to be seen around in this area.

### **White, female anthropologist in the Dominican Republic**

During fieldwork, I was perceived in a certain way by informants, and this identity influenced the investigation results. In this aspect, there are some main aspects that stand out as central, which I find necessary to mention.

The first issue is connected to my ethnic and class identity. I have never paid much attention to my skin colour. However, in the Dominican Republic I was continually reminded of this aspect through interaction with others. Walking in the streets of Santo Domingo, I heard utterances like, "You shouldn't get tanned; Walk in the shadow" and "*Rubia!*<sup>15</sup> [Blond!] The sun is not good for you". A typical sight was people using umbrellas in the sunny weather. My Spanish schoolteacher had one, and she was very preoccupied with covering the two of us together under her small umbrella, whenever we went out for lunch or had out-door-classes. José Guerrero, a recognized Dominican anthropologist and historian, explained that white is perceived as good and rich, and black as bad and poor. The fascination for whiteness, he meant, could be too much for a young, light-skinned anthropologist, and humorously advised me to wear a cap and brown contact lenses in el barrio. Even though I found it uncomfortable to be judged by "the cover of the book", my skin colour opened up possibilities for contact with bachateros, because in many ways it was popular to be seen with white people. In this sense it could enhance bachateros' social rank. It was impossible to avoid my informant's categorisation of me as a human being. In this thesis I apply a processual approach to identity which emphasizes a relational and situational aspect. Without narcissistic intentions, this and

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<sup>15</sup> The suffix -a (*rubia*) refers to female, while the suffix -o (*rubio*) refers to male.

forthcoming examples, illustrate how I influenced the situations through the interaction with informants. By using personal experiences, I intend to explain something beyond the situation *per se*.

At the same time, my class and ethnic identity involved restrictions, like scepticism from informants. Colonialism and U.S. invasion<sup>16</sup> is perceived as having been disadvantageous to Hispaniola in many aspects, and I represented these “Western exploiters”. One of my Haitian informants once said that “Americans never arrive just to look, they come to take. They laugh with you, share everything with you, but they’ve a second agenda. They’re hypocrites. In the beginning I thought you were American”. I also faced joking accusations of being paid by a suspect American company, bachata investigation being but a cover-up. However, as time went by, my informants understood that I had a clear conscience and that I was not from the U.S. Gradually, they opened up and I managed to build up the necessary confidence to carry out the investigation.

The second challenging aspect was the roughness of my Haitian field, which bachata was a part of. Crime<sup>17</sup>, conflict and alcohol consumption were an everyday part of field research – in comparison to the Dominican bachata context which was much more peaceful. Half way through fieldwork I found myself sprinting away from gunfire at a Haitian bachata performance, hiding behind an abandoned lorry. And, because most bachata concerts were held during night time, I participated during these hours, something which decreased my personal safety. However, anthropological research sometimes involves taking risks, in order to get to know the unknown. Sticking to the familiar is the antithesis of anthropological research (<http://www.anthropologymatters.com/>, July 3, 2007)<sup>18</sup>. If I was to restrict myself to never go out, not drink alcohol<sup>19</sup>, not try anything new, my independence as a researcher would be seriously affected. To find a balance between risk and safety became crucial to me. With necessary street smart precautions I would be relatively safe. Most of the time I was accompanied by someone, and it seemed to be the best solution because I gained access to

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<sup>16</sup> The U.S. occupied Haiti from 1915-1934 and The Dominican Republic from 1916-1924.

<sup>17</sup> Teresa Caldeira's has studied fear, segregation and crime in São Paulo and argues that many of the similar patterns can be found in other metropolises as well.

<sup>18</sup> Anthropologist Hannah E. Gill did fieldwork in the Dominican Republic in 2003. In "Finding a middle ground between extremes: notes on researching transnational crime and violence" (Gill, 2004), she focuses on her own practical, philosophical and ethical experiences when working in areas of conflict and crime. For further reading on her methodological reflections like risk taking, limitations of movement, constant surveillance and mistrust during field research, go to [www.anthropologymatters.com/journal/2004-2/Gill\\_2004\\_finding.pdf](http://www.anthropologymatters.com/journal/2004-2/Gill_2004_finding.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> Jocularly, a Dominican anthropologist told me that I could not carry out an investigation on bachata and the Dominican society without *tomar unos tragos bien fuertes* (taking some really strong draughts (of alcohol)).

places I would not have gone alone, without being too restricted. But notwithstanding the violent climate, I was never a target and experienced many more amusing situations than frightening ones.

Thirdly, this was, however, conditional upon how I deliberately sought to manage myself as a white female in a world dominated by males. I constituted myself as an audience member but was cautious not to involve myself in any way in amorous relationships. There was a need to constitute myself as an honourable woman among the many *prostitutas* who were drawn to the bachata settings.

Women rarely perform or compose bachata, because it is normally reserved as a man's activity. This does not mean that women are absent from bachata arenas. Because the social context traditionally is that of the bar and the brothel, women are present as well, but they are often categorised as promiscuous or prostitutes. The fact that all my music informants are males is thus no coincidence; there are more of them. I had the chance to observe women performing a few times, however none of them became my key informants, mostly because they were hard to find, but also because it was a strategic choice of mine to distance myself from them as not to become labelled as promiscuous myself.

Cross-gender friendships are ambiguous in the Dominican Republic in general (Hernandez 1995:xxi), and to hang around with male bachateros, at the hotel, at carwashes and *colmados* during night time, was continuously questioned. For me, as a woman, it was challenging to socialize in highly masculine spaces without being categorised as promiscuous. The management of the category 'woman' varies in expression and it is continuously negotiated. To interact in bachata contexts and not behave "as expected", clearly brought out some confusion among the male bachateros. They probably thought I would fall neatly into the category of a "loose woman", however this was not my mission. My mission was the opposite; to focus totally on my research and avoid this categorisation. It was challenging to be taken seriously as a female researcher, because I was continually asked whether I had a boyfriend, if he was at home or if we could meet somewhere. Questions concerning my bachata research were conspicuous by their absence. My European physical traits of blue eyes, blond hair, light skin and assumptions of belonging to a higher class than them, did probably not decrease their interest in me. This apart, it is not required to be a light-skinned "Westerner" to receive attention in the Dominican Republic; by virtue of being a woman - whether Caribbean, European or American - men whistle, stare, touch, comment, approach

and talk to you on the street, in the shops, through the car windows and at bachata arenas. Some of the Hotel Barceló Lina bachateros became so exceedingly friendly, that I had to make a strategic choice of taking them out of my project. In order to keep focus on research and to avoid categorisation as a “loose woman”, it was necessary to be conscious of who I could intrude on, and who I had to distance myself from. It was difficult for the bachateros to understand this and it took a long time before they acknowledged how I chose to play out the category “woman”. However, as time went by, they accepted that I was there to make friends – not lovers, and that the research was always my number one priority.

### Collection and interpretation of information

Indeed, music provides an exceptional context for observing and understanding identity formations of any society. I chose to use bachata as a vehicle through which class, ethnic/‘racial’ and gender aspects may be seen. It turned out to be a suitable vehicle; as I assumed prior to the fieldwork, talking about music and participating with Dominicans and Haitians when they performed was not difficult. Music was heard everywhere; music was played for whole neighbourhoods. It was a phenomenon that most people shared and were happy to talk about. This made my fieldwork especially enjoyable.

In order to respond to my hypothesis I mainly used participant observation, which is a characteristic anthropological methodological approach. Some of my research techniques included visiting, surveying, attending, listening, interviewing, lingering around and dancing. I utilized either participation or observation, or sometimes a combination of the two. I often turned observations into subject for conversation, in order to get a better understanding of the occurrence. **Observation** was effective when I wanted to focus on how individuals behaved in relation to each other in specific situations. I received interesting information by being a passive spectator during performances, listening to conversations, or watching the bachatero’s daily activities. Observation was particularly useful during performances, because the contexts were normally too noisy and disturbing for interviewing. The sometimes extremely loud and bad quality of the speaker-sound made me plug my ears with bits of napkin – something which made me hear less; obviously it would have questioned the reliability of my interview data.

Through open-ended, semi structural interviews, I engaged a **participating** role. This methodological approach is advantageous when one wants to understand informant’s



experiences and stories about their own lives (Thagaard 2002:83). When talking to selected informants, they could reflect upon their own life situations. Who they included and excluded became important topics in my interviews. It was also important to me to participate in the typical activities in the field in order to be accepted. One of the activities was dancing. During the year in Spain, I had already been introduced to bachata, so the steps were fairly familiar. However, the Dominican bachata has a local expression which takes time to learn, so I guess “the-investigator-trying-to-integrate” was quite a sight sometimes and did not vanish in the crowd as a local inhabitant.

To carry out better observations and interviews, I used remedies like field note-writing. More rarely, interviews were supplemented by a tape recorder with the purpose of being able to concentrate on body language and getting the exact words of the informant’s stories. The interviews were taped upon obtaining the informant’s permission. Observations and interviews were typed out almost every day so they would not be forgotten. In addition, I tape recorded and filmed music performances during late night/early morning hours, in bars and *colmados*. At first, I considered to avoid filming as not to influence the situations. However, when I experienced that audience and bachateros were undisturbed – and even enjoying dancing and talking in front of the camera – I continued. Several times, I was even encouraged to film the settings.

An investigator always interprets data from his or her experiences. Objectivity might be a goal, but researches will always be filtered through personal subjectivity, where background, bias, feelings, literature acquisition and physical identities play a crucial part. Such localised identities testify a specific epistemology<sup>20</sup>, and the anthropologist’s own understandings and values will therefore mark the comprehension of the results. Consequently, this thesis is not ‘the truth’, but a construction of my informant’s self understandings (Thagaard 2002). Ethnography is formed through interaction between anthropologist and informant. Therefore, a different anthropologist would certainly perceive the field in other ways than I did. Nevertheless, I have intended to present the informants as close to their own perceptions as possible, and hopefully they will see themselves in my analysis. My purpose is to shed light upon characteristic aspects of bachatero-life and Dominican society. I am aware that I have the complete and total responsibility for my constructions and my participation in the production of bachatero meaning.

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<sup>20</sup> Epistemology (from Greek) means theory of knowledge. It is a branch of philosophy which deals with the nature, methods, limitations and validity of knowledge and belief” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epistemology> July 17, 2007).

## Succession and focus of the chapters

In **Chapter 1** I have introduced theoretical and methodological reflections which I perceive as necessary in order to show my approaches and understanding of the thematic foundation.

**Chapter 2** focuses on how music traces a particular political and socio-economic history. Bachatero life needs to be understood in a wider context, and a historical background can explain the hierarchical divisions, classifications and conflicts that are characteristic to Dominican music and identity expressions today.

**Chapter 3** presents Santo Domingo as a social map, where the bachatero's perceptions/use of areas and neighbourhoods becomes significant indicators of class and ethnic belonging.

In **chapter 4** I concentrate on the specific neighbourhoods and venues mentioned in chapter 3, by looking closely at different bachata performances. I intend to show how acting out different styles through performance marks and establishes social distinctions. I extend on class and ethnicity, although I recognize the centrality of gender as well.

**Chapter 5** is devoted to differing life stories of my informants, through which ethnic, class and place dynamics in Dominican culture are reflected.

In the **conclusion** I make connections between the analytical results in the previous chapters in order to evaluate my initial expectations about the relationship between identity and music formation. In addition, I will suggest issues which might be interesting for further investigation.

*Somos*<sup>21</sup>

Un pueblo de hombres a medias  
medio negro  
medio español  
medio indio  
medio africano  
medio latinoamericano  
medio pueblo.  
Hombres a medias.

*Blas R. Jiménez*<sup>22</sup>

## 2. MUSIC TRADITIONS IN LIGHT OF THE SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION OF HISPANIOLA

The current lives of my informants cannot be fully understood without exploring significant historical events on Hispaniola. Historical discourses have had a great influence on identity and music in the Dominican Republic and still have. Retelling of the past implies a reconstruction of identity because it reflects on why individuals and their society are the way they are today. It is important to realize that history is always a construct as it reflects a position with an interest (Friedman 1992). This bias has implications for today's representation of the past. I have chosen, with this in mind, to emphasize certain antecedents which I suggest have had huge impact on the social life of the bachateros.

This chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part I focus on key characteristics of the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial history of the island, and connect this to the overall social demographic composition of Dominican Republic. In the second part I explore musical traditions in the Dominican Republic in light of the historical development outlined in part one.

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<sup>21</sup> Translation of the poem in appendix.

<sup>22</sup> An important Afro-Dominican poet and essayist who dedicates most of his work to promote the value of the African heredity in the Dominican culture. He has published various poems and was the former director of the UNESCO office in Santo Domingo. At present he coordinates *El Centro de Información Afroamericano* (CIAM), (The Afro-American Information Centre).

### ***Political and socio-economic transformations***



Road leading to sugar cane plantation. Normally located far away from other densely populated areas.

The works of Sidney Mintz and Eric Wolf (Mintz 1985, Wolf 1982) have had a major impact on anthropological studies of Latin America. They are both inspired by Karl Marx and concentrate on the processes of production as an explanatory factor for cultural phenomena. They also argue that the complex relationships between technology, land areas and labour must be seen in light of historical processes. As Sidney Mintz states:

[...] I believe that without history its [anthropology's] explanatory power is seriously compromised. Social phenomena are by their nature historical, which is to say that the relationships among events in one "moment" can never be abstracted from their past and future settings [...] (Mintz 1985:xxx)

According to them, it is essential to do anthropological studies and analyses in light of colonial history and capitalist development in Latin-America, and this again in relation to similar developments elsewhere in the world. They focus on the interconnection between Europe and the West Indies in order to explain different cultural orders. Wolf criticises the understanding of culture as static, disconnected phenomenon without relation to other civilizations. According to him, "such a developmental scheme is misleading" (Wolf 1982:5). In such a scheme, social systems are viewed as passive pieces in the world, and their histories become stories of success or failure. It results in a contest between civilisations where the purpose is to see who succeeds and who loses. Cultural systems are set up against each other and morally judged by their progress. This hierarchical ranking holds power relations,

because “those who claim to that purpose [the fact that they are winners] are by that fact the predilect agents of history” (Wolf 1982:5). Wolf’s model of society and culture represents a continuing process of structuring and change. In this process, the involvement of peoples in the expanding world is controlled by the capitalist mode of production and is therefore primarily a political and economic process.

My approach in the first part of the chapter will be influenced by Mintz and Wolf’s way of thinking about transformation. I will not confine myself to the use of only the two of them, but rather view their approach as a tool to systematize my presentation.

The European intrusion in the Caribbean started with Christopher Columbus’ arrival to the Caribbean island of *la Hispaniola*<sup>23</sup> in 1492. When they arrived, they encountered *los taínos* (the indigenous population), who had lived on the island since 900 A.D. The Spanish discovery influenced the political and socio-economic systems already existing on the island and resulted in a shift in ruling forms (Hoetink 1973, Mintz & Price 1985, Mintz 1989, Moya Pons 1995, Wolf 1982). Demographic studies show that the Taíno population of Hispaniola probably numbered 400.000<sup>24</sup> the year of Columbus’ arrival. Their political organisation was different than the Spanish; it was characterized by stateless communities with leadership based on personal qualities and consensus rather than legislation, military and hierarchical organisation (Archetti & Stølen 2001:251). Their livelihood was based on farming, hunting, and fishing. Soon the Spaniards became aware of the potential profit in the islands’ gold deposits. In order to extract the metal and make economic profit, they took advantage of the Indians and forced them to work under harsh conditions in gold mines. Integration in the European economy resulted in considerable transformation of the indigenous social organisation and way of living. Establishing colonial hegemony, the Spaniards exploited the natives; the indigenous population decreased dramatically due to Europeans’ illnesses, killings, forced labour, abortions and collective suicides. By 1519 all the natives were extinct, except a small group of 500 who survived by escaping to the mountains the same year (Moya Pons 1995).

Exhaustion of the Hispaniola gold mines and extermination of the Indians gave way to alternative economies. The colonial powers were interested in producing products which

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<sup>23</sup> *La Hispaniola* or *la Española* (Little Spain) was the name the Spanish conquerors gave the island. The Tainos referred to their island as *Haytí*, *Quisqueya* or *Bohio*. The three last-mentioned names honour *Taino* culture (or Haiti giving associations to blackness, barbarism and evil) (continuing on next page) whereas *Hispaniola* recalls Spanish conquest. Consequently, the name of the island is politically motivated. In this thesis I use the Dominican Republic, as it is the official name.

<sup>24</sup> The number of Hispaniola’s population prior to Columbus’ arrival is much disputed and varies from 300 000 to 3 millions (Hylland Eriksen in Howel & Melhuus 1994:279).

could not be obtained on their own territories. The fertile soil of Hispaniola met their needs as it was suitable for growing sugarcane, tobacco and coffee. By the early 1500s especially sugar cane was widely grown on plantations throughout the island for export to the world market. Europeans also introduced domestic animals that were unknown to the indigenous people, such as cattle, sheep and goats (Wolf 1982:135). Along with cattle farming, the sugar business started to replace mining as the main economic activity. Politically, new administration centres developed as colonial powers, merchants and military forces settled. Urban communities became powerful centres connected to the mining industry, while plantations were common in the rural areas. Economically, the main exported commodity was sugar cane, while farmers produced goods for the urban domestic market Archetti & Stølen 2001:255). Due to the political and economic development during the colonial period, administrative centres with military and civilian elites representing the colonial powers were created. The cities played a central role in the construction of identity and nation building on Hispaniola and as we will see later, music played a key role in this identity building.

As the new sugar industry expanded, the shortage of a manual work-force became critical. To meet the need for labour the Spanish conquerors who had arrived to Hispaniola in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, were joined around the year 1600 by France, Spain, Portugal, Britain and the Netherlands in slave trade with West-Africa. “In the plantation belt [...], the European planters and their descendants broke the resistance of the pre-existing kin-ordered and tributary societies [the Indians’] and replaced them with platoons of African slaves working under a system of forced regiment agriculture” (Wolf 1982:157). The European trade brought millions of Africans to the Caribbean plantations, where two-thirds of the slaves were forced to labour on the sugar plantations (Wolf 1982:196).

The sugar business was a labour-intensive industry because of the time- and energy consuming milling work of the sugarcane. Construction of sugar mills powered by animals, humans or water on the *ingenios* (plantation areas) was an investment in industry which offered good profits. Settlements of sugar cane workers on the *ingenios* were called *bateyes*. The major part of the sugar producing areas was concentrated around the capital of Santo Domingo<sup>25</sup>, being the centre of economic and political power. The *ingenios* soon became the most important populated areas, containing a large number of slaves in addition to Spanish foremen and other foreign technicians (Moya Pons 1995:39). The changing forms of political and economical rule were possible because of the colonial exercise of control and establishment of hierarchical societies. Slave trade was later abolished in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>25</sup> The Spanish founded the city of Santo Domingo in 1498 and made it the capital of the first Spanish colonial in the New World.

## Cultural diversity and the creation of categories

The transformations of Hispaniola led to cultural differentiation. The differentiation and new demographic configuration was created during and after colonial exploitation. Despite the abolition of slave trade, withdrawal of foreign forces and new political and economic strategies, the characteristics of an exploitative system still live on in the daily life of Hispaniola people.

A hierarchy, based on colour, origin and class developed during colonial rule. For historical reasons, colour became one of several criteria for social status. European leaders on the one hand owned the plantations and occupied authoritarian positions, while mainly non-European forced labourers, especially black Africans, provided all the physical work (Mintz in Mintz & Price 1985). The existence of a poor black population and a light-skinned elite created a range of descriptive and categorical labels for the different groups. The ones I will explore further can be described as **ethnicity/‘race’** and **class**. As I will show here and throughout the thesis, these categories stand in a complex relationship to social differentiation and societal formation in general. It is essential to illustrate that ‘race’ and class are not purely political or economic categories linked to modes of production. The presentation has to be understood as a combination of modes of production and the way individuals reflect and comprehend their world.

Colour reference, which has to do with the racial category, became an important factor in social stratification. During the colonial age, people from a number of different countries settled down on the island. Intermarriage and sexual relations between the different groups were rather common, and the offspring resulting from these relations made the population very heterogeneous in terms of physical traits. In order to describe these physical traits and make sense of the complexity, a system of skin colour reference developed. The multi-faceted colour ranking represented shades from *blanco* (white) to *negro* (dark), including *cenizo* (ashen), *pálido* (pale), *trigueño* (light brown, like wheat), *mulato* (black-white mixture), *mestizo* (Indian and Spanish) and *indio* (term referring to the Indians inhabiting the island before the arrival of Columbus) to mention some. According to Michell Wucker (1999), later French colonists of Hispaniola found 128 varying racial categories precisely defined along a mathematical scale. It ranged from *mulato* (half white, half black) to *sang-mêlé* (mixed blood; 127 parts white, 1 part black).

The symbolic reference *indio* is important for the explanation of the Dominican colour system. In his survey on race and ethnicity in the Dominican Republic, David Howard (2001) found that over half of all the informants used *indio* to describe their race. This is interesting, he says, since the majority of the indigenous population was killed or died within fifty years after Columbus' arrival. He explains it as a way of distancing oneself from the white Spanish suppressors, and at the same time from the African slaves. The turn to the reference of Indians solved the problem of any negative connection to either of the two groups (Howard 2001:41).

In addition to skin colours, other physical features such as hair can signify an individual's 'race'. During investigation, Guzman (1970) experienced the use of hair references among individuals on Hispaniola. She found nine hair colours and fifteen main kinds of hair texture, ranging from *pelo bueno* to *pelo malo*<sup>26</sup>. *Pelo bueno* means good hair and is straight, soft and European, while *pelo malo* means bad hair and is curly, unmanageable, rough and tangled. Today, colour categories are even added to the national identification card, *cédula*.

The colours and hair descriptions referring to race reflected more than just a shade and a texture; it referred to inequality of value of an individual and placed people in a racial hierarchy. In other words, physical traits indicated – to a large degree – one's social class belonging. The dark-skinned population was perceived as less worthy, wealthy and prestigious than their white compatriots, and was therefore associated with the lower classes. Curly Afro-hair was thought about as inferior to European straight hair, and indicated a lower social standing.

As we can see, there is a close connection between 'race', class and the modes of production. In the colonial age, those controlling the modes of production acquired economic and political power. They belonged to a higher class and had racial traits such as white skin colour and straight hair due to their mainly European ancestry. Those working for Europeans belonged to a lower economic and political class and had African racial traits. These distinctions are still characteristic in today's Dominican Republic. High class individuals are generally of European ancestry, have economic and political capital and high positioned jobs. Individuals belonging to a low-class have generally darker skin, are politically and economically marginalized and have low social prestige. However, these divisions are not unambiguous;

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<sup>26</sup> In the Dominican Republic, I quickly became aware of frequently used references to skin- and hair colours and hair texture when talking to or observing informants, accidentally overhearing conversations on the street or through media.



high class is not concurrent with European 'race'. There are several examples of poor light-skinned and prestigious dark-skinned people.

Establishing categories based on economic and political terms acts to describe social groups and value them against each other (Wolf 1982). Each group has their specific characteristics and these conditions substantiate their position in the society. The distinctions decide who belongs to a certain category versus those who does not.

As I will describe in the next section, Hispaniola was later divided in a Spanish (later the Dominican Republic) and a French (later Haiti) part. Due to the implementation of different political and economic systems, the creation of categories developed in distinct directions in the Spanish and French nations. In the **Spanish** colony, cattle ranching replaced the sugar business as the main economic activity by the seventeenth century. The slaves in the cattle-ranching sector were less exploited than the slaves on the sugar plantations. Cattle ranching was a pastoral activity where both workers and managers had more free time. The slaves had more social contact with their masters and resulted in an interbreeding of whites, blacks and mulattoes. In the **French** colony, however, the sugar plantation system maintained the most profitable and in order to be at this production level it demanded hard-working slaves. The time-consuming plantation work generated a strict separation between slaves and masters, blacks and whites, as these two groups had less contact than in the Spanish colony (Sagás 2000:23). These two systems strongly influenced the development of different racial and class ideologies in the Dominican Republic and Haiti and the differences between the production systems are mirrored in the differences in class and race relations between the two countries. The population working on the sugar cane plantations were perceived as low-class compared to the cattle ranching workers who were categorized as higher class. This perception is today present in the way Haitian immigrants are treated in the Dominican Republic.

### **Colonialization, resistance and independence**

Because conquerors had established a strict hierarchy and exploited Africans, there was resistance towards colonial control. The skewed distribution of resources resulted in a deeply political, economic and socially divided society which the oppressed were not content with. Spanish leaders struggled with maintaining control over their workers. In the Caribbean colonies there were continuous rebellions and some slaves escaped. In addition to slave turmoil threatening the colonial hierarchy, corsairs arrived and plundered Hispaniola and the

Caribbean in general in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, creating further problems for the masters. Realizing the benefits of contact with the pirates, slaves gained knowledge from and assisted invaders in contraband business. The power of colonial forces was decreased thus changing relations between the different groups socially, economically and politically (Moya Pons 1995:44).

During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the island became a territory of battle between Spain and the three other powerful imperialists of France, the Netherlands and England. In 1697, the Spanish ceded one third of Hispaniola to the French after increased French colonial intrusion. The French called their side **Saint-Domingue** while the Spanish called their part **Santo Domingo**. From that moment on the two countries developed in different ways. Political reforms like *El Code Negro* (the Black Code) implemented in 1685 by the French colonists, set out to ensure a more humane treatment of slaves and had effects on the demographic composition. It allowed whites to marry Africans and the offspring of these couples were to be considered as equal to whites. Due to massive demographic expansion, Saint-Domingue had, by the end of the century, ten times more blacks than whites (Wucker 1999:35). In addition, trade along the border side between the two countries became tense due to contradictory interests connected to different land-use systems; the French plantation export and the Spanish livestock rising. In the 18th century, Saint-Domingue became France's most lucrative colony.

Also, dissatisfaction among the free, but seldom landowning *mulatos*, heated the situation as they were subject to discrimination by whites. The class conflict was between rich white planters, poorer whites, free blacks and slaves. Inspired by the French revolution's (1789–1799) motto of “Liberty, Equality and Fraternity” and realizing their potential achievement of these values, the slaves revolted against their oppressors in 1791 and started a civil war. The turmoil was called the **Haitian revolution** where one of the most powerful leaders was Toussaint L'Ouverture. He led a new slave revolt in 1793 which spread across most of the colony. The uprising finally culminated in the establishment of the free, black republic of Haiti<sup>27</sup> in 1804, the first of its kind in the Western Hemisphere. (Moya Pons 1995:96).

**Haitian domination**, lasting from 1822-1844, is important to the development of racial attitude in the Dominican Republic. The Dominican elite perceived the occupation as humiliating. It led to more tense relations concerning racial belonging. After the establishment

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<sup>27</sup> The Haitians took the indigenous name of the island, *Hayti*.

of independent Haiti, Santo Domingo was invaded in 1805 by the former slaves. Although the attempt failed, Haitians used brutal means such as the scorched earth strategy, killing Dominicans or forcing them to join them to Haiti. This strengthened the national Dominican discourse of the Haitians as being barbaric, black and brutal (Baud 1996, Sagás 2000). A time of Dominican economic decline followed after the Haitian intrusions, lasting for more than a decade. This weakened facilitated the Haitian president Jean-Pierre Boyer's invasion and occupation of the Dominican Republic in 1822. The same year he abolished slavery over the whole territory.

However, Boyer's dream of unifying Hispaniola met innumerable obstacles. The Haitian occupation failed economically as many families belonging to the Hispanic economic elite fled the country because they refused to be dominated by former slaves who occupied their positions. In addition, the Catholic Church opposed the Haitian occupation on racial grounds. It disliked especially the African-derived religious expression *vodou* (voodoo)<sup>28</sup>. The white Hispanic Catholics perceived the black Haitians' religious practice as inferior and to be full of mysterious ceremonies and black magic (Sagás 2000:36). On the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 1844, the elite-representing liberal Juan Pablo Duarte led a rebellion which resulted in the declaration of independence from Haiti. The overthrow of Spanish rule in 1865 was the nation's "second independence" and marked the end of colonial control<sup>29</sup>.

Haitian domination played a key role for the development of anti-Haitian sentiment in the Dominican Republic as it hindered the elite's wish to be associated with the white, civilized Western world. The fact that formerly discriminated slaves managed to dominate their oppressors and establish a Haitian state explains Dominican anxiety. Despite the Haitians' scarce political and economical power, they controlled the entire island for a period. The domination laid further grounds for the anti-Haitian ideology which became a central part of Dominican national discourse. (Baud 1996, Howard 2001, Krohn-Hansen 2001, Sagás 2000).

## The postcolonial situation

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<sup>28</sup> *Vodou* is the popular religion of Haiti. Its origins stem from the beliefs of West African slaves who were forced to Hispaniola who also incorporated religious elements from Catholicism. The spelling *voodoo* is the most known and common usage in American and popular culture, and is perceived as offensive by the Afro practicing communities. I chose to use the spelling *vodou* as this is closer to Haitian and Dominican language. Other alternative spellings are *vaudou*, *voodoo*, *vaudoux* and *vudú*. The word means "saying", "spirit", "God".

<sup>29</sup> Unlike Haiti and other Latin American nations, the Dominican Republic does not celebrate Independence Day from a European colony. Their anniversary of freedom is on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February each year.

'Race' and class ideology also continued to play a central part in the Dominican culture in the postcolonial era. After the colonial period, new dimensions were added to the concepts of 'race' and class. The new states had to legitimize their independence and adopted the categories of race and class developed during the colonial period in order to achieve this.

As already mentioned, the creation of categories developed in different ways in the Spanish and French countries. This was mainly due to the use of political and economic systems distinct to each of these. The categories of 'race' and class with their deep roots in Hispaniola's past were further transformed during the postcolonial era. With this in focus, Harmanus Hoetink (1973) argues that the question of race in the Caribbean varied between the non-Spanish speaking and the Spanish speaking countries. According to him, the distinctions between white and coloured became less absolute in the Spanish Caribbean (f.ex. the Dominican Republic). Here, categories were more flexible and less problematic. However, in the French Caribbean (f.ex. Haiti), the separation between racial groups became stricter and mixing of races was conceptualised as more problematic. He adds that "this does not mean that racial prejudice and discrimination were ever absent in the Spanish Caribbean, but they did not lead to such a pronounced endogamy of the native whites as in other areas" Hoetink 1973:102). In the Dominican Republic there were more examples of wealthy dark-skinned politicians or soldiers and light-skinned poor peasants, than in Haiti. In Haiti the elite consisted mainly of non-Africans while the lower social classes were represented by the dark-skinned population.

Further development of racial ideology on Hispaniola was influenced by U.S. military occupation of the Dominican Republic and Haiti (1915-34). During this period, large-scale import of Haitian workers became an important practice. In need of cheap labour for an increasing sugar cane business – mostly controlled by foreign nations –, Haitians were brought to work in the Dominican Republic. Haitians were illiterate, hard-working and accepted a low income. Since both countries were under U.S. control, the legal barriers for the importation were practically non-existent. Again, the Dominicans felt threatened. This time the Haitians did not come as powerful and feared conquerors but as freeloading infiltrators. They lived in a country which had undergone political instability and economic decline during the nineteenth century. In comparison to the period of their domination where they were stereotyped as strong and threatening, they were now increasingly perceived as poor, illiterate migrants who came to exploit the resources in the wealthier Dominican Republic. The

complaints about *la invasión pacífica* (a peaceful invasion) became commonplace and the Dominicans now viewed the Haitians as racially and culturally inferior (Sagás 2000:40-41).

Categories for sameness and differentiation such as race and class were, as I have shown, created during the colonial age. However, the most profound changes in the development of the racial ideology in the Dominican Republic occurred during the regime of Dictator **Ramón Leonidas Trujillo** (1930-61). His era represents one of the strongest, most absolute and most violent dictatorships to have arisen in Latin America. He used already accessible categories, and gave them new meaning.

Trujillo was annoyed by the increasing population of Haitians especially in the borderlands of the Dominican Republic. Having acquired total political and economic control, he ordered the massacre of Haitians residing in Dominican territory in 1937. The estimated body count ranges from 12 000 to 40 000, many of whom were dark-skinned Dominicans. By physically eliminating the Haitian presence on the border and other parts of the state, Trujillo could start to build his version of Dominican nationalism (Sagás 2000:46). His institutionalisation of a ‘racist’ ideology had effects on how different individuals and groups of society were perceived. Dominicans became everything the Haitians were not. Dominicans of all classes – including those with dark skin – started to consider themselves as not black. Only Haitians were considered black (Sagás 2000:36). As Frank Moya Pons argues, “one of the great paradoxes of Dominican national formation is that as the Hispanic population became darker, the Dominican mentality became whiter” (Moya Pons in Austerlitz 1997:20).

The Dominican Republic experienced several economic and political adjustments from dictatorship to democracy. The collapse of the sugar industry in the late 1980’s, which was a result of the fall of international sugar prices, US reduction of sugar import quota from the Dominican Republic and the inefficiency and corruption of the Dominican government’s State Sugar Council (CEA, Consejo Estatal de Azúcar) resulted in major privatization of the nearly 500 *ingenios* in the year 2000. The introduction of market economy was devastating for the local population. People dependent on the sugar plantations faced unemployment on a large scale. It had devastating effects on *braceros* (sugar cane workers), factory labourers and others connected to plantation work. Many of these workers started to migrate in search of alternative employment. In the 1980’s a wave of migrants left the plantations to find work in other agricultural industries, construction, business and informal economy in the cities (Wooding & Moseley-Williams 2004:42-44).

More recent economic and political factors have also had impacts on the life of Dominicans and Haitians in the Dominican Republic. From the mid 1990s to 2003 the country's economy boomed. Hipólito Mejía, who was elected as president in 2000, saw reduction of poverty through employment, education and healthcare in addition to combating corruption as important political tasks. However, the country faced a setback in 2003. The shift was a profound change, after the growth in the 1980s. Mejía and his colleagues failed to improve conditions in the republic. The government and the country's largest bank, *Banco Intercontinental*, were blamed of corruption<sup>30</sup> of 2 billion dollars. Many lost their savings and the bank went bankrupt. To stabilize the economy, the state asked for loans from The International Monetary Fund (IMF)<sup>31</sup> (Wooding & Moseley-Williams 2004:70). At the expense of poor Dominicans and Haitians, the population was forced to pay the cost of the corruption scandal through higher taxes, inflation, currency devaluation and few social reforms. Politicians distracted public attention from the crisis and focused on poor, black Haitians taking jobs from Dominicans and Haitians exploiting already pressured social services. Xenophobia increased and the government responded by deporting Haitian immigrants, a method characteristic to the Dominican Republic's deportation policy for over 15 years.

The majority of Haitian immigrants lack visas, valid work permits, birth certificates (for children) or *cédula* (legal documentation card with name, registration number, photograph and a thumb-print required for all economic transactions and voting) (Wooding & Moseley-Williams 2004:49) and can therefore not claim the same rights as Dominicans. Denial of documentation violates the rights of Haitian immigrants and prevents Dominican-born offspring of Haitian immigrants from obtaining Dominican citizenship. Legally, they cannot have the same benefits such as education, health care and housing. Through reference to skin colour on the Dominican identification card, 'racial' perceptions are being upheld. More than just a reference to physical traits, it can indicate where any Dominican or Haitian stands in the social scale.

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<sup>30</sup> Both the Dominican Republic and Haiti have several times experienced corrupted regimes and governments who fail to accomplish their promises. Experiences of presidents who aim at improving their own conditions, rather than the nation's, have shaped people's perceptions of political systems. Petter Skauen (conciliator and advisor who has worked on Hispaniola for several years) referred to a comment he heard: "If the president is not corrupt, he is *maricón*" (homosexual). Here, *maricón* symbolizes a male who is not tough, strong and masculine enough to be corrupt. For centuries, male leadership and corruption has had a strong connection on Hispaniola.

<sup>31</sup> The total Dominican foreign debt is today 7.2 billion dollar according to government sources. (<http://dr1.com/business/index.shtml>, 2006).

With the election of former president Leonel Fernández in 2004 and initiation of economic reforms, the economy has stabilized. There has been considerable growth in tourism and in *las zonas francas* (free trade zones). However, the economy continues to experience repetitive energy shortage, which results in frequent *apagones* (blackouts) and expensive prices.

As we have seen through this historical presentation, ‘race’ and class have been major organising categories in Dominican society. A clear black-white distinction has existed, where white has represented civilisation, European ancestry, Catholic values and economic prosperity. Black, on the other hand, has symbolised the opposite: Barbary, African ancestry, voodoo and poverty. In this system Haitians have been seen as the incarnation of blackness. As I will show next, historical transformations have had a huge impact on musical life in the Dominican Republic.

### ***The stage for the development of musical traditions***

How have musical traditions influenced and been influenced by ‘race’ and class relations in the Dominican Republic? We will now look at how the general political and economic transformations in Dominican history are mirrored in the musical history of the country, but also how music has contributed to shape historical periods and transformations. In the introduction, I referred to the fact that history is always written with an interest. This statement is applicable to music too. Genres are being used and manipulated, with a particular interest, to confirm for example political control, ‘race’-, class- and gender differences. They are being defined and redefined in order to express a certain idea, opinion or belief.

The colonial era contains many different sources for the development of musical life on Hispaniola. The history of this period may clarify the way the musical genres have arisen, been used, shaped and reshaped as expressions of Dominican culture. Thus, the historical basis is useful for an understanding of Dominican identity and the role music plays in this representation. Caused by the cultural contact between different continents, the Dominican Republic as for the Caribbean<sup>32</sup> in general, holds musical genres of great diversity.

Regarding **bachata**, it is impossible to make sense of this musical genre without mentioning its strong relationship to **merengue**, a genre categorized as a strong symbol of Dominican national identity. Since it is known to be an older musical expression than bachata I will first

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<sup>32</sup> See Kenneth M. Bilby’s exploration of the Caribbean as a musical region (Bilby in Mintz & Price 1985).

introduce this cultural expression. These two phenomena have developed alongside each other and reflect a common social context. However, as time has gone by, they have grown in different directions and each have a specific social significance.

There is a continuous dispute over the origin of merengue. The existence of various explanations testifies that the subject is complex and incorporates aspects of power in the battle of categories. One of the major disagreements concerns its connections to its African, as opposed to European, roots. The disagreement is about whether African or European traits are to be associated with merengue. Individuals such as authors, intellectuals and musicians attempt to define and categorize the musical genre and use it as a tool for expressing a viewpoint or an apprehension. The categorizing is based on conditions and ideas from the past. Behind merengue's link to Dominican identity is a century and a half of racial and class confrontation. Merengue is interpreted in a discourse of this hegemony, something which makes it challenging to talk about its African heritage. This is because it challenges the institutionalisation of the Indian and European civilization-bias in Dominican identity.

According to Jean Fouchard, merengue developed directly from Haitian *mereng* (*méringue* in French), evolving from the fusion of slave music (Fouchard in Austerlitz 1997:2). Also, my Spanish teacher informed me of merengue's African origin by referring to a story she had been told. She explained that merengue dance has a specific choreography and it incorporates a particular step which has connotations to the past. This is where the dancing couple drag their feet on the ground, referring to a slave in chains with a heavy ball at the end. These, and similar arguments, have been criticized by many Dominicans who deny any Haitian influence on their national music. For example, the merengue innovator Luis Alberti suggests that merengue "has nothing to do with black or African rhythms" (Alberti in Austerlitz 1975:71).

However, looking beyond a detailed exploration of the numerous historical versions, I would argue that merengue is a mix; it is Afro-European. In such a sense it is a syncretic genre with both African (Haitian) and European elements. Deciding how much it pulls to either of the two culture's continents is not my main point here. My aim by mentioning the discussion of merengue's origins is rather to illustrate that music is drawn into the expression of Dominican identity formation. Juan Rodriguez contributed to the discussion of the genre's origin. He informed me that "Of course, in this country you are not going to hear that merengue has a lot to do with the Haitians who came from Africa. I'm going to tell you this, with a low voice and in English to avoid offending people around us; what most people don't know is that the merengue is Haitian". His interpretation, along with a number of similar



conversations I had with other people, proves the actuality of musical origins and history in the present. It also shows the tension connected to racial ideas in music.

### Trujillo's dictatorship and its impact on musical life

In Dominican history music has been used in a variety of political contexts related to the construction and maintenance of social identity. Genres have been exploited in order to strengthen political control. Dictator Trujillo, or *El Jefe* (the Boss) as he was called, realized the potential of strengthening his position by using music. With immense influence on the political, economic and cultural areas, Trujillo contributed to the development of popular music in the Dominican Republic. His nationalism was reinterpreted by urban and rural populations according to local attitudes, and strongly influenced music and dance in the Dominican society. By carrying on ideas from the past he justified his position of power. During his reign he expanded especially the ideas of 'race' but also class and influenced music with these ideologies. His direct involvement with merengue, and the consequences this had for bachata, determined to a great extent the musical landscape of the country.

Like most Dominicans and Haitians, Trujillo loved music and dance, and his favourite was merengue. This genre had been popular since the nineteenth century, and when he came to power it was only one of a number of regional music styles existing in the countryside – for example *carabiné*, *mangulina*, *pripri*, *sarandunga* and variants of merengue, including the *pambiche*, the **accordion-based** *merengue cibaño* (merengue from the **Cibao** region) and merengue played with **guitars**. It was accordion-based merengue (also called *merengue típico* or *perico ripiao*)<sup>33</sup>, which Trujillo later made so popular. Guitar-based music like *bolero*, *son* and *guaracha* were also popular in the rural areas (Hernandez 1995:6-9).

Music in general was an important tool for the survival of slaves. Consequently, with immigration from Haiti, African cultural expressions have influenced Dominican society. Rooted in slave musical expressions, sacred genres such as *salve*<sup>34</sup> and *música de palos*<sup>35</sup> were common in connection with ritual performances (Hernandez 1995:37). In the sugar districts,

<sup>33</sup> As sophisticated urban ballroom-merengue later became increasingly connected to high society, it became important to distinguish this merengue from the rural low-class accordion-based merengue. The refined merengue was called *merengue típico* or *perico ripiao*, whereas the rural was labelled merengue tradicional.

<sup>34</sup> *Salve* is a call and response type of singing that is highly ceremonial and used in pilgrimages and at parties dedicated to saints. The use of *panderos*, *atabales* (both are drums) and other African instruments is typical ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music\\_of\\_the\\_Dominican\\_Republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music_of_the_Dominican_Republic), May 20 2007).

<sup>35</sup> *Música de palos* refers to the percussive music in religious fiestas of Dominican *vodú*; the *palo* is a type of drum.

African-based magic/religious expressions, like *vodou*, are still important parts of identity construction. The Dominican *vodou* is a Haitian religion (African origins) with heavy Catholic influences. During my fieldwork I was fortunate to observe two amazing *vodou* rituals, where I experienced its fascinating music and dance expressions. This type of folklore was an important dimension of my Haitian informant's identity, either it was their family members, friends or themselves who practiced it. The connection is evident because some of the bachateros made references to *vodou* in song lyrics. However, the sense of belonging goes beyond that; it refers emotionally to aspects of their self comprehension. When I asked about it I understood that they had strong feelings for the custom. They often associated it with Haiti and their African heritage. *Vodou* tradition was definitely an important part of their soul.

The north western region Cibao was considered as the elite's home, and the light-skinned rural peasants of this area played the accordion-based merengue. However, the earliest merengues were performed with guitars or similar string instruments and it was not until the 1870's, when the accordion was adopted into Dominican society, that it became the principal instrument of merengue groups from the Cibao region. The Cibao elite, for their part, viewed the local peasant music as a vulgar, rural and low-class expression with lyrics referring to this type of social life. Whether played on guitar or accordion, merengue was categorized as non-representative for the elite. Instead, they turned to more "refined" musical genres such as US one-step, fox-trots and Cuban rumbas (Hernandez 1995:37). The first printed reference to merengue appeared in a Dominican newspaper article in 1854 where it was described as a confusing dance. Also, intellectuals of the urban elite denigrated merengue for being indecent and ridiculous. (Ureña & Velázquez 2004:26-27).

However, once scorned by the elite because it was rooted in low-class culture, merengue eventually became a symbol of national identity. In stead of decreasing, it increased in popularity. Before merengue could enter polite society, however, it needed to be "dressed up" appropriately. Dictator Trujillo, who came to power in 1931, promoted this transformation as one of his serious political concerns. He founded his nationalist agenda in merengue. As Austerlitz notes, "[...] the Dominican dictator understood that rural expressive forms can serve as effective symbols of national identity" (Austerlitz 1995:52). He turned merengue into a national symbol of the power and modernity of his regime, transforming the regional merengue. Focusing on lyrical content, it should refer to phenomena recognizable to the low-class population; for example sugar cane cultivation. However, it also appealed to other classes because it was Hispaniola's largest economic recourse. Lyrics reflecting rural environment connoted an idealized rural culture symbolizing nationhood.

Trujillo also changed rhythm and instrumentation to a more European style in an attempt to sophisticate and refine merengue. Then he forced it upon the elite. Trujillo introduced the “Europeanized” merengue in elite ballrooms to an astonished upper-class audience too scared to openly question the dictator’s preference. Gradually, it entered the social world of the classes. The suppression of African characteristics was evident. Merengue became a medium through which the dictator’s preference for Hispanicism, whiteness and Catholicism could be played out. Under these conditions African expressions such as vodú were either abandoned or driven underground (Davis 1987:33-48).

As sophisticated urban ballroom-merengue later became increasingly connected to high society, it became important to distinguish this merengue from the rural low-class guitar-based merengue. The refined merengue was called merengue típico or perico ripiao, whereas the rural was labelled merengue tradicional. However, Trujillo broadcasted both styles and increased possibility for communication across classes throughout the country.

Trujillo’s use of propaganda together with music had huge impacts on popular Dominican music. The dictator had his own orchestra, *El Orquesta del Presidente Trujillo* (The orchestra of the President Trujillo), which was imposed to specialize in the white merengue from Cibao. These musicians also had to compose songs praising the President and his everyday actions. The publication of *La Antología de la Era de Trujillo* (Anthology of the era of Trujillo) in 1960 included over 300 merengues dedicated to the leader. Examples of the song titles illustrate the megalomania; “*Trujillo es grande e immortal*” (Trujillo is great and immortal), “*Gloria al benefactor*” (Glory to the benefactor), “*El embajador-at-large*” (The ambassador-at-large), “*Fé en Trujillo*” (Faith in Trujillo) and “*Trujillo el gran arquitecto*” (Trujillo, the great architect”) (Hernandez 1995:43).

The leader’s influence on popular music was by no means limited to his orchestra, change of instruments or lyrical content. During his regime he also controlled all the country’s broadcast technologies and forbade import of foreign recordings. Trujillo’s brother José Arismendi, owned the country’s leading radio station, *La voz del Partido Dominicano* (The voice of the Dominican Party) and his band often played in an elegant ballroom located inside the broadcasting studio of the radio company. No musicians were allowed to record songs without Trujillo’s permission and the few who did were live performers from the studio. In this way the dictator controlled the recording business and made media an effective way to spread his agenda. He also provided *velloernas* (jukeboxes) in establishments such as *barras*, *cabaretes* and *burdeles* (various bars associated with prostitution). It was a desirable agreement for the owners of these businesses as the instalment of sound system was free of charge, in exchange for giving away 50 percent of the earnings. The *colmados*

(neighbourhood stores) could have a sound system behind the counter to attract costumers to drink and dance. Music attracted people to the easily accessible stores and *burdeles* and formed a social context for the Dominican population. Especially to poor individuals, these became important locations because they could not afford music equipment themselves. Consequently, they became typical places for musical transmission (Hernandez 1995, Juan Rodriguez, personal communication September 20, 2007).

As I have illustrated, the dictator took control over the musical landscape. However, his position as leader became increasingly threatened in the mid 1950's. The country's economic situation declined, mostly due to a decline in the sugar cane business. Both internally and externally, opposition to his regime grew because of his massacre of thousands of Haitians (and Dominicans) in 1937.<sup>36</sup>

In May 1961, Trujillo was assassinated by a group of conspirators (including Dominican military and business leaders) provided with guns from by the CIA. Even though the leader was gone, some of his colleagues – such as his family members – remained in powerful positions. His personal secretary, Joaquín Balaguer, functioned as president a while after his demise. However, in the end increasing pressure towards Trujillo's men made their justification of the dictatorship impossible. By November 1961, most of Trujillo's family members fled the country.

### **The fall of Trujillo: Redefinitions and effects**

The dictator's death marked a turning point in Dominican history. It was the beginning of a new era; an era of creativity and redefinition of Dominican identity. The assassination of Trujillo was followed by a rupture in the political, economic and demographic system, but also in terms of values and norms characteristic to Dominican society. It became necessary to redefine Dominican national identity.

During his regime, the dictator was more preoccupied with his personal and family wealth than the nation's. With his self-centred agenda, he and his associates managed to take possession of over half of the country's total wealth and occupy vast areas of land. After his death, the Dominican Republic was faced with the challenge of dismantling the political,

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<sup>36</sup> Also, the incident of the Mirabal sisters accumulated resistance towards the dictator. The Cibaeño, well-educated sisters, together with their husbands, actively opposed the Trujillo regime. In 1960, as the sisters travelled to visit their jailed consorts, they were beaten to death by the despot's men.

economic and military establishments raised by Trujillo, and replace them with new ones more suitable for a modern nation. The existence of a political vacuum made this a major challenge. Having been under dictatorship for more than three decades, Dominicans had no experience in participatory government. Moreover, there existed few institutions that could handle the transformation. Unprepared for a rapid transition to democracy, the nation experienced an unstable political period. From Trujillo's fall in 1961 to 1966 (when Balaguer was elected as president for the second time), the Dominican Republic went through a coup, a civil war and a U.S. occupation. (Hernandez 1995:71-72). Joaquín Balaguer was also the man who, in 1983, published the 'racist' book "*La isla al revés: Haití y el destino dominicano*" (The island upside down: Haiti and Dominican destiny), which became a best seller.

Hope for opportunities and participation in the new era of modernity characterized the period after the dictatorship. Cities like the capital Santo Domingo (named *Ciudad Trujillo* during the dictatorship) attracted populations living in rural areas. Peasants in large numbers began moving to urban centres, creating important demographic transformations to the nation. "In 1960, 70 percent of a total population of three million still lived in rural agricultural areas. [...] Between 1960 and 1970 the population of Santo Domingo almost doubled, rising from 370,000 to 699,000 inhabitants" (Martínez in Hernandez 1995:74). However, the capital was unprepared for this process and *barrios* (shantytowns) were created in marginal outskirts of the city. The unqualified masses, unable to find employment and disconnected from their rural origins, were condemned to reside in poor barrios, work in the informal sector and socialize in new locations earlier unknown to them. There existed no centres of recreation or amusement such as discotheques in the urban areas. As a response to the need for socialisation, the *barras* and especially the *colmados* became important places for communication among migrants. Because bachata was excluded from FM radio and television, these establishments opened up possibilities for listening to bachata (Dagoberto Tejeda, personal communication, May 2, 2005). Merengue, on the other hand, became integrated in the formal market, being introduced to the broadcast media and officially distributed in large quantities.

## Bachata; emergence, genre, style and social context



Bachata performance in the street of the barrio. The musicians – who were friends of Ramón – made use of only *maracas*, *tambora* y guitarra. The music they played sounded very much like the slow Cuban *bolero*.

The music that now is called bachata emerged from and makes part of a long tradition of *música de guitarra* (guitar music) in Latin America. Some of the influences have been Mexican *ranchera*, Cuban *son* and *bolero*, Puerto Rican *plena* music and Columbian-Ecuadorian *vals*. The guitar tradition was characterized by trios or quartets which used guitars and percussion instruments such as *maracas*<sup>37</sup> and *bongó* drums (Hernandez 1995:5). The *bolero* was also considered a **dance** associated with sentiments (normally about success and failure in love relationships) and sensuality<sup>38</sup>. Similarly, bachata has changed from being an exclusive romantic musical genre to being dance-focused as well (Hernandez 1995:27). The character of the couple-dance is achieved through sensual body movements with focus on the hips of both partners. The steps follow a “one-two-three-kick” pattern, where the “kick” is a small hop or a toe touch.

The most notable influence on bachata was the Cuban *bolero*, and to a lesser extent *son*. Introduced in the nineteenth century, Cuban migrants escaping from the Wars of Independence (1895-98) brought both musical expressions to the Dominican Republic. Like the bachateros who succeeded them decades later, the *boleristas* were of rural, humble origins and played by ear (Hernandez 1995:5).

<sup>37</sup> Simple percussion instruments usually played in pairs, consisting of a dried calabash filled with seeds.

<sup>38</sup> Some claim that *el bolero* has had most influence on bachata dance, while others relate it more to *el son*. Considering bachata’s strong connection to *el bolero* the first suggestion seems reliable. However, the bachata dance steps in bachata and *son* do also resemble. Interestingly, I observed that Haitians dancing bachata had more similar footwork to *son* than the Dominicans. This was especially true for one step where they swinged one lifted leg in front of the other.

Considering bachata as a **genre**, explained as a category of music, it incorporates various **stylistic** features (ways of playing the genre of bachata). The **genre** can always be identified by two features: its instrumentation and vocal use. The essential instruments are one (or sometimes two) lead guitar(s), *maracas* or *güira* (metal cylinder-shaped scraper perforated with a nail, played with a stiff brush)<sup>39</sup>, *bongós* and sometimes *tambora* (both are drums). Nowadays, the *güira* has replaced the *maracas* in many contexts. However *tambora*, characteristic to merengue, is no substitute for *bongos* as it is still central to bachata, especially *bolero-bachatas*. The other bachata characteristic is its vocal tone as there are always lyrics to the melody. The lyrics which are highly emotional stimulate the listener to reflect upon the relationship between an individual and his or her social world. Two romantic musical expressions, the serenade and the *decima*, affected bachata as a genre with their emotional lyrical content. Originating in Spain and introduced during the colonial age, they influenced bachata with its themes of love, betrayal, despair and disillusionment (Hernandez 1995:10). The guitar was a vehicle through which musicians could express such emotional dilemmas.

Considering different **styles** in bachata, I choose to cite Hernandez for a definition:

First, style is intrinsically related to the social context in which music or any other expressive event takes place. Second, the patterning that produces identifiable ways of doing things reflects cultural meanings shared by all those who participate in a communicative event such as musical performance. Third, these meanings are related to fundamental ways to conceptions of identity – the ways people perceive and define themselves, especially in opposition to other groups of people. The obvious and inevitable corollary of these motifs is that changes within a social context are certain to find resonance in stylistic changes. We can also be certain that the ways these resonances are expressed will reflect the survival strategies as well as perceptions and values of the social group experiencing the change (Hernandez 1995:18).

In accordance with this, I understand style as different ways of performing a genre. The realisation of a style is context-bound (depends on the situation) and as performances these will vary according to the context and give the genre a specific social meaning. This discursive category is constructed upon people's experiences of and participation in specific performances. In chapter 4 I will explore further how the bachateros perform the different styles of bachata.

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<sup>39</sup> *El güiro* is, like *la güira*, a percussion instrument commonly used in Latin American music. However, it differs from *la güira* in that it consists of an open-ended, hollow gourd with parallel notches cut in one side. It is played by rubbing a wooden stick along the notches to produce a ratchet-like sound (<http://en.wikipedia.org>).

Now, what are some of the stylistic features in bachata? Bachata sometimes has a sobbing singing style, especially with the highly romantic songs, and it is this *llanto* (crying/sobbing) that has given the name *música de amargue* (music of bitterness) to bachata. *Música de amargue* or bachata in general is often referred to as *El blues dominicano*. Even though they differ, a comparison to the U.S. blues illustrates that both musical expressions have stylistic features that deals with emotional themes;

“The concept of ‘amargue’ is similar but not identical to the U.S. ‘blues’. Blues suggests a certain emotional depression, even despair, perhaps caused by a woman, but they can also be caused by the hopelessness of the singer’s socio-economic reality. Amargue, on the other hand, is an emotional state caused by women: a man who is *amargado* (embittered) is one who has been deceived [...]. Indeed, so many bachata songs expressed this bitterness that in the early 1980’s, bachata began to be called *música de amargue*. The embittered man typically consoles himself in a bar, drinking with friends [...]” (Hernandez 1995:168) (See chapter 3 and 4 for “drinking culture” and social bachata contexts such as *colmados* and *barras*).

Pioneers of bachata such as Luis Segura, also called *El Aññoñaito* (“*ñoño* is a word used to refer to a whining, spoiled child; *aññoñaito* is a diminutive of this word” (Hernandez 1995:20), Leonardo Paniagua and José Manuel Calderon became well-known for using this sobbing technique. However, there are also bachata styles that express less emotional aspects and have a more relaxed, open vocal quality.

Throughout songs, the bachateros often send *saludos* (greetings) out to the audience by referring to names of friends or family members present at performances. This stylistic feature serves to strengthen the relation between the musicians and his or her community. I repeatedly observed bachateros speak out names during performances. Also, they cried out phrases and exclamations, such as *ron!* (rum!), *vamos* (present form of the verb *ir* which means “to go”), *chichi* (a word used to express affection towards females) or *mami!* (mommy!). These expressions are examples of how musicians improvise in bachata, as this is outside the formal lyrical structure of the song. Improvising is a highly valued skill among bachateros and their audience.

The lyrics in bachata reflect the musicians’ rural connection, and sometimes their marginalised educational background as well. Many lyrics are misspelled, “what mainstream society would call grammatical and pronunciation mistakes, although sometimes the irregularities are simply regionalisms” (Hernandez 1995:21). Most of my Haitian bachateros wrote and sang with a Haitian, barrio accent and this did not seem to bother their audience. In



contrast, the Dominican bachateros scorned musicians with spelling errors as they were preoccupied with their own use of a correct Spanish.

Another stylistic feature in bachata, emerging in the late 1970's and 1980's, is known as the *double sentido* (double entendre). This popular narrative strategy manipulates language with the purpose of having a humorous result. This is a metaphorical tool which can conceal words and meanings such as official ideas or matters in sexual relationships between male and female. The manipulation of language in bachata verifies the skills of bachatero performers and the ability to laugh at one's own misery. Interestingly, the importance and use of language in bachata can resemble that of U.S. rap music. Street-language and inventive word-play are essential tools in rap as well. Like bachateros, rappers tend to use double entendres and other forms of manipulation of words. The building of vocabulary and narrative powers is an important parameter for measuring musicians' language skills and popularity; it empowers the performer.



*Güira*



*Maraca*



*Tambora*



*Bongós*

It is crucial to explore bachata as a **socially positioned category** in order to understand the everyday life of my informants. The bachateros I met performed in different stylistic ways depending on context. Their varying interpretations gave me important information about the complex social meaning contained in and expressed through bachata.

Improvisation is one technique which positions bachata and bachata performers in the social hierarchy. The non-standardised written music has traditionally often involved improvisation, something characteristic especially in live performances. I observed several improvisation situations during the bachatero's concerts or gatherings. The ability to sing and play guitar well were highly valued skills. In this regard, a talented musician would receive respect and appreciation from the community. Such attention could often result in free food and drinks for the bachatero (Hernandez 1995:11).

Among Dominicans, my informants included, there tends to be some disagreement whether the term *bachata* existed before it referred to a genre of music. Many argue that the literal meaning of the word *bachata* was party, good time and spontaneous gatherings in the street with food – **accompanied** by guitar-based music, so it was the party, not the music that was called *bachata*. In daily Dominican speech the term *bachata* is well used and I often heard people use the verb *bachatear* when they were going out partying. Others argue that *bachata* meant to get together with the purpose of playing the genre music of bachata. Disagreement aside; the term *bachata* has been, and still is, connected to certain people who stand in a specific position in the social hierarchy, which consequently has given *bachata* – whether it initially referred to a party or a musical genre – a social meaning.

The term *bachata* has existed for some decades<sup>40</sup>, but the social content of it has undergone constant change. The transformation of bachateros' social position implies 'racial'/ethnic, class as well as gender aspects. The already-mentioned recreational events were associated with underprivileged individuals residing rural areas (Hernandez 1995:12). These people were mostly black and low-class. Originally, the term had value-neutral connotations as a backyard (if rowdy) party. In the 1960, the music connected to these get-together's was described as the romantic genre of the rural population. Hernandez has, through the analysis of bachata lyrics and social transformations, written extensively about bachata and gender. She argues that during the 1960's, bachata lyrics focused on women as romantic long-life companions. The bachateros longed for eternal love and often expressed

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<sup>40</sup> According to Hernandez, who relies on her bachata musicians' narratives, it was not before 1970 that musicians began to call their music *bachata*. Before that, they called it *bolero campesino* (country-style bolero) or simply *música popular* (ibid:11-12).

lament that the female had left him. This female focus had little problems of being socially accepted. The 1970's and 1980's were decades of worsening economic and social conditions, with the effects of misgovernment and migration to the capital. The situation affected deeply the poor populations who were associated with *bachata*. Consequently, *bachata* came to have negative connotations as it reflected the harsh social conditions in brothels and bars, where *bachata* was performed. Instead of blaming grim circumstances on the state, men in *bachata* took it out on women; they expressed anger and hostility towards them (Hernandez 1995). This portrayal of women – misogyny – was harder to swallow, and together with the class connotations it was associated with, *bachata* began to be viewed by the upper-classes as backward, coarse and rude, because the musical genre's ambience and lyrics now reflected heavy drinking and womanizing; It became related to prostitution, alcohol consumption and disreputable contexts (Hernandez 1995:12-13). During the 1990's the focus shifted to some extent away from misogyny, something which contributed to its crossover into the mainstream.

A comparison between bachatas' and US *honky tonk* music's social development is fruitful: In "Popular Music, Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies" (Frith 2004), Malone explains that the years during World War II were decisive for the development of *honky tonk* (Malone in Frith 2004:120-121). At this time, many states in the US, especially the Southern ones, saw a considerable rural-urban migration. The masses, becoming urban in residence but still rural in outlook and style, experienced several problems like housing, work and separated families – just like rural migrants did in the Dominican Republic after Trujillo's fall. In order to cope with a difficult reality, Americans – mostly men – began to socialize in bars called *honky tonk*, which were associated with low-class, juke boxes, prostitution, alcohol and violence – and this social setting has many similarities to that of *bachata*. (see chapter 4 for further description). The music played in these rough establishments was called *honky tonk* music (ibid.). The lyrics focused mainly on working class everyday life, with tragic themes of lost love, loneliness, alcoholism, adultery, and self-pity. In the early 1990s it crossed over into the mainstream – something also experienced with *bachata*. Today, *honky tonk* is regarded to be the most recognized and mainstream subgenre of country music (<http://en.wikipedia.org> May 20, 2007).

Class and 'race' ideologies established in the past had a crucial impact on *bachata* music itself. Consequently, the music and its people were categorized in a similar way. *Bachata*, its performers and audience was perceived as poor, rural, vulgar and black. The fact that 'the

others'; the upper-classes, understood bachateros and their music as inappropriate, was expressed during a visit I had to a luxury hotel in Santo Domingo:

Awaiting someone in the bar I asked the bartender whether he could play bachata music. Hesitating, he responded that he could fulfil my request. In addition, he reassured me that the director of the hotel had banned bachata music from the resort during a period of time in the past. Searching for bachata CD's, he finally found one at the bottom of the pile and put it on. Noticing my positive reaction, he said: "Well, at least tourists like bachata! However, Dominicans staying here at the hotel [mostly well-off Dominicans] don't so I might turn it off after a while and play merengue instead". When I asked – already assuming the response – if he had Felix Cumbé or Robin Cariño there too, he just shook his head and replied that this was not the place to play bachata, and especially not bachata played by Haitians.

I was not able to find out when bachata was banned from the hotel. However, the fact that it **was** is interesting in itself. The example illustrates the perception of bachata as backward and unwanted in particular settings. For the upper-classes the bartender referred to, bachata represented a lower standing in the hierarchy than merengue and was thus perceived as being inappropriate of being played in spheres limited to rich people. Clearly, the struggles between musical genres reflect a battle between classes and ethnic groups as one class – which also has ethnic dimensions – intends to dominate the other. The negotiation of position in the social hierarchy is expressed by the upper-class stigmatisation of bachata, and the upper-classes are mainly white.

There is a variety of alternative names to *bachata*. The music recorded and reproduced by rural population was referred to as *bolero*, or *bolero campesino* (country-style bolero), however more frequently as *música popular* (Hernandez 1995:12). Other more negative associated examples of denominations for the musical genre are *música cachivache* (knickknack, bauble); a term referring to bachata's worthlessness, *música de guardia* (guard's music); a name with connotations to low-rank soldiers drinking and listening to low-quality music in bars and brothels (Hernandez 1995:12) and *música de sereno* (music of dew); dew fell on low-class people who were up early to work in higher class residences, and they listened to bachata. Nicknames with negative connotations given to bachata by the upper-classes were to identify the musicians themselves and the class they represented in urban areas. In this way, they tried to explain what 'the others' [the bachateros] were in comparison to them and thus make sense of their social world. The elite viewed themselves as representing superior culture, while low-class was corresponding with inferior culture.

The origins of bachata are rural. However, it developed as a unique genre primarily under urban conditions. It emerged during the political, economic and social developments of the 1960's (Nyvlt 2001:80). Rural migrants perceived by urban settlers as unskilled and uneducated *campesinos* (peasants) were prevented from occupying jobs in the formal market. Instead, they became part of the informal sector characterized by small scale jobs, an unregulated marketplace and manual labour. Living under demanding conditions, migrants created many of the jobs themselves, such as selling cigarettes and fruit in the streets, providing domestic services or, relevant to my musical focus; reproducing recorded products (pirate copies) and selling them for reduced price.

### **Radio Guarachita – a change in the air**

The large amount of migrants in Santo Domingo in the 1960's created considerable demand for rural music. Rhadames Aracena, the only radio broadcaster during the Trujillo era who was allowed to import and play foreign music such as the Cuban bolero, recognized the large bachata audience and the economic profit it constituted. Taking advantage of the political, economic and social chaos after Trujillo's death – which was characterised by an unsettled market and a huge number of marginalized migrants having sporadic and unofficial jobs – Aracena saw the possibility of becoming the leading promoter of Dominican guitar music. In 1965 he opened up the **Radio Guarachita** enterprise (*guarachita* is the diminutive of the word *guaracha*, a type of Cuban popular music) which became the most popular bachata radio station in the country. Playing rural bachata music for urban audience, he managed to make a connection between the urban and the rural world; the traditional and the modern world (Hernandez 1995:87). Through this medium he succeeded in creating a sense of community between individuals in the countryside and in the city. But the genres' exposure was restricted. As no mainstream Dominican radio was willing to play bachata, it could only be heard on A.M. airwaves. Up until the early 1990's it was excluded from the F.M. broadcasting.

Aracena was also conscious of the great pirate copy circulation and the migrant's desire for recording their music. He saw his main task to record rural migrant music, and he did it on 45 RPM vinyl singles. This was to become, for a long time, the standard format of bachata releases, until cassettes took over in the late 1980's. However, to start with, the radio broadcaster was reluctant to promote bachata as it was associated with low-class, low quality,

vulgarity and places like bars, brothels and *colmados* where alcohol consumption was high. In order to cover up their rural and uneducated class and ethnic background, he corrected the musician's grammar and pronunciation when they recorded in his studio. All my informants had good knowledge of this, especially those who had worked for him. They expressed gratitude towards Aracena who had made them more refined musicians. As Robin told me:

Many have told me that I sing well. But none of them have told me **how** to sing well. He [Aracena] taught me this. He taught me everything. He gave his good side to me. And this is of enormous value. I'm alive because of what he taught me. Because, when I didn't pronounce a word right he told me off. He said that I shouldn't record anything until I had learned the right pronunciation. He had big eyes, and gave me the *no voy a joder mas contigo-mirada* (I'm not going to mess around with you no more). If I sang *amol* (love) and not *amor*, he would teach me how to pronounce the 'r and not the 'l. Haitians often use the 'l, a lot more than Dominicans. But there are Dominicans too who don't know how to say 'r, like uneducated people who have never spoken to the educated ones.

In addition, Rhadames saw the need for a common thread between the migrants, who came from different parts of the Dominican Republic. The station helped individuals maintain contact with their friends and families by offering the listeners *servicios públicos* (free public-service announcements). The poor infrastructure during the 1960's made communication between migrants and their relatives in rural areas difficult. However, important messages like personal problems, illness, death or birth could be announced through Radio Guarachita. The station had slogans referring to this benefit: "Radio Guarachita has no specific day, nor hour for the messages" (Dagoberto Tejeda, personal communication, May 05, 2002), informing that it was at its listener's service at any time. Another slogan was: "We are a big family. There are more than a quarter of a million of us. We are the biggest and most powerful family. We are the Radio Guarachita" (Hernandez 1995:93). These words appealed to migrants separated from their friends and families as they referred to an imaginary community where they could maintain contact.

Even though the bachateros I talked to were grateful of Aracena's help, they also informed me of his more exploitative side. As Robin uttered: "He didn't pay me. He didn't even pay for the transportation. I recorded many songs but he put most of the money in his own pocket. For me, it [the money] wasn't enough to eat. However, he offered me food at his home sometimes". The relationship between the musicians and Aracena is very likely when referring to long established ideas from the colonial times; "Indeed, Aracena's highly personal yet hierarchical style of dealing with his musicians is characteristic of traditional Dominican

paternalistic patron-client relationships, in which social and economic subordinates are flagrantly exploited, but their loyalty is maintained through personal favours” (Hernandez 1995:100). During the times of foreign control and dictatorship, a social organisation characterized by a hierarchic system was established. The ideas of Aracena’s exploitative style become comprehensible with Hispaniola’s past in mind.

### **From stigmatisation to valorisation**

It took many years of roughness before bachata entered into mainstream Dominican society, which it finally did in the 1990’s. Before that, it experienced two decades of exclusion from television, radio and the print media and stigmatisation from the middle and upper-classes. Who is responsible for the increased valorisation of bachata, is debated; however I will mention some people who definitely have had an impact on the latest transformations of this musical genre.

In the early 80’s the genre had still not achieved social acceptance, however, during this decade it was growing in popularity. When bachata pioneer Luis Segura, *El Papa de la bachata* as he is also called, released a record in 1983 called *Pena* (Grief), it [...] “outsold every other recording in the mainstream market” (Hernandez 1995:192). This triggered a period of recognition for bachateros and their fans, but as it probably was simply part of media exploitation it did not maintain attention. Bachata went back to its initial position after two years before it made way into the mainstream again after some years (Hernandez 1995:196).

The microscopic boom in 1983 did nevertheless have effects on bachata’s further development. In the wake of it, more bachateros saw an opening possibility for acknowledgement. Their music was distinct from the *bolero* inspired bachata: it was speeded up – probably to resemble the fast going and already socially accepted merengue – and instrumentally modernized. The increased tempo and incorporation of electric guitars made it a danceable and more sophisticated genre. In 1987, Blas Durán released the electric guitar-based bachata-merengue fusion song “*Consejo a las mujeres*” (“Advise for the women”), which became a huge hit (Hernandez 1995:200).

Additional help – probably being more decisive for bachata’s rising popularity than a few successful songs and stylistic innovations – came from a group of respected musicians inspired by the *nueva canción* (new song) movement. This movement originated in Chile during the late 1960’s and flourished in the years of the Presidency of Salvador Allende (1970-1973). The *nueva canción* musicians created political folk/protest songs with characteristic themes like empowerment, human rights and poverty. It spread to other Latin American countries, such as the Dominican Republic, where politically conscious musicians challenged both music and national identity. The group Convite, consisting not only of musicians, but also social scientists and folklorists, had the most influence in the country. These well-educated critics were sceptic to Balaguer’s anti-Haitian politics and proposed focus on and acceptance of merengues long-rejected African roots.

In the 1980’s, four respected *nueva canción*-inspired musicians turned their focus to bachata; Luis Dias, Sonia Silvestre, Victor Victor, and Juan Luis Guerra insisted to perceive bachata as a worthy expression of Dominican culture. They produced a sophisticated bachata, with synthesisers and much less misogynistic lyrics, and called it *techno-bachata* as opposed to the original bachata (Hernandez 1995:119-205). This valorisation had effects on how bachata was going to be perceived in the future.

In 1991, the middle-class musician Juan Luis Guerra released the album “*Bachata Rosa*” (“Pink Bachata”), which became a triumph in the Dominican Republic, the United States and even Europe. The massive media exposure and record-high sales seriously challenged the stigmatisation of bachata (Hernandez 1995:207-208, Austerlitz 1997). Today – one informant told me – Guerra even incorporates pianos in his bachatas.

Another musician who tried out bachata was Blas Durán. His bachata style was less sophisticated than that of the *nueva canción* inspired musicians – their different styles appealed to different social class audiences. Durán’s use of the electrical guitar, speeded-up tempo and a rawer language encouraged and gave way to younger bachateros such as Luis Vargas, Antony Santos,<sup>41</sup> Raulín Rodríguez and Joe Veras – bachata front men of the 1990’s and today. Even though it maintained bachata’s typical street language, it had a modern touch to it that appealed to the middle-classes. Undoubtedly, improved recording equipment, access to television programs and finally F.M. radio exposure also contributed to better sound and

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<sup>41</sup> Antony Santos is today the best paid bachatero in the Dominican Republic. On May 12, 2007, he will do a concert in Puerto Rico at the Roberto Clemente Coliseum, a venue with a seating capacity of 10,000 people. He is said to receive US\$90,000 for this one presentation alone [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antony\\_Santos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antony_Santos) (May 7, 2007).



announcement; People started to value the formerly stigmatised bachateros (Hernandez 1995:209-210).

The Dominican New York-based group “Aventura”, formed in 1994, has had enormous success all over Latin America, the United States and Europe<sup>42</sup>. At present, it is probably the best known bachata group worldwide. The musicians have developed their own bachata style by fusing R&B, Hip-Hop, rap and reggaetón<sup>43</sup>. They also make use of English, Spanish and “Spanglish” (mixture of Spanish and English) in their lyrics, giving it a clearly modernized and Westernized touch. In 1999, they signed a contract with BMG.<sup>44</sup>

My Haitian informants acknowledged the positive impact respected musicians have had, and still have, on bachata. This also affected **their** everyday life as a bachatero because their music is less stigmatized than before. At the same time, they questioned these musicians’ awareness of what it is like to be a **low-class Haitian** bachatero from a poor neighbourhood. They claimed that the respected musicians had taken advantage of the low-classes’ bachata, which among them had been an extremely popular genre for a long time.

Music traces a particular socio-political history. The purpose of this chapter has been twofold; In part one I explored the social and cultural transformation of Hispaniola, while in part two I discussed musical development on the island. The connection between the two parts is evident; the transformation is reflected in Dominican musical genres. The expressions built upon well-established Dominican attitudes which have been developed over time on Hispaniola. Music can therefore be understood as reflecting social, cultural and political development on Hispaniola. Division of resources along ethnic, class and gender lines justifies relations of domination, exploitation and subordination within Dominican society, and thus implicitly the social position of Dominican and Haitian bachateros. In this sense, aspects of Dominican society can be read through for example bachata and bachateros everyday life.

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<sup>42</sup> The summer of 2005, I could listen to Aventura’s mega hit “*Obsesión*” on the radios in Norway.

<sup>43</sup> “Reggaetón blends Jamaican music influences of reggae and dancehall with those of Latin America, such as bomba, plena, merengue, and bachata as well as that of hip hop and Electronica. The music is also combined with rapping or singing melodically in Spanish, English or ‘Spanglish’” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reggaeton>, 2007).

<sup>44</sup> “BMG (Bertelsmann Music Group) is one of the six divisions of Bertelsmann. It was established in 1987 to combine the music label activities of Bertelsmann. It consists of the BMG Music Publishing company, the world’s third largest music publisher and the world’s largest independent music publisher, and the 50% share of the joint venture with Sony music, Sony BMG Music Entertainment (Sony BMG)” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BMG> (May 7, 2007).

In the next chapter I narrow down my focus to Santo Domingo, the capital and main location for my investigation. My informants' various connections to the city reflect their identity making. I will substantiate that my informants – by the way they make use of the capital – maintain and produce their identity and that of others.

### 3. SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF SANTO DOMINGO

Perceptions the Haitian and Dominican bachateros had of their social world in Santo Domingo is central to this chapter. The different groups and networks moved around and felt connected to specific parts and people of the capital. I will show how the bachateros construct identity and forms of belonging through their narratives and actions. In these various social contexts bachata is being upheld and reconstructed and works in this way as an identity marker.

In this chapter I will first present Santo Domingo's geographical and social stratification before I describe my main location; the **outlying** neighbourhood of the Haitian bachateros. I focus on the informants' use of their own *barrio* (neighbourhood) but also their perceptions of other inner city contexts where they did not normally socialize and which represent to Haitian informants other types of life than theirs. Further, I explore conversations and activities of the **urban** Dominican bachateros, still with focus on how they use place as an identity marker to represent themselves and others. The interesting thing is to see how both groups of bachateros hold and produce identity markers of differentiation and similarity through interaction both **within** their own group ('us'), as well as towards **other** groups ('them') through the use of place.

#### ***Santo Domingo's geographical and social stratification***



The public "power grid"

Bachata is associated with particular localities, and the specific places are connected with the performance of bachateros and their audiences, whether live or taped. Recently, the relationship between place and identities has become an important theme of anthropological enquiry. Margaret Rodman (1992) is one anthropologist who addresses this matter. In her article “Multilocality and Multivocality” she argues that scientists should challenge the tradition that perceives places as passive backdrops where interaction takes place (ibid:640). Instead, she stresses that places are politicized, historically specific and locally constructed. By looking at praxis of everyday life, she says, one can grasp the ‘multivocal’ expressions of place. By ‘multivocality’, Rodman states that individuals have different experiences of places – due to different backgrounds – and these experiences are shared with other people (ibid:641-643). This is also true for my informants in that they give varying meanings to places, whether Haitian or Dominican bachateros, middle or low-class, female or male. Often, these perceptions compete and create tensions in the creation of place (ibid:650).

In his article “Dueling Landscapes – Singing Places and Identities in Highland Bolivia”, Solomon (2000), argues the importance of analysing the interconnection between place, identity and music. He has done fieldwork among the Chayantaka indigenous people of Highland Bolivia and states that “[...] for Chayantaka, musical performance is a practice for embodying community identity, inscribing it on earthly landscapes as well as in the landscapes of the mind” (ibid:258). In this chapter I look closely into the multiple and competing expressions of the collective categories of ethnicity, class and to some extent gender, which are all negotiated through the use of place.

Expressions of places must be seen as connected to history and colonial contact (Low 1993). Having the previous historically-focused chapter in mind, it is interesting to see how identity formation, time (history) and place are interconnected. As Jenkins argues; “Identification is always from a point *of view*” (Jenkins 2006:25-26), and this view has already been created – in the past. However, it is renegotiated in the present and will project perceptions about the future. This happens to places as well – such as Santo Domingo –; it has been formed and maintained through time by interacting individuals, and it is still negotiated. In this sense, it is meaningless to speak of time and humans outside of place (Jenkins 2006:26). My informants interact within historically defined spatialities. In line with Goffman, I view them as being a physical presence in the world. They are territorialized in terms of the local staging of social identity in Santo Domingo (Goffman 1959).

Significant political and economic changes influence construction of social space and the demography of Santo Domingo. The massive rural-urban migration during the 60's shaped to great extent the geographical and social stratification of today's city. Traditionally, the cities and towns are white, surrounded by black communities in the case of the capital and southern towns – a settlement pattern determined by economics and reinforced by racism. However, this pattern is changing with rural/urban migration and the general increase into the capital and beyond – to New York and elsewhere abroad (Sørensen 1999, 2002, Grasmuck & Pessar 1991, Duany 2006).

Demographically, Santo Domingo resembles the rest of the country, however the number of Haitian immigrants is higher in the capital due to more possibilities for employment here than in the rest of the Dominican Republic. Demographic transformations created poor barrios not only in the outskirts of the city but also in central parts; middle-class neighbourhoods and enclaves of the higher classes. Today Santo Domingo, one of the Dominican Republic's 32 *provincias*<sup>45</sup>, is a cosmopolitan city with 2.5 million strongly class divided inhabitants, 37, 6 % of them living in marginalised urban areas (Globalis 2006).

The capital's marginal areas are situated mostly in the outskirts/ peripheral urban areas. However, there are sectors of *clase baja* (low-class) in various central parts too. There are few large geographical areas which can be characterized as only poor or rich, as neighbourhoods often are mixed and not homogenous. Economic capital from homecoming migrants from US has made it possible to construct houses in areas where they originally have had a squat or another small brick house (Teig 1998:38-39). However, there tends to be more poor zones along the north-south going river *Ozama* which divides the city in two. My Haitian bachateros, however, all reside in the outskirts of the city where poor barrios and *bateyes* (areas for sugar cane workers on the plantations) prevail. The Dominican base ball pitcher Pedro Martínéz who plays for an American team has contributed economic capital to his home barrio of Manoguayabo, situated not far from my field. This support resulted in construction of schools, churches and a baseball field. Similar investments which improved barrio conditions occurred in the Haitian bachateros' neighborhoods as well.

Considering public services such as electricity, working- and health conditions, Santo Domingo has one of the worst standards compared to other Latin American capitals. Sanitary,

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<sup>45</sup> The Dominican Republic is divided into one district, *Distrito Nacional* which is Santo Domingo and 31 *provincias*. Las provincias consist of two or more *municipios*, which again consists of different *distritos municipales*. Santo Domingo exists of 13 different *ensanches* (sectors) which consist of totally 104 *barrios* (neighbourhoods) (Teig 1998:39).

educational and environmental conditions are very poor in many areas<sup>46</sup>. Dominican authorities have historically organized fewer basic services to *bateyes* and poor barrios, where the living conditions are worse than elsewhere in the capital, with decaying houses, scarce health and educational provision<sup>47</sup>. Especially undocumented immigrants, but also poor documented Haitians and Dominicans, have problems accessing these services. *Apagones* (power outages) and water outages are common occurrences in the capital as in the country in general and they were *asuntos sobre el tapete* (controversial topics). Many individuals simply can not afford electricity and do not pay their bills. The illegal hooking up to a power source, is a typical sight. The electricity companies cut supplies as a solution to their problems with non-paying costumers and individuals who connect themselves illegally to the main electrical grid. My informants, especially Haitians living in the poorest neighbourhoods, were daily affected by *apagones* lasting for many hours or even days. Some homes, shops and music venues have *plantas* (fuel operated generators) which turn on automatically when the power fails. Power outages could also occur during bachata performances and was perceived by Haitian informants as a phenomenon typical to their barrio life.

### Getting around, class by class



Motoconcho; typical low-class transportation mode.

<sup>46</sup> In 2005, UNICEF declared that nearly half of the children and adolescents in the Dominican Republic live under critical poverty circumstances (*Diario Libre*, March 23, 2005). The country [...] “is a low-income developing country ranking 94 out of 177 countries on the UNDP Human Development Index” (Teigen 2007:35)

<sup>47</sup> Jorge Duany has done fieldwork on *salsa* and social life in Puerto Rican barrios in New York. He describes these contexts as characterized by economic deprivation and ecological isolation. He adds that the barrio community is marked by its reciprocity relations through relatives, friends and neighbours – but it is also recognizable by its tendencies of violence, unemployment, family instability and physical deterioration (Duany 1984:196). Duany’s remarking resembles the characteristics of Dominican barrio life.

Music always accompanies travelling, and how people – my bachateros included – get around reveals the divisions of social space in Santo Domingo. The choice of transportation reveals identity strategies. Different vehicles reflect social class belonging. *Guaguas* (run by independent bus companies) are small buses which have starting and stopping places all over the city. It is common for a *guagua* to wait until it has a full passenger load before it departs.<sup>48</sup> These busses were common to where my informants lived and they used them to move around. *Carros públicos* (public cars) are private cars used as informal taxis shared with others, often containing three people in front and four in the back. I was constantly reminded by middle or higher class Dominicans that I had to be careful because the drivers or other passengers could not be trusted in terms of robbery and other types of crime. Instead, I was encouraged to call a regular taxi (more expensive than *carros públicos*), and I was told to always verify the number and colour of the car even with these vehicles.

For bachateros *guaguas*, taxis and *motoconchos* (motorcycle taxis) signified their barrio life style and used them when they had bachata performances or visited friends and family. In certain situations they ascribed positive meaning to them like “arriving frequently, safe, fast and having possibilities of listening to music on the radio”. However, on other occasions they ascribed negative value to these transportation modes. Ramón for example was especially careful when sending me home from el barrio after attending concerts or visiting him. He refused to let me return in a taxi with an unknown chauffeur, so he found a friend he trusted who could drive. Sometimes barrio individuals hesitated to use *guaguas*, *carros públicos* and *motoconchos* late at night as they described them as “unsafe” and being for people who took risks. Their changing opinions about transportation show the complexity of their identity.

Two of my Haitian bachateros possessed private cars, however this was not common in los barrios. Ramón’s second-hand car was especially in an extremely bad condition. These were used to move around, mostly in but also outside, the barrios. Possibilities of using the cars changed from day to day, depending on money to buy gasoline, but also situations connected to performances; They preferred to arrive by car when they performed, because *se ve bien* (it looks good). Even though Ramón’s car was nearly falling apart, he owned it, something most of the other inhabitants could only dream of. Cars of finer makes and better conditions were thought of as belonging to middle and upper-class people. Robin had several times observed *Jipetas* (Jeeps) outside performance arenas in the centre; “These *jipetas*

<sup>48</sup> The *cobrador/vossador* (a person who collects *el pasaje* (the fare)/a person who informs the route of the bus) hangs out the open door as he tries to pick up more passengers on the way.

belong to rich people and they attend performances of *música fina* (“fine” music as opposed to low-class bachata), or bachata *pija* (“snobbish”) of Juan Luis Guerra”. Haitian-born Felix Cumbé, who had built up a name in the music industry and produced several bachata (and merengue) CD’s had invested in a Jeep, as it symbolized higher class. However, he still lived in a low-class area. The different vehicles adopted by performers, audience or others in the specific neighbourhoods functioned as important identity signs for class and place-belonging. In this way vehicles stand for something whereby bachateros made sense of their world.

### Music venues

Santo Domingo offers various venues where music is being sold, performed, danced to and listened to. Merengue, bachata, rock español, son and reaggetón are just some of the genres connected to specific places and people in the capital. Several events offer cultural happenings, such as *fiestas populares* (popular parties), *fiestas patronales* (patriotic parties), merengue festivals and carnivals. Two of the biggest events when it comes to music are *Festival de Merengue de Santo Domingo*, celebrated in July and the annual *Festival de Música Latina* held at the Olympic Stadium. Outdoor concerts are often held along *El Malecón* (the beachfront boulevard) mainly during weekend nights. *La Zona Colonial* (the Colonial Zone) located on the western bank of the Río Ozama has a diversity of music shops, bars and discotheques. More European music is represented here such as electronic music, rock, reaggetón and jazz (especially in *Casa de Teatro*), which project a more ‘modern’ way of life than the ‘traditional’ bachata associated with the urban poor areas.

The city’s spatial structure and informant’s use of it as contextualisation of their lives, gives information about how they deal with different arenas for selling, listening, dancing to and performing music. Even though most of my informant’s financial means allowed few possibilities for socializing in the musical arenas of the Colonial Zone, their views did not always give priority to economic dimensions. Ramón called people who went to *Casa de Teatro* to listen to jazz music as *gente pija* and *gente demasiado culturales* (“snobbish people” and “over-cultural people”) and informed me that he and his band members had nothing in common with this place, its performers or audience. For him it was important to mark and establish social distinctions to la *gente pija* (‘they’) in contrast to himself and his friends (‘us’) through reference to music and its performance places. When confronting him



with the bachata arenas in the same area and asking his opinion on this, he also called this style of bachata *pija* or  *fina* (fine/refined cf. ‘cultural’). He added:

“They [people from the centre] don’t understand bachata because they don’t know what it was. They don’t value the old bachateros in the same way as we do in el barrio. Nowadays, many talk about la bachata but they don’t know where it comes from, they think of nothing but money. Only the money, they are not interested in *los raises* (the roots)... you may find *las raises* where we live.”

People connected to the urban jazz and bachata venues, become ‘significant others’ by being the contrast against which the barrio informant compared himself.

Different public buildings in Santo Domingo, all of them situated in the inner-city, offer musical education and performances. *El Teatro Nacional* presents international theatre, dance and music performances. *El Conservatorio Nacional de Música* has students interested in learning to play the piano, violin, to sing in a choir, or being connected to theatre or ballet. One informant told me a story about a girl who was taught merengue at the Conservatory, however hidden, because they did not perform *música de la calle* (“street music”) there, only *música classica*. He laughed frustrated and uttered that I had to wait for long time to see bachata enter there. Through the bachatero’s utterance, we are reminded of that different music venues are associated with different human beings and music genres, and that these spatial categorisations draw upon historically constructed presumptions of class and ethnic belonging. Bachateros act and utter their identity within spaces and produce a social map of the capital. In doing this, they reconstruct territories that have a historical foundation.

Situated near *La Zona Colonial* is an area called *Pequeño Haiti* (Little Haiti) with the market *Mercado Modelo*. This is a place where Haitians and Dominicans from *la clase baja* and *media baja* distribute fruit, clothes, vodou items, spices, paintings, shoes, musical instruments and pirate copies of all kinds of music typical to the Dominican Republic. My informants told me to go here if I desired Afro-Dominican music such as *vodou*, *palos* and *salve*. Here, most of the market sellers are engaged in the informal sector economy. Due to political and economic transformations, sugar cane fields are today privatized and work is difficult to find in these areas. Instead of remaining in the plantations, some Haitian workers move to other parts of the city to find employment, like for example in *Pequeño Haiti*. Many of the same items sold in *El Mercado Modelo* can be found in the northern barrio of *El Duarte*, also a place where pirate copies of music are easily procured.

Interestingly, some of the Haitian bachateros also travelled to perform in other provinces outside Santo Domingo, such as Barahona, La Romana and San Pedro de Macorís. These are sugar-based districts and have a high concentration of Haitian immigrants ([www.minorityrights.org](http://www.minorityrights.org) June 28, 2007). Robin was one of the musicians who talked warmly about his belonging to such areas. He was also born in La Barahona and raised in La Romana and for that reason he felt especially connected to them:

“The people from La Romana have always given me support and strength, in every sense... like with the music. Living and loving... they have given me so much. Those people made me the man I wanted to be, they appreciate my music.”

In these plantation areas the musicians had affectionate audiences and the bachateros were sometimes better paid here than in Santo Domingo – “a deviation from the general rule that musicians do better playing in the city than in the provincial areas” (Hernandez 1995:190). In the bachata song “*La historia de mi vida*” (“The story of my life”) Robin refers to his childhood and feeling of connection to La Romana and Barahona:

### “La historia de mi vida ”

(“The story of my life”)

By: Robin Cariño:

La historia de mi vida  
Es una historia muy triste  
Te la tengo que contar  
A mi no me da vergüenza  
Hablar de lo que fui  
De mi vida pasada  
Naci en Barahona  
Me crei en La Romana  
Y llegue hasta Baygua  
Alli hice de todo  
Alli pasé de todo  
Yo lo digo con orgullo  
La caña la pique  
Tambien yo la sembré  
Yo tambien la resembré  
Tambien la cultive

The story of my life  
Is a very sad story  
I have to tell it to you  
I don't get embarrassed  
When talking about who I was  
About my past  
I was born in Barahona  
I was raised in La Romana  
I came to Baygua  
There I did everything  
There everything happened to me  
I say it with pride  
I cut sugar cane  
I also planted it  
I also harvested it  
I also cultivated it

Tambien la canterie  
 Y hasta abono regue  
 Yo me siento orgulloso  
 Con decirle la verdad  
 A ese pueblo que a mi me apolla  
 Con cariño y mucho amor  
 Yo quiero felicitar  
 Con este coro  
 Que ahora dice asi:

(Coro):

Barahona te quiero  
 La Romana te adoro  
 Barahona te quiero  
 Barahona mi tierra natal  
 La Romana me vió crecer  
 Y ahora vivo en la capital

(Repite coro):

Barahona te quiero  
 La Romana te adoro  
 Barahona te quiero  
 Yo me siento muy agradecido  
 Con la gente de La Romana  
 Mis canciones siempre le han gustado  
 Ya el apoyo que ellos me brindaron

(Coro):

Barahona te quiero  
 La Romana te adoro  
 Barahona te quiero  
 Hay de todo en este mundo  
 Gente buena y gente mala  
 Si hay dos cientos que a mi no me quieren  
 Hay dos millones que a mi me reclaman

(Coro):

Barahona te quiero  
 La Romana te adoro  
 Barahona te quiero  
 A todos los pueblos; yo los quiero mucho  
 Yo aprecio con mucho amor  
 Pero hay dos pueblos que yo tengo presente  
 Es Barahona y mi Romana

(Dice):

A todos los pueblos yo los quiero mucho  
 Higuey, Los Mamelles, Santiago, Puerto Plata,  
 El Ceibo, San Pedro de Macoriz<sup>49</sup>

I also planted it in furrows  
 And even irrigated it  
 I feel proud  
 Telling you the truth  
 To this people/neighbourhood who support me  
 With affection and love  
 I want to give my gratitude  
 With this refrain  
 Which says like this now:

(Chorus):

Barahona, I love you  
 Barahona, I adore you  
 Barahona, I love you  
 Barahona, my natal land  
 La Romana saw me grow  
 And now I live in the capital

(Choir repeated):

Barahona, I love you  
 La Romana, I adore you  
 Barahona, I love you  
 I feel very grateful  
 With the people from La Romana  
 They have always liked my songs  
 And the support they gave me

(Chorus):

Barahona, I love you  
 La Romana, I adore you  
 Barahona, I love you  
 There are plenty of things in this world  
 Good people and bad people  
 If there are two hundred who don't love me  
 There are two millions who reclaim me

(Chorus):

Barahona, I love you  
 La Romana, I adore you  
 Barahona, I love you  
 I love all the neighbourhoods so much  
 I appreciate them with a lot of love  
 But there are two neighbourhoods I think of  
 It's Barahona and my Romana

(Spoken):

I love all the neighbourhoods so much

<sup>49</sup> All names of sugar cane provincial regions in The Dominican Republic.

## Poor barrios



Typical low-class houses made of wood; Street in el barrio.

The surroundings changed as the bus I sat in moved further away from the centre. There were fewer houses on each side of the road and the landscape flattened out. The radio was on in the bus, playing the new bachata song by Aventura; *Obsesión*. The driver jumped up and down on this seat in dance-like movements and tapped an empty water bottle on the gear stick to emphasize the rhythm. Inside the bus it was nice and cool due to the air condition, but outside it was very hot. I got off at a crossing and ran into the shade of a colourful *colmado*. This crossing was where I had to change to a *guagua*. As the *guagua* driver waited to fill up his vehicle with passengers, I observed the lively life. It was busier compared to many places I had been in the centre. To me it appeared as chaotic, noisy and smelly but yet so charming. Many sold a variety of items in the street. I thought of Ramón who sometimes had to earn some extra money by selling clothes, besides being a bachatero. Adults and children ran to cross the streets just in front of cars and *motoconchos*. Many cars were hooting or the drivers waived their hand out of the windows to get the attention of possible passengers. Small boys strolled around with their shoe shine boxes, hoping to make a few pesos polishing a pair of shoes. For this job, I was told, they would receive 10 RD\$ (10 Dominican pesos was worth approximately 4, 50 Norwegian kroner during my fieldwork, 2005). Some women walked around with large colourful hair rolls in their already curly black hair while they chatted to passers-by. Other people stood calmly by the house corners, taking it all in. At this very crowded and noisy place music, and especially bachata, was heard from everywhere; the music came from private houses, cars and neighbourhood stores. I observed a couple dancing with beers in their hands inside a shop. Finally, the *guagua* driver decided to depart; he thumped at the sliding door of the rattling bus and almost pushed the passenger into it. I sat down and realised that the *guagua* was so packed I could not move. Next to me sat a man with a chicken on his lap. After some minutes of driving we approached el barrio and the huge fields of sugar plantations opened up on each side of the road. A few cows grazed there. Otherwise the

fields looked abandoned. We entered the neighbourhood and I could see the squats so characteristic to this neighbourhood. El barrio resembled the first “crossings’ atmosphere”, only with fewer vehicles and people in the streets. Also here, the bachata music continued to fill my ears.

The urban structure and the ways my informants use space stand in a complex relationship to each other. Different bachata lives appear as marks for class and race distinctions, and as objects of negotiation of position in hierarchies (Teig 1998:40). I will now explore more in detail how the selected Haitian neighbourhoods mark identity belonging.

The selected barrios are situated in two different parts of the capital. The western site is situated closely to *bateyes*, however this barrio<sup>50</sup> is developed and more modern in terms of infrastructure, *colmados*, churches, school, health centre and housing. Haitians and Dominicans make up the mixed population which lives in strongly coloured (evoking Caribbean architecture)<sup>51</sup> wood-and-tin shacks or in concrete block houses. The centre section consists of paved roads while sprawls of remaining shacks are accessed by muddy, narrow paths. The inhabitants own the informal settlements they built, not the land. My two Eastern field settings, *la parte oriental*, are cut off from the rest of the city by the Ozama River. This area consists mainly of poor housing settlements, however middle-class settlements can also be found here. It resembles the western barrio’s characteristics concerning its geographical structure and population.

The barrios can be described as low-class, and many of the individuals belonging to *la clase baja* work in the informal sector. They have their particular and multiple strategies to attain money, and many of the *negocios* (businesses) or *chiripas* (work of informal art which many have as supplementary or unique work. It is a constant economic improvisation with no safety net beyond) take place in the streets of the barrios. They sell items like clothes, shoes, perfumes, sugar cane, fruit, *fritura* (fried meat or vegetables), pirate CD’s of music and

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<sup>50</sup> Informants referred to their area as both *batey* and *barrio*. *Batey*, because this area is a former *ingenio* (sugar plantation), and the settlement for the labourers who works here is called *batey*, and *barrio* because this term is used to describe any neighbourhood. Therefore my informants switched between these two terms. Since the privatisations of *ingenios*, the number of unemployed has risen among the population residing these areas and therefore the most common income strategy is no longer sugar cane cutting. However, the inhabitants of the *batey* have become permanent and they can still refer to their neighbourhood as *batey* even though the *areas de caña* (sugar cane fields) are no longer working and people have adopted other income strategies.

<sup>51</sup> In Dominican popular religion every colour represents, symbolically, a guardian spirit. For example red represents *Santa Carlos Borromeo*, yellow *Santa Isabel* and blue *San Santiago*. For this reason the houses in varying parts of the country are painted in strong contrasting colours, as a spiritual protection from negative energy and opening to the positive (Atlas folklórico 2003:36).

collect bottles or wash cars. Other alternatives can be possession of, or engagement in, a *cafeteria*, *colmado* (small neighbourhood store selling food, drinks and other groceries), *compraventa* (bargain and sale) or a *Banca de Lotería Nacional*. One of my Haitian informants even earned money by instructing barrio inhabitants to drive a car. Children, mostly boys, clean shoes for a few *pesos*. Many women, and men, *hacen el san* (do the *san*). Mailloux (1997) sees similarities between *san* and the West African *tontines* which are both rotating credit funds. *San* is a prevalent form of collaboration in the Dominican Republic, and for some the only form of credit available. Money is put into a common fund and the administrator, which is elected on turns, receive a large part of the money. The participants use the money to buy merchandise, then using the money with profit made on merchandise sales for their children, food, clothes and personal care (Mailloux 1997:167).

A similar phenomenon is also described in detail by Julian Y. Kramer's "Self help in Soweto" (1975)<sup>52</sup>. He discusses mutual aid practices – burial societies and rotating credit associations – among marginalised people in Johannesburg. He writes:

"Burial societies, as the term indicates, are associations which provide financial assistance for the funerals of members and their families. Rotating credit associations, on the other hand, are essentially savings clubs [...] formed upon a core of participants who agree to make regular contributions to a fund which is given in whole or part, to each contributor in rotation" (Ardener 1964 as referred to in Kramer 1975:10).

*San*, in this aspect, works the same way; it is a reciprocal exchange economy system which is based on money, where the main aim is to improve economic situations. Kramer argues that these organisations develop in economically deprived classes in societies where institutional alleviation is either non-existent or ineffectual (ibid.:11). I would also describe the Dominican Republic as such a society in many respects.

Some of *la clase baja* individuals own houses, however most of them live in rented houses or homes of relatives or friends. (These marks can also fit *clase media baja* individuals).

<sup>52</sup> "Mutual aid societies [...] have been reported from many different parts of the world – amongst Puerto Rican and Mexican migrants in American cities; amongst peasants and plantation workers in Asia; amongst Africans living in the cities or involved in cash-cropping in colonial and neo-colonial Africa and amongst workers in pre-welfare state Britain and Norway – to mention some" ((Kramer 1975). Unni Wikan (2004) has also observed the phenomenon – which she calls *spareklubb* (savings clubs) – in Cairo, Egypt.



Selling sugar cane on the street

Even though there is no dominant ‘African’ ideology, there is a tremendous cultural expression of Afro-Dominican culture in Santo Domingo, as in elsewhere in the country. Traditionally, the dark population (African slaves and their descendants) resided and worked in the sugar producing *bateyes* and *ingenios* outside urban centres. Later and recent Haitian immigrants relate to and express the musical traditions of their ancestors. The poor Haitian-Dominican neighbourhoods surrounding Santo Domingo are typical socio-geographical areas associated with these Afro-Hispanic expressions. A large part of the influence is manifested through complex dance and music expressions, many of them having religious connotations. Some of the phenomena are *vodou*, *gágá* (*vodou* performance ritual held during the weeks before Easter), *salve* and *palos*<sup>53</sup>. The UNESCO protected northern area of Santo Domingo, Villa Mella, known for its *congos*<sup>54</sup> is a neighbourhood representing strong African - influenced musical culture (For further reading on *vodou* or Villa Mella, see Rosenberg 1979, Davis 1987, Deive 1988, 1996 and Hernández & Sánchez 1997). As my Haitian informants resided in mixed Haitian and Dominican neighbourhoods (representing a diverse population consisting of offspring of immigrants who settled in the Dominican Republic), they all had a strong sense of belonging to an African derived tradition. References could be knowledge of *vodou* beliefs, earlier participation in *vodou* performance rituals, family members who were

<sup>53</sup> *Atabales* is another name which is used to refer to the music of *palos* – a type of drum music (Juan Rodriguez, personal communication 2007).

<sup>54</sup> The *congos* is a type of *tambores* with Congo origin, and they are only used in the Villa Mella area (Juan Rodriguez, personal communication 2007).

*brujos*<sup>55</sup> (medicine man, curer, visionary) or Haitian associated rhythms and lyrics in their bachata music. Utterances like:

“the *gágá* spirits are inherited, *se llevan en la sangre* (they are transmitted through the blood), and you have to be Haitian to be in real contact with this tradition. You can see a lot of this here where we live... like Haitians who *se suben o se monten* (enter into a trance) and such” (Rafael)

were frequently used when talking about what was typical to Haitian identity. They saw the tradition as signs of not only their barrio life, but also as marks of ‘**racial**’ importance (biological reference). Phrases like this refer to the importance of kinship in the neighbourhood. Having knowledge of for example *vodou* was significant for a sense of community among the Haitian bachateros.

Similarly, language is a location-sign which marks racial distinctions and similarities between individuals and groups. I often heard people talking Haitian Creole (a French based language with African, Spanish and English derivations) when I walked around the neighbourhoods. The informants varied in mastery of Creole, however they all understood most of the language and some had a strong Creole accent when they talked or sang. The informant’s use of and thoughts about African derived musical traditions and Creole will be further explored throughout the thesis. However, as I have shown so far, notions of *raza*, class and barrio belonging are mapped along various contradictory axes such as kinship, magic-religious phenomena and language.

To symbolise a group belonging to el barrio and its population, it was important to stress a collective identity. Group identification implies that members perceive themselves as similar. Collectivity refers to having something in common, and there can be no commonality without collectivity. Jenkins (2006) explores the term ‘community’ as an everyday structuring term of human life. Even though, as he says, the term has slowly withdrawn from the margins as an analytical tool, it is not only in the possession of academics. A sense of ‘community’ is an everyday notion that structures life, peoples’ understanding of settlement and each other (Jenkins 2006:108-109). Therefore, I choose to apply the term here as it is important to the comprehension of el barrio people and their social life. Understanding ‘community’ Jenkins draws upon Cohen (1985; 1994; 2002) and his framework on the same notion. Cohen, he explains, sees recognition of ‘community’ and a ‘sense of us’ as stemming from the

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<sup>55</sup> In Dominican *vodú* the religious master is called *brujo*. “A term with lesser racist connotations is “Caballo de Misterios” or *sacerdote* (priest). Some authors use the term *brujo* to refer to the Haitians; the Dominicans are the good ones” (Juan Rodriguez, personal communication 2007).



consciousness that life is different ‘there’, and awareness of threat that it poses to how life is ‘here’. Having said this, the term ‘community’ may give associations to something ‘structural’. But, I would argue that it does not signify ‘structure’. It is undoubtedly ‘cultural’ and changeable. Cohen emphasises membership as a symbolic construction and the membership is thus imagined. In this sense symbols are abstract and taken-for-granted to some extent. Consequently, people may to some degree act in similar ways without uttering or acting in similar ways at all. Jenkins agrees on this, and presents his own terms ‘nominal’ and ‘virtual’ which resembles Cohen’s argument. The nominal – the name of an identification – is always symbolic. In contrast, the virtual – the experience of identity – can mean different things to people in practice (Jenkins 2006:110-112). However, Jenkins criticises Cohen for overestimating the symbolisation of community as founded more in ‘thinking’ rather than in ‘doing’. To Jenkins, ‘community’ and collective identity is, after all, something people **do**. The doings of people constructs a common awareness of things and a shared symbolic world (Jenkins 2006:114). This criticism is further applied to my later discussion of socialising and alcohol consumption in *colmados* and carwashes the Haitian informants felt they belonged to.

Cohen and Jenkins’ theoretical approaches are applicable to life in los barrios. They both emphasise on community as a symbolic construct which can describe the neighbourhood as a territorial cultural community to which my informants felt a sense belonging. As I have shown, the sense of belonging to los barrios is structured around symbolic dimensions of ‘race’ which again are marked by linking *vodou* rituals and Creole to the Haitian bachatero identity.

For the bachateros, it was important to stress that they felt connected to specific contexts. All mentioned belonging to los barrios as a crucial indicator for their music, ‘race’ and class identity. During interviews or when observing conversations, I quickly started to recognize the musician’s characteristic comments like “*Toco para mi gente del barrio*” (“I play for my people in my neighbourhood”) and “*Soy un bachatero pobre de la clase baja*” (“I am a poor low-class bachatero”). Utterances referring to the musician’s connection to los barrios portray important information about their view on what kind of bachateros they were. They emphasised that their way of life had typical barrio elements and agreed mostly on what these elements were. The boundary making towards people from the centre was also important. They stressed that certain types of individuals did not belong in el barrio. One observation exemplifies this way of identity management:

A female in the audience who lived in the centre, had come to attend a bachata performance in *el barrio* with some friends. Soon she started to complain about “*los chicos frescos*” (the rude boys) who ate of her food and gave her unflattering comments. She also called the performance “simple” and finally expressed her wish to leave. As she walked away a man in the crowd uttered that “some of the people in *el barrio* can be *frescos*, but not all and she doesn’t understand this”. He added that “it is normal that she doesn’t handle this; she’s from the centre and one can’t demand more of *esa gente* (those people)”.

This extract is interesting because it shows how individuals construct identity by positioning themselves in contrast to ‘others’. In this process we understand who we and other people are, and *vice versa*; other people’s perception of themselves and others (we included) (Jenkins 2004:17). The man in the example ascribed characteristics to himself and his barrio “people” (‘group identification’/‘us’/‘inclusion’) in contrast to the girl, her “people” and their way of being (‘categorizational identification’/‘them’/‘exclusion’). The girl did the same thing, only the other way around. Both identities; barrio and centre, are constructed and upheld by an ‘internal’ (self-definition) and ‘external’ (definitions given by others) dialectic (Jenkins 2004:18) and in this way social identity becomes meaningful. Perceptions of belonging – or roots in – local barrio culture develop and maintain bachatero identity.

### *Colmado and carwash*

Socializing (identity making) in los barrios often took place in the streets, inside or mostly outside their own, friends’ or families’ houses. Typical social settings which the Haitian bachateros used were the *colmados*<sup>56</sup> and carwashes (combined establishment for carwash and bar/dancing place). They signified their class and place belonging and represented important arenas in their daily life. Here they interacted, both during day and night time, with other inhabitants in el barrio. A *colmado* is, according to Hernandez “[...] a common social space for everybody and is one of the most important contexts for the exchange of information, ideas, and culture” (Hernandez: 1989:79). There were various *colmados* in one single neighbourhood and the bachateros used them frequently in their everyday lives. This was a

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<sup>56</sup> Some *colmados* are called *colmadón* which means big *colmado*. It is a modern and extended version of the *colmado* where the sale of nourishment is a supplement to the sale of alcohol. It normally also requires a well-functioning TV and plenty of chairs and tables to accommodate social gatherings. However, most important is good music equipment. I did never observe any *colmadónes* in El barrio, as this is a more urban type of negotiation. According to Gerald F. Murray (1996) most of these businesses do not belong to this group. The majority of the *colmados* are still establishments offering nourishment and other types of domestic products. However, an important income is generated through the sale of beer, rum and other alcoholic drinks in both *colmados* and *colmadónes* (Murray 1996).

typical venue for performing bachata. In this way, the store not only provided a public space for buying commodities; it was also a place where people could experience music, especially bachata but also merengue, son and reggaetón. Other characteristic activities in the *colmados* for my male Haitian bachateros were *charlar* (chit-chat/ small talk) with friends, drinking Presidente or Brugal (Dominican national beers) or *ron* (rum), playing dominoes and listening and dancing to music.

The male bachateros used the *colmados* frequently. I saw fewer women in the *colmados* at late hours, however they were often to be observed during daytime, buying daily food. Cash was scarce for the area's inhabitants so most residents made frequent trips to the *colmado*. Store owners offered their costumers credit or sold small quantities of any item such as a slice of cheese, a spoon of tomato paste from the can, or a small cup of oil.

Usually, both *colmados* and carwashes had a sound system to play music in order to enhance the establishment's social function. In the 1960's they began to put radios, and later juke boxes, in *colmados* and during this decade they were beginning to turn the barrios into significantly noisy places. Some were more advanced; they collected songs on a computer connected to speakers. A *colmado* proprietor in one of the barrios said that "a *colmado* without bachata is not a good *colmado*. People always demand songs. Just as important as possessing groceries is the bachata I have here." The Haitian bachateros also sometimes performed bachata concerts in the small shops. Some residents complained about the loud sounds, music, drinking and the dancing, especially during the evening and night time. These kinds of noise and complaints tended to characterize barrio life.

Similarly, the carwashes were social spaces where class identity was negotiated. They were places to hang out and served as a disco at night. Similarly to the *colmados*, performances were often held at these places, especially if it was a big performance with popular bachateros. This was because *colmadoes* normally offered less physical space than carwashes. All of the Haitian bachateros had experience from playing at both venues. Hernandez (1995) writes that carwashes, "modelled after U.S. car washes, are relatively new phenomenon in the Dominican Republic and were probably introduced by returning Dominican migrants; prior to that cars were typically washed at gas stations" (Hernandez 1995:30). During the 1970's, these establishments began to be popular in the urban parts of Santo Domingo, especially in the peripheral barrios of the capital (Velázquez & Ureña 2004:157). Similarly to the *colmadoes*, these places were equipped with tables, chairs and alcohol for people who came randomly by to take *un refresco* (a refreshment) during the day, or to attend music performances during the evenings and nights. As I observed in los barrios, some of these

places have been transformed into arenas with built-in bars at the front. When I asked him to explain what a typical carwash in his neighbourhood was, Ramón told me:

“It’s a place where you can get your car washed and while waiting you may get a Presidente and socialise with the other people in the bar, it’s a *barrio* thing for us out here. I’ve heard that many carwashes in the centre quit the car washing possibility and only focus on the bar. I often go to the carwash to catch up with my friends. There’re always someone there I can *charlar* (chat) with. In addition, I may get to plan a new concert with the owner. *La gente* (the people) of this *barrio* don’t have a lot of money so the carwash is a good possibility for them to attend free concerts because they normally don’t charge any entrance fee”.

By what Ramón told me, we can see how ideas of class are being articulated. The carwash had strong class connotations as it was a place to hang out for poor individuals residing in low-class *barrios*. Low economic capital among the inhabitants resulted in socialising in the places that offered possibilities for gathering and listening to the newest bachata hits – for free. Even though *colmados* and carwashes were establishments which provided electricity, seats and drinks, I had also observed informal jam sessions on the side of the street where musicians and audience brought out their own plastic chairs and bought refreshments from the corner shop nearby. Whether open-air, *colmados*, or carwashes, these venues were good alternatives for filling the desire of being updated on the latest music and gossip in the neighbourhood, or attend performances.

### *Una red de la mala vida*



Men hanging around in the *colmado* during nighttime.



Carwash in el barrio. Notice warning sign on pillar *no armas de fuego* (arms prohibited).

Perceptions of **danger** are used to define social space and categorize others. Stories and observations of the bachateros' lives encode important information about class and barrio identity. References to violence, *delincuencia* (delinquency), *playtos* (fights) and heavy alcohol use were common themes in the conversation among the musicians. Even though they did not consume too much alcohol themselves they did all agree that bachata, alcohol and violence were strongly connected. They often said they belonged to a “drinking culture” and that the combination of *Brugal* (a type of Dominican rum), bachata, women and *armas* (weapons) was a very dangerous one. Moreover, descriptions of their lives were often referred to as *una red de la mala vida* (a network/system of the bad life). This expression alluded to conditions of drunkenness, harsh low-class living standards and prostitution. Bachata's social context has historically been connected to this type of phenomena and the genres' connotations seemed to characterize the daily life in los barrios. Preoccupation with drinking as therapy for heartbreak or anger, or simply as a relaxing recreational activity in itself were both characteristic themes in conversations and in bachata lyrics. Bachata and drinking were seen as causing problems, but also as salvation, as Ramón says:

“If you have a problem with your *compañero* (companion), you take a chair and you sit down, with the lyrics... and you'll take a rum or beer, you calm yourself down and you forget about your problem. The words and beer take you, in a way, and help you feel your sentiments. That's what I like about bachata”.

One night, before Ramón started to perform he approached one of his band members and commented with a smile: “*Oye!* (Hey!) It's like I'm a bit thirsty!” I quickly understood what type of liquids he referred to. The others nodded and smiled and responded that “bachata and rum belong together”. Ramón continued and said that before they could begin the small

concert, they needed alcohol. A boy on a *motoconcho*<sup>57</sup> was sent away to buy a bottle of Brugal while the musicians tuned the guitars.

Ramón informed that the Dominican saying “for every bottle of milk, people consume four bottles of rum” (see also Murray 1996:271) was applicable to *la vida de bachata*. Even though Ramón also meant that he belonged to the social life of el *colmado* and the carwashes and its associations to a “drinking culture”, he did not agree to this in every context. When we walked around in el barrio and drunken people came up to him to converse, he replied rather shortly and seemed to keep some kind of distance. When offering him beer or alcohol he often hesitated to drink. Confronting the incident with him later, he explained that he disliked the heavy use of alcohol, especially during daytime. He uttered that he did not like to talk and socialize with them under those conditions. Another explanation could be that he wanted to avoid the obligation of buying beer for his friends. He added that they had a too strong tendency to fall into the traditional “drinking culture” of the neighbourhood. Here, Jenkins’ critic (2006) of Cohen is useful; even though the bachateros labelled themselves as members of a barrio with high alcohol consumption (cf. Cohens’ community belonging as symbolic mental notions and Jenkins’ ‘nominal’ term), this sign of themselves was not identical to their actions in every context (cf. Jenkins’ ‘virtual’ term). As Jenkins emphasizes,

“A label and its consequences may not always be in agreement. [...] the consequences or meaning of any specific nominal identification can vary from context to context. The nominal may be associated with a *plurality of virtualities*. Individual identities and differences are to some considerable extent distinguished out of collective identities. We need, therefore, a means of distinguishing the unique particularities of the individual from the generalities of the collective. Distinguishing the virtual [the doings of people] from the nominal allows us to do that: *some part of the virtual is always individually idiosyncratic*” (Jenkins 2006:77).

Ramón’s action broke with his symbolic idea of his belonging to a ‘collectiveness’ of alcohol consumers. In this specific context he chose, by his conduct, to portray himself as not similar to the ‘nominal’ identity of el barrio. Even though his action – his person based identity formation – seems contradictory, it can be explained and made sense of. Nominal and virtual identity constructions are just as ‘real’. They are both ‘real’ in everyday life and can actually not be separated. The two aspects are part of the same **process**. In one way, we have the naming of individuals, made by themselves or others. In another way, the individual’s doings and the reactions of others are consequential occurrences. Nominal and virtual are implied in our all our ways of defining identity. It is in the change and flux between them that identity

<sup>57</sup> A moped-taxi.

becomes meaningful (Jenkins 2006:78). In this way we can understand that “Haitian bachateros”, “alcohol consumers” and “low-class neighbourhood residents” are important interconnected nominal criteria, however they are not sufficient, for self-description and ascription of bachatero identity. Of equal importance is the acting out of this nominality, and hence the focus on the virtual aspect. The virtual may or may not be in accordance with the nominal, depending on the situation. In this example, it was not. Ramón did not want to be associated with drinking culture, even though significant others would probably perceive him as connected to it. As a result, it is therefore difficult for him to become perceived as non-interested in alcohol, in his own eyes or in the eyes of others.

Signs prohibiting the use of knives and firearms were common in *colmados* and *barras* in the neighbourhood. Robin said that “the people here [barrio] have a lot of weapons and the combination of bachata, drunken men, weapon and women is very dangerous. Many people have died because of the ambience bachata brings forth”. All the bachateros had stories related to the connection between bachata performance, violence and alcohol. However, it was important for them to stress that the link between bachata and *playtos* (fights) was stronger among the older generations. This makes sense when remembering that the social conditions were worsening in the 70’s and 80’s due to declining sugar prices, rising inflation and unemployment. Once, when Ramón and I sat down in a *colmado*, a discussion of bachata, alcohol consumption and violence evolved with an old man living in el barrio. The ageing man recalled that he was cut by a *cuchillo* (knife) while listening to a bachata in the neighbourhood a long time ago. Pulling up his shirt, he showed the scar on his left arm and said, with Ramón nodding affirmably beside him:

“If they put on a bachata and you were *guapo* (nasty) you got into trouble. If you had enemies you could not put on that bachata, you were supposed to *pelear* (fight). If you have problems with your *compañero* (friend/companion) nowadays, you take a chair and you sit down, and you take *ron* (rum) or a *cerveza* (beer), you calm down and you forget about the problem. In the old days, however, you took a knife and you looked for someone to fight with.”

This excerpt and similar informant memories functioned as important intakes to the understanding of everyday bachatero’s life; they reflected past and present social conditions in el barrio.

I repeatedly observed articles in newspapers and stories in the television news reporting violence in Santo Domingo, especially in los barrios. An article in the free-of-charge Dominican newspaper, *Diario Libre*, argues that “Besides from being a place to forget and

remember between bachatas, gulps and conversations, the *colmados* and open air bars are gangway for knives and fire arms” (*Diario Libre*, 13.07.2005:8). This article implicitly refers to a connection between bachata and weapon distribution. It confirms the idea of *colmados*, frequently used by low-class barrio people such as the Haitian bachateros, are risky violent places where criminal actions can be more frequent than elsewhere<sup>58</sup>. Experiences of crime tended to be class-specific. Even though all social classes in the capital were affected by violence, the various classes experienced different types of abuse, where the lower social classes confronted more violent crime (Caldeira 2000:53). In a marginalized bachata ambience I did witness one incident of gunfire and a following panic situation during a performance in el barrio, however shooting also happened quite frequently in the centre of Santo Domingo.

The concepts of fear connected to low-class barrios portrayed in media and by middle- and upper-classes did to some extent coincide with my Haitian informant’s own view. They all agreed that their neighbourhoods could be dangerous places to live and that many *delinquents* (criminals/hoodlums) were there. There was especially one social category that I repeatedly heard of; *El tiguere* (The tiger; a dominicanism of the Spanish word), meaning “someone who survives in his environment” (Krohn-Hansen 2001:51). This collective category was frequently referred to by all my informants, disregarding class, ethnic or gender belonging. Lipe Collado has written the first and only book on the uses of the *tiguere*-label (1992). Christian Krohn-Hansen, drawing upon Collado, argues that *tiguere* is a typical term for classifying men’s behaviour which has deep roots in Dominican society<sup>59</sup>. Brendbekken (forthcoming) describes from the border zone how Dominican market women may also be described as cunning and smart *tigueras*.

There are varying, ambiguous and often overlapping meanings of the *tiguere*. A *tiguere* is an everyday hero and a trickster<sup>60</sup> at the same time and management of this category tells much about gender, class and ethnic identity maintenance and construction. Some marks which

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<sup>58</sup> As part of the measures against crime, the Executive Branch forces businesses (e.g. *colmados*, bars and carwashes) which sell alcoholic beverages to close at midnight from Sunday to Thursday, and at 2:00 AM Fridays and Saturdays. This could cause great damage to the Dominican people, and especially the low-class people whose only income might be from a small business (<http://dominicanoday.com>, (September 21, 2007).

<sup>59</sup> It was from the 1930’s and onwards, with the Trujillo regime and its urbanisation process, that the *tiguere* became a well-used category. Acknowledging that the category was already established before the 1930’s, it was especially when rural masses arrived in urban settings that it was refuelled and became widely common. All of a sudden, migrants faced new situations, social networks, relations and personal difficulties. In order to cope with these situations it became important to be and act clever (Krohn-Hansen 1995:264, 2001, Collado 2002). Women can also be associated with this category; *tiguera*

<sup>60</sup> Someone difficult to classify in terms of moral codes (Krohn-Hansen 1995, 2001).



represent a tiger can be; autonomy, making oneself seen, seducer, eloquence and seriousness (Krohn-Hansen 1995, 2001). For most men in el barrio, it was important to be visible in the streets. Their “physical movements” indicated that they prioritised socializing with friends, drinking beer, and playing bachata. This fits into Wilson’s model which suggests that men occupy outside/public cultural spaces (1973), and this is also typical spaces where bachata is performed. Being a “man of the street” also often imply expectations of being a seducer (*mujeriego*). A seducer also has to be fun-loving, a drinker and a dancer (Krohn-Hansen 1995:250). Ramón was continually with other women even though he had a wife at home, and he had numerous children with many of them. For him, it was important to display his virility and female conquests (cf. reputation) in order to be a “real” man. Krohn-Hansen argues that there is another side of men’s relation to women that emphasises the providing man who sacrifices himself for his family and is supportive (1995:250, 2001). Especially for Felix and Robin, who obviously were frequently in the public sphere playing bachata, it was also important to take care of the family and children, and show that they were responsible. The dialectic between these two moral systems (reputation/public versus respectability/private) is typical of Caribbean societies. In addition, men should have a gift for speech (1995:254, 2001). The importance of verbal improvisation and manipulating skills is connected to the *tiguere*. Verbal artistry is also a highly valued skill in bachata, and gives the performer prestige.

Even though being called *tiguere* often implies approval, it can also be morally sanctioned (Krohn-Hansen 1995:265, Collado 2001). This duality was expressed in several conversations and observations I had with my informants. Ramón told me of groups of unemployed young men who occupied certain public spaces in the barrios, performance venues included, who he labelled *tigueros*. These youngsters and the alleyways they patrolled were feared by neighbours because they were thought of as connected to narcotics, weapons and dangerous *bandas* (gangs). Many, like my Haitian informants, hesitated to socialize in local geographies of danger, where these *tigueros* stayed. In addition, los barrios were perceived as having *gente fresca* (rude people) and sometimes these people were part of the audience when the bachateros performed, something they disliked. Ramón explained the term *fresco*, which he meant was a typical characteristic of *tigueros*:

“los *tigueros* are very frescos. They have no *verguenza* (shame), you can’t *confiar en ellos* (trust them). They are... *tipos* (types, kinds)... a bit *locos* (crazy). Many don’t like *gente fresca* because they cross the line. If there is a *playto* (fight) they can pull out a gun and fire... I have experienced

that during concerts. They don't have morals. I don't *ando* (walk, be with) them, they know who I am but I only give them a *saludo* (greeting) and that's all".

But when the neighbourhood was threatened from the outside, the *tígueres* were often the first line of defence. When I confronted Ramón with my experience of a taxi driver who was very uncomfortable to enter el barrio he seemed to change his mind about *gente peligrosa* (dangerous people) in his neighbourhood:

Me: "Tonight, when I came here the taxi driver pointed out several times that he did not dare to enter el barrio. He claimed that this place is full of *tígueres* and he seemed truly worried about driving any further. He stopped the car and made comments about *el apagón* (power outages) which left the surroundings in complete dark. I told him I was only going to a bachata performance in a carwash. Then he said that he knew what kind of bachata and carwash that would be. ... His anxiety forced him to leave the place. He totally refused to take me all the way".

Ramón: "What? Haha! He doesn't know this barrio and our bachata. It's not that bad. He should *tranquilizarse* (calm down), and experience *la bachata de verdad en su citio de verdad*.(the real bachata in its real place)".

Me: "Yeah, then he would change his mind! You know, he said it was *peligroso* (dangerous)... that the *tígueres* would attack him and his car".

Ramón: "He's not right. Ok, let me put it this way... (clearly resigned to the driver's perception and action). I'm sure there are more *tígueres* where he lives! He's afraid of this place but they [*los tígueres*] would never do anything to him. They won't attack him... a stranger like that. He must have been one of those from *la clase media*. People talk and talk about dangers but they don't dare to come here and check if it's true".

The understanding of the terms *tiguere* and *fresco* seems to be ambivalent. The seemingly contradiction between the degree of danger in el barrio and the existence of *tígueres en la calle* (tigers in the streets) is comprehensible when the narratives are thought of as context bound. On some occasions the Haitian bachateros perceived their neighbourhoods and its performance venues as dangerous, which is similar to a collective representation of barrios as perilous. For Ramón it was important to stress that he did not socialize in every part of el barrio, because he did not want to be connected to los *tígueres* who were *delinquentes* (criminals). In other contexts, however, he ascribed his neighbourhood with less negative connotations. When people from 'outside' portrayed his dwelling place and performance

places in a negative way, he broke with the collective representation and claimed that **his** barrio did not fit the categorization of danger ‘the others’ had. In this way, he did not relate to the collective national stereotype, but instead portrayed his barrio as different. An external threat stimulated neighbourhood solidarity. His reference to the driver as possibly being from *la clase media* implies not only the neighbourhood and its *tigueros*, but it also shows important class dimensions. The bachateros’ ideas and perceptions of their whereabouts changed depending on the context, the varying positioning of my informants and who made the statement.

### **Dominican perceptions of themselves and Haitian bachateros**

As I have already shown, not only the Haitian bachateros expressed attitudes about other people and themselves; others also had ideas and meanings about Haitian musicians. The dominant group – Dominicans – also establish categorizations which express class difference/social ranking in terms of norms. To expose these social constructions of identity it is useful to discuss observations of the Dominican bachateros’ actions and conversations. They distanced themselves from the outskirt barrios and “its people” by describing themselves, their own bachata style and surroundings as “modern” and *más fina* (refined). Their life styles were connected to good morals and correct ways of living and playing bachata (“we have culture, they have not”) and used to construct contrasts towards the Haitian bachateros as representatives of ‘significant others’. To have *cultura* implied that people had *costumbres* (manners), were *educado/a* (refined) and *preparado/a* (educated). The Dominican bachateros, who lived and performed in more central parts of Santo Domingo, viewed themselves as a group which symbolized “cultured” bachata songs and dance styles which were being performed at more “respectable” venues. Often they referred to their bachata style as *un estilo limpiado* (a cleaned, refined style) compared to *la bachata vulgar* of ‘the others’.

Because of factual yet limited social integration of Haitians (i.e., socialization across ethnic lines) with Dominicans, possibilities are created for **ambiguous** categorizations which contextually take on negative or positive value, or both. I repeatedly heard my Dominican informants and other individuals on the street uttering such phrases when talking about Haitians: “He is black, but intelligent”, “He is Haitian, but sympathetic”, “He is black but has the soul of a white”, “He has good rhythm, but he is Haitian”, “He dances well, but he is from Haiti”.

I observed that the urban bachateros could describe the Haitian low-class performers in both encouraging and less flattering ways. The category *humilde* (humble, modest) was used about poor people who had some degree of *cultura* and good conduct. People who were ascribed these characteristics had made a positive impression on the Dominican bachateros. It could be memories of childhood friends of African descent or encounters with Haitians in the streets that caused no *problemas* (trouble). However, normally the Dominican musicians seldom had contact with musicians from the poor outskirts barrios. The definitions seemed to be more negative the less personal contact the Dominicans had with the Haitian bachateros. The musicians of which the Dominicans did not socialize with were described as *brutos* (brute) and *crápulos* (bad people). Their connection to *música y cosas oscuras* (dark, obscure, evil music and things) like *vodou* was feared. They were also described as being bachatero musicians only for the to *ganarse la vida* (earn a living), not because they liked bachata. The Dominicans made this contrast by saying that they, on the other hand, were performers because they really adored the music and that they were not constrained to be a musician due to economic reasons<sup>61</sup>.

The central public spaces in the Haitian neighbourhood's social life, los *colmados* and carwashes, were also ascribed negative meaning. Consequently the venues' users were categorized in the same way; People who gathered here, performing loud bachata and dancing at any hour, represented venues of *falta de cultura* (with no culture). In comparison, Dominican bachatero venues – the opposite of noisy carwashes and *colmados* proliferated in the barrios – were *centros de cultura*. *La gente de estos sitios* (the people from those places) were perceived as strongly connected to *colmados* and carwashes. Their use of these kinds of venues reflected the Haitian bachateros' low place in the social hierarchy. The Dominican musicians described *colmados* and *barras* as class and ethnic phenomena; the more socialisation in these places, the more low-class and darker the person was. Many of the Dominican bachateros claimed that these “uncultured” venues were combined with drinking, prostitution and violence. They expressed no desire of going to los barrios to attend bachata performances there.

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<sup>61</sup> I think the Dominicans are right when they say that economic situation is a reason to play bachata. There are many who see bachata as mainly an object of commerce and a way of making fast money. The Dominican bachateros viewed this as only being for personal benefits, as opposed to their own aim which went beyond an economic personal agenda – they had a wish to educate, awaken and inspire **others**. However, I think it is controversial to claim that lower class bachateros – like my Haitian informants – do not like the sound of bachata or that they did not want to inspire others. All my observations indicate the contrary; they absolutely loved bachata. To see how much they enjoyed performing convinced me of their passion and love of their music.

The Dominican bachateros also referred frequently to ‘**racial**’ aspects when describing Haitian bachateros. Walking down the street at the end of the fieldwork, I told Alejandro I had been to one of Felix’s performances a couple of days ago. Without any warning he suddenly stopped, burst out laughing and emphasized with abrupt hand gesticulation: “Control yourself! What are you doing out there [in that barrio]? He plays good... but he’s Haitian! I would never buy a CD of his, he’s a Haitian bachatero”. The contradiction in Alejandro’s utterance reflects his ambiguous attitudes about the bachatero. He first admits that he enjoys his way of playing bachata, thus Alejandro has basically a positive evaluation of Felix – at least they share the same musical taste. He then, however, turns to describe him in a negative way because of his Haitian origins. This is the contradictory aspect; to begin with he gives the barrio musician credit but then he criticises him. However, the ambiguity can be made sense of. Alejandro’s perception of Felix acknowledges that Alejandro is a devotee of the music tradition practiced by Felix – his musical tradition draws them together as it provides a common ground. But, this commonness is subsequently disrupted by the perception of racial difference. Felix’s Haitian ancestry becomes an underlying and unavoidable identity. The reference to Felix’s race is an obvious identity marker and it influences how Juan perceives him. For Alejandro, Felix is an attractive ‘exotic other’ as much as he is a threatening ‘dangerous other’.

The barrios, as I have shown, are a key site to examine the complexity of identity dynamics. Characteristic social contexts, such as *colmados* and carwashes, are cultural institutions which make possible important social aspects of the everyday life in El Barrio (Hernandez 1995). Bachateros connected to these neighbourhoods are likely to identify themselves with their whereabouts, which is represented by mainly *clase baja* and a large number of African descendants. Similarly, the others – here the Dominican bachateros – identify themselves with more ‘modern’, ‘refined’ and ‘cultural’ places such as Hotel Lina, represented by middle-class and a whiter clientele. Through focusing on movement in and perceptions of Santo Domingo, my informants categorized it in different manners and created a social map. Their movements and belongings illustrate their standing in the social hierarchy. Through my descriptions of neighbourhoods, I have in this chapter aimed to explain how individual and collective variations in the categories of class and ethnicity are marked by my informants’ use of locations. Senses of places are **locally and historically specific**; however, it is **universal** that humans make part of such a creation. As I have shown throughout this chapter; place is always in the background of identity negotiations. They are not insignificant, but rather

embedded with cultural meaning and they are being used and interpreted in order to make identities meaningful – either it is through actual use of the place or through imaginary associations connected to places. Collective identities, Dominican versus Haitian, are normally located within regions or territories (Jenkins 2006:26). I have shown that places are ascribed value; nonetheless these categories are ambiguous and changeable.

In the next chapter I will put emphasis on these social constructs and the **performative** aspect (how they speak and act) of the bachatero's identity. I will further explore the dynamics of social identity by looking closer at how identities are acted out. Special focus will be on social differentiation based upon the articulation of cultural difference, such as class, ethnicity and gender.

## 4. STAGING BACHATA – PERFORMING CLASS AND ETHNICITY/‘RACE’

“I can express who I am through bachata.

When I play I transform into the music and feel connection to my people who attend my concerts. Even though I’m not a well-known musician in the Dominican Republic who plays bachata like Juan Luis Guerra, I know I have my own style and the audience in El Barrio like me and support me”.

[Ramón, 36, Haitian bachatero, *clase baja*]

Bachata’s meaning is not limited to cultural ideas, constructions or concepts. It is also a social category which has important practical effects. Bachata as performance (practice) is expressed in all its complexity through the usage of various styles. I will in this chapter compare the different styles and focus on how they are played out in the different ethnic, class and gender contexts. Social meaning is embedded and acted out in the stylistic performances, and it is my main aim to explore these understandings here. Different stylistic bachata settings reflect more than just the performance in itself; it is an experience which reveals social identities of the interacting individuals. Actual actions (performances) of the bachateros, both Haitians and Dominicans, function to uphold and redefine social constructions of identity. For example, I will show that bachata is a vehicle through which tensions like ‘race’, class and gender are expressed. The constant negotiation of how bachata is to be acted out depends on the context and must be considered in relation to conditions in society. Understanding the processes of interaction between musicians and audience is essential to the understanding of identity; it gives information about how identity is “worked”.

### ***Setting – the barrio context***

Ramon and I had been walking in the hot Barrio all day. Tired, we sat down at a *colmado* and ordered two *Presidentes* to cool down. The shop owner bent over the desk and informed us that he had heard Ramón was going to play tonight at the biggest local carwash. We responded affirmatively and my informant added that it was going to be *lleno de gente del barrio* (full of people from the neighbourhood). When I asked if everything was set for the evening, he nodded and said that he had chosen the four other band-members who all were Dominicans. With whom he played varied from concert to concert, he explained. Some of them he had performed with for several years, others he contacted just for the evening. Sometimes he also spontaneously

incorporated a musician from the warm-up band. Quickly we finished the beer so Ramón could return to his home and prepare himself. In the meantime I waited outside his house chatting to his wife and playing with their children. It did not take long before the bachatero was all dressed up in newly washed jeans and a light shirt. I also recognized how his hair was nicely braided in cornrows.

Leaving his family behind, we went off to the carwash in his rattling car with the smashed windscreen, the broken headlights and the worn-down wheel hubs. Parking the car just outside the performing place I saw that some people had already settled down in the bar or at the small white plastic chairs with tables. It was a multigenerational audience, all from aged individuals to newborn babies. Entering the carwash, my informant saluted many of them with hugs, handshakes and kisses on the cheeks, saying *hermano* (brother), *amigo* (friend) and *tranquilito* (taking it easy, chilling). *El dueño del carwash* (the carwash owner) also came over and met Ramón with a warm handshake and friendly words. I noticed a painted sign on one of the stone bricked walls saying: “*No armas de fuego*” (No weapons allowed). When Ramón recognized my astonishment, he introduced me to a couple of his good friends who he told me I could *confiar* (trust). He reassured me I was going to be all right and that his friends were going to take good care of me during the concert. Ramón sat down with me and his friends until he went to perform. It caught my attention that the musician sat down among the rest of the audience. *Presidente* and *cuba libre* (rum and coke) was ordered to the table as the sound from the huge low-quality speakers filled the air with bachata music from the warming-up band.

Ramón entered the stage, with no fanfare, two hours after schedule but no one else than me seemed to be preoccupied with that. Some of the previous band performers, who had played a few merengues but mostly bachata, left the cement stage which was at the same level as where we sat, giving way to the Haitian bachatero. The remaining musicians were joined by additional performers of Ramón’s band. Now it was time for only bachata music. The performers made use of several instruments such as guitars, *güira* and *bongos*. Sitting a couple of meters from the musicians, the bachatero started out by shouting in the microphone that he was happy to be here with his *gente del pueblo* (the people from his neighbourhood). The audience responded by clapping their hands and calling out “*Diablo, diablo*” (Devil, Devil); Ramón’s personal slogan which he used in his songs. The music equipment was quite rudimentary and the sound was almost painful for my ears. I recognized the song he was performing, however, the words he added in between the verses or at the end of the melody made it slightly different from last time I heard it. In the middle of the song he spoke a few lines which included *saludos* (greetings) to the audience and they responded by smiling, raising their cold beer or moving their bodies to the melancholic but contagious rhythm. Those who remained seated did not necessarily sit still on their chairs; they danced enthusiastically from the waist up and cheered with the neighbours. Others entered the scene to dance – males and females together. With sensual bachata moves they occupied the dance floor where Ramón stood. Some of them tried to grab the microphone to suggest their favourite songs they wanted the musician to perform. Following some of their desires, the musicians stood the stage for roughly one hour before la *planta* (generator) cut and the sound and lights went out.



This seemed to be a well known phenomenon as no one raised an eyebrow. Only some heavy-hearted sighs could be heard before the energy came back after a while. Continuing his concert, Ramón addressed to the audience that this was *cosas del barrio* (barrio things) but that he was going to entertain them anyway.



Some of the musicians Ramón used to perform with.  
Instruments (from the left); güira, tambora, guitar, synthesizer, guitar, guitar.

This episode illustrates a typical bachata performance of Ramón. The context is quite similar to his other performances and those of Felix and Robin. The setting takes place in a carwash in his barrio with an observing and participating *clase baja* audience. It is this communication between performers and audience that will be my focus onwards. Musical practices include whole worlds of social uses and meanings, with complex rules, hierarchies and systems of opinions that can be interpreted in many ways. They illustrate what is typical of the performers and audiences' identity, and at the same time portray what it does **not** represent.

One quality that labels this context as a barrio bachata performance is its informality. In this situation musicians and the people attending the concert are interacting with little physical distance between them. The carwashes' architectural construction facilitates close physical contact as the cement dais is at the same level with the audience, only raised a few centimetres above the ground level. Sometimes there was no cement stage at all; they performed on the ground. While Ramón is waiting to perform he sits down with his friends and drinks with them. He usually intermingles with the audience standing in the bar and often exchanges a couple of remarks with *el dueño* (the proprietor). Also, when he walks over to the microphone and starts singing, the audience is in close physical contact with him as they all share the same stage, on the same level. He is supposed to do so, in order not to be perceived

as *pijo* (refined, stuck-up) by his audience, but he also chooses to do so himself in order to portray *un lado bueno* (a good side) of himself. Here, Ramón (individual) fits the low-class norm (collective) of the bachata performance.

Similar situations of informal jam settings even made audience-participation possible; friends or relatives who randomly passed by were invited to for example beat the *bongós*. This close interaction levels the position of bachateros with that of the audience (see chapter 5 for a discussion on social rankings of bachateros and barrio inhabitants). And the ‘roles’ that everyone acts out are meant to be comprehensible to all participants in this situation. As I will show later, the interaction between the urban Dominican bachateros and their audience is somehow different than the barrio example, because there are varying rules governing how to behave in each context.

### ***Performance, arenas, audience and interpretations***

In the classical work “The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life”, Erving Goffman (1959) contributes with a useful understanding of how human beings behave in social situations and how they are perceived by others. His work can illuminate my empirical examples of performances because he is interested in the interaction that takes place in a certain situation where certain people act out certain ‘roles’. He has a ‘dramaturgical’ approach to social interaction where life is portrayed as a theatre where the actors [individuals] negotiate about their own and others’ roles.

Like me, Goffman is preoccupied with what people want to act out – and how the acting is perceived by others. He argues that it is possible to manipulate ones’ ‘status’ in accordance to what is most useful for one’s purpose. During communication between human beings it will be an advantage for the individual to control the behaviour of others, in particular the way they treat him/her. Therefore, the individual will normally act in strategic ways that are expedient to his/her interests when in the presence of others (Goffman 1959:13) and in this way the individual is active in the definition of the context. There is an ongoing negotiation of how to define the situation, and since the others are not passive individuals they can also express their views. However, the participants usually desire a common agreement on the ‘reality’ or ‘rationality’ of the circumstances in order to avoid open conflict. Goffman calls this level of agreement “working consensus”. The working consensus vary from situation to situation (Goffman 1959:9-10). When for example Ramón plays in a *colmado*

where there are youngsters around they might prefer to listen to the popular youth music reggaetón on the radio instead of bachata. On the other hand, when the bachatero performs for an affectionate audience, as in the example above, his fans will show interest for his actions. However, even though the content may be different, the working situations have the same form. In situations where there are disagreements about definition of a situation, it may result in confusion and embarrassment among the people present.

Further, he uses ‘performance’ as a metaphor for everyday actions and routines. He defines the term as: “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants” (Goffman 1959:15). Through interaction (performance) individuals act out roles in different situations which he calls ‘front-stage’ – the scene/setting area – and ‘back-stage’ – behind the scenes. In the ‘back-stage’ situation, for example at home, one is rather free of pressure from others and one can be ‘oneself’. One can negotiate one’s role before it’s acted out in public. In the ‘front-stage’, performer and audience meet to negotiate and define a situation. Individuals present their personal fronts here. Personal fronts can include for example gender, age, ethnicity, looks and facial expression. Notice that some may be rather fixed while some others are transitory. For instance, ethnicity is more fixed than facial expressions because they change over time (Goffman 1959, Jenkins 2006).

Goffman stresses that it is through social interaction, or what he calls ‘the interaction order’, with others that a role of an individual is negotiated and becomes meaningful. The physical co-presence between humans leads the individual and collective perceptions of identity together where they are constructed and re-established.

Through ‘impression management’ – our way to influence others’ reception of our role – individuals present a perception of themselves to other individuals. The motivation behind this acting is to receive acceptance for one’s behaviour from others. This moment of encounter is what Jenkins (2006) examines as well;

“In my terms, this is the internal moment of the dialectic of identification with respect to public image. The external moment is the reception by others of that presentation: they can accept it or not. Individual identification emerges within the ongoing relationship between self-image and public image” (Jenkins 71:2006).

In this interface, between the internal ‘self-image’ (how we see ourselves) and external ‘public image’ (how others see us), identity which is being performed may be rejected or not. The reactions from others have consequences for the performer as they are feedbacks on his or her identity. What types of consequences this has for someone’s identity management depends on aspects of dominance and resistance. Identities may be robust and therefore more resistant to external opinions, or they may be more flexible and thus easier to change due to dominance from the external identification. Rather than being static and unchangeable, identity becomes flexible and negotiable in this view. Without an audience consisting of ‘significant others’ the performers’ identity is meaningless and *vice versa*. The bachateros are defined as much by their **being-perceived** as by their **being**. When the individual acts out his or her role the reaction from spectators is crucial as they accept or rejects the individuals’ image of self. In this sense the individual as performer is a public product (Jenkins 2006).

As shown, the processual understanding of identity is important in order to understand social life. In “Stigma” (1968) Goffman emphasises labelling of deviance in order to show how others perceive and influence our identity. Others label our way of living life not only by ways of categorizing and naming, but also through reactions and treatment of us in interaction. The external effect on our internal identity may bounce back at us and have consequences for how we act in the future. This is what also Jenkins focuses on when he talks about trajectories of **being** and **becoming**. With these expressions he wants to stress the importance of the ever-changing aspect of identity, which becomes possible through the negotiation between agency and structure. If we think of identity as conceptualized in terms of process, the gap between action and structure can be avoided (Jenkins 2006:24).

When others categorised the bachateros identity management as “failed”, it had effects on how the musicians perceived themselves (thought) and how they played their roles (action). In matters of authoritative social control the bachateros could change their behaviour. Definitely, authority and power are important in determining whose definition prevails (Jenkins 2006:49). Comments or other reactions towards their identity influenced and had consequences for their presentations. The categorisation influenced how the bachateros carried through the concert. The new roles could be performed by changing the use of for example clothes, instruments and speech. The internalisation could be of both positive and negative identities. However, as Jenkins states, this way of perceiving identity does not take into account incidents when individuals resist external control (Jenkins 2006:75). I agree

with this point, as I often observed resistance from my bachatero informants when they were confronted by opinions or actions that contradicted with how they perceived themselves. Their reaction to such labelling was done by ignoring or expressing disagreement towards external labelling, for example by continuing to perform in their special way or verbally commenting on the incorrect (in the bachateros’ view) categorisations of them.

In accordance with Jenkins, my point is that it is necessary to understand identification as a dialectic that goes both ways; both from external to internal **and** from internal to external. Only then can, we comprehend the ebbs and flows of interaction in everyday realities. Both are processes of everyday life, and none of them have more value than the other. Identity can only be understood as process, as being and becoming. It is never final or settled. Identity construction takes place during bachata performances through the interaction between musicians and audience, where everyone acts out their roles in accordance to established, but not determining, social norms. During the interaction there is a continuous shaping and reshaping of identity-markers done through for example dancing, lyrical use, dress codes and instrument application.

Solomon (2000) claims that: “Performance creates the space for calling into being the differences that make a difference – the differences between communities” (2000:276), and it is these differences in the stylistic features of bachata that I will look further into and interpret.

Having explained how I use ‘performance’ with reference to Solomon (2000) and mainly Goffman (1959), I wish to mention two additional analytical terms before I turn to the performances of the bachateros. The first, ‘**audience**’, I chose to understand as a gathering of spectators, viewers or listeners who are present at a ‘performance’. Another term for ‘audience’ can also be ‘a public’. The second, ‘**arena**’ I think of as the social space where performers and ‘audience’ meet and negotiate identity. Arena can be interpreted as Goffman’s term ‘setting’, which he explains to be an important part of front-stage. This is what provides the background of a performance. For example, a *colmado* or a carwash can be the arena or setting of a bachata performance. All three terms – audience, arena and performance – are connected to each other; for example if there is an audience, consequently there is an arena and performance as well. It would be meaningless to speak of the analytical terms as isolated units. None of them can exist without the others.

### Performing class identity



Felix Cumbé with some of his well-dressed-up band members.

Contexts of staging provide an opportunity for the articulation of different identity distinctions – such as class for example. By looking closely at dress code, instrumentation and lyrics use in bachata performances I will show how these strategies encode class categories.

The scarce financial means of the Haitian bachateros restricted them in using expensive **fashion items** such as clothes, shoes and accessories. The bachateros perceived themselves (internal identification) as low-class people and emphasised that they could not afford fashion that *la clase media* or *clase alta* consumed. Ramón explained: “Poor people don’t have a lot of clothes. They often wear *pantalones prestados o heredados* (borrowed or inherited trousers). Despite this situation, they all seemed to be very style-conscious and interested in having a good physical appearance. This focus was especially important during performances. They had all invested in outfits which they used during concerts, however Ramón informed me that he might have to sell some of them to obtain money. They stressed that playing music was their work, and at work it was crucial to “be in good conditions”, “go prepared” and *verse bien* (look good). It was important to have *ropa adecuada* (appropriate clothes) in front of an audience, and the musicians took out time and put a lot of effort to prepare themselves before they went off for the evening. A clean, ironed shirt and a pair of nice shoes was a must. Additional effects that heightened the look even more could be jewellery, rings, watches, gelatine or spray for the hair and a squirt of perfume. Several times I observed that Ramón wore a big watch during performances, but I soon discovered that it was damaged as the hands did not move. For him, the practical aspect was irrelevant, while the impression he gave

was more important. These were visible attributes of their lifestyle encoded in appearance and behaviour. But as Robin explained, there were do’s and don’ts when it came to dressing up;

Once a friend of mine brought back a very expensive suit from New York, and he sold it to me for less than half price. If I had been singing in El Hotel Naco [a comfortable and attractive hotel in Santo Domingo] I would have worn that suit. It’s in the centre and people *se fijan* (take notice) you know... but if I’m going to sing in La Romana or in other *barrios humildes* (humble, modest) I’ll not wear it [the suit], *eso no va alla* (that [the suit] doesn’t serve the occasion/is out of place). There [in La Romana] I’ll put on a pair of jeans and *un polo* (a sweater), it’s *mas cómodo* (convenient). I think of the audience and if I wear the suit the people are going to say: Ay! We can’t continue to talk to him! [Robin] *Se ha vuelto demasiado pijo!* (He has become too snobbish/stuck-up!) *La gente te tumba y sube por tu vestido.* (the people/the audience tear you down and build you up because of your clothes). So that’s why I have *mucha clase de ropa, verdad?* (many types of clothes, right?)... so I can choose. It depends on with *quien andas* (who you are with. Lit, *andar*: walk). My musicians and I often talk about what to wear because this is very important. But the singer is the front figure so it’s most important for us [singers] to consider the clothes.

Robin was conscious of what to wear in different settings. It illustrates that he knew how to switch between the different social class contexts, in order to follow the dress codes that were characteristic for each situation. By what he said, it is clear that he took into consideration the fashion-opinion of ‘the others’ (external identification) – the audience. In a Goffmanian sense, he presents an image of himself in order to receive acceptance from others. On the back-stage – with his fellow musicians – he discusses outfits. On the front-stage – at Hotel Naco or in La Romana – he presents himself and negotiates his role with the audience. His purpose is that his self-image becomes a credible public image. Therefore he wears clothes that he assumes fits the audience’s taste. Through this dynamic between performers and audience, the bachateros’ clothes become social identity markers of struggle between people. Opinions of what to wear and not, are persistently being constructed and reconstructed.

The importance of costume and performances was also explicit during Felix’s concerts. He was normally very well dressed, but he was also the best known bachatero of my informants and had most likely built up the biggest economic capital of them all. I observed that he performed in a stylish blue suit combined with a fancy Cuban-inspired hat and nice black shoes. Occasionally, some of his band members would dress up in a similar way in order to be identified as an ensemble.

The bachateros were very particular about their dress codes and its connection to cleanliness. Dirty clothes could reflect more than just filthy textiles in itself; it could indicate a person's social class because it revealed that the wearer was from a poor barrio where the lack of sidewalks or paved streets made them dirty. Thus, it was important to perform with clean shoes and a clean outfit to represent their social class in the best possible way. The attention of the well-keeping of one's shoes and clothes was not only a matter of attention for the bachateros; it also affected me. Continuously, it was pointed out to me that I had to clean my shoes after visiting el barrio; it was shameful if I returned to the centre with dusty and muddy shoes after a performance. “People will talk”, Ramón explained to me. I was recommended to stop wearing light-coloured clothing when I was visiting; the dark spots on white textile could expose that I had been in a low-class area. Ramón's wife often gave me a cloth to dust off the worst dirt before my return to the centre. I understood that wearing a clean outfit was not only a matter that they were occupied with inside the barrios; they were also occupied with avoiding negative reactions from ‘the others’ in the centre.

I had observed that Dominican descriptions of Haitians often focused on that they smelled badly or were unclean. (Interestingly, this perception did not coincide with my own observations as the Haitians I met were extremely conscious about their personal hygiene. If they had water they used it to keep themselves clean). However, the Haitians were aware of this negative labelling. They recognized that this was a common way for Dominicans to describe Haitians. Despite this external categorization it did not seem to have become an internalized identity of the Haitians themselves. For the most part, they did not perceive themselves as unhygienic and they had routines for maintaining themselves clean. Their own image had consequences for the bachateros when they performed. Especially, concerts were important situations where the perception of cleanliness was upheld. To be “presentable” by wearing clean clothes was considered an important aspect of class identity; and this idea was verified by concrete actions like dressing up in a “presentable” way. These were norms that affected both barrio performers – and me – as I represented one in their audience.

The Haitian bachata style also had poetic characteristics. The link between **lyrics** and my bachateros' social context was hard to miss. When asking how he would describe his bachata, Felix answered that it was important for him to write *popularmente* (popularly). Bachata lyrics reflected the musicians' low-class origins of los barrios. They sang mostly about *amor* (love) and *desamor* (lack of love) in relation to women, but also about their complicated childhood as sugar cane cutters – like in Robin's *La historia de mi vida* (the



story of my life), – friendship, and immigration. Their perception of their social ranking in society was expressed through the medium of bachata and the audience seemed to *amargarse* (become embittered) when they heard these songs. By singing about common experiences – such as growing up or living under harsh low-class conditions – the performers presented something the audience could identify with. Because the content of bachata lyrics represented recognizable stories to the public, the bachateros received approval for this. During observations, I noticed several comments from the audience like “*Estoy borracho y amargado*” (I’m drunk and blue) and “*Coño! Es mi música!*”<sup>62</sup> (Damn!/Fuck! This is my music!). When attending Robin’s concerts – one of Ramón’s biggest idols –, Ramón often *se amargó* (turned bitter) further. He explained the reason to be: “I’m blue because it’s **him**”. Statements like these confirmed their feeling of connection or belonging to the performer and the music he presented, and thus to a certain group of people who shared this common identity.

Another stylistic lyrical feature was the use of slogans. All the *barrio* bachateros had their own expression. For example, Robin said “*Cariño*” (his surname and *bachata* slogan) many times during his songs and added the interrogative “*Y qué?*” (What?) as a way of asking his audience what was going on, or coming next. The audience responded by smiling or chuckling back. Ramón’s motto was “*Diablo! Diablo!*” (Devil! Devil!) and the audience used to yell it out during performances. Ramón then responded back with the same slogan. This was a way of communicating with the audience.

Further, **instrument usage** also encoded class belonging. Even though bachata instrumentation has developed considerably from its original simplicity, the *barrio* performers did not consider it as obvious to possess instruments that had been added to the more refined *bachata* ensembles. Ramón’s band for example did not perform with high-tech synthesizers, which he explained made the genre more “sophisticated”. He stressed that the refined bachateros – often referring to Aventura and Juan Luis Guerra – were too absorbed in *americanisar la bachata* (Americanizing bachata) with new instruments and the usage of them. He blamed their innovations and style of bachata for not being “real”, while he characterized himself closer to *la bachata de verdad* (the real/authentic bachata) because he did not use the most modern instruments in his performances. Usually he incorporated güira, *bongós*, two electric guitars and *bajo* (bass guitar). As he had no fixed band members he had

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<sup>62</sup> *Coño* is a vulgar term for female genitals and can here be translated as “Damn!” or “Fuck!”

to *buscar* (look for, gather, contact) musicians who provided these instruments before every performance. If he lacked one guitarist he chose to postpone the entertainment until he secured the musician. I never saw Ramón perform in a *colmado* or carwash with acoustic guitars or *maracas*. This observation caught my attention as it seemed paradoxical to me. During interviews Ramón admitted several times that neither Juan Luis Guerra nor Aventura were his favourite musicians because they transformed “real” bachata into “fake” bachata. Despite this opinion, he himself refused to perform with the **actual** authentic instruments – acoustic guitars and maracas – but used electric guitars and *güira* instead. Even though Ramón meant he performed the traditional low-class bachata, he had upgraded his instruments too, in order to play the most innovative and “hip” bachata as possible for his audience. This shows that there often is a gap between what people say and what they do. It also illustrates that bachata offers a category in which it is possible to explain and negotiate identities; modern or traditional, low or higher class, Dominican or Haitian.

There is resemblance between this example and that of Ramón’s in chapter 3 where his description of himself, his identity, seems to be somewhat contradictory to how he acts out this characteristic. He claims that he and the barrio residents belong to a “drinking-culture”, but still he avoids, and even dislikes, drinking with his friends in some situations. Similarly, he points out that he is not delighted for the ‘modern’ bachata and talks warmly about the old style which he feels closer to. However, during performances he played a quite modernized bachata style himself. It is in-between the naming of identity and the acting out of identity that social life emerges as meaningful. This is the way identities change; they must be understood as never set, but always in the making.

In order to explore the reactions from the audience and performers in the carwash, the social anthropologist Juan suggested me to do an experiment by playing a CD of Juan Luis Guerra before or after one of Ramón’ performances. He presumed that the people would respond by saying something like: “Turn off that *vaina!*”<sup>63</sup> (rubbish), and continued by informing:

People like Guerra, Luis Dias and Aventura are the reason why the middle and high classes listen to *bachata* today. But they make music for one type of people. They changed bachata but that’s

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<sup>63</sup> The typical Dominican term *vaina* may refer to different meanings. To differentiate between the intentions, individuals emphasize intonation and bodily expressions to express what they mean. My informants referred to *vaina* as either something positive or something negative. For example if they referred to a good performance they said, with intonation and facial expression reflecting happiness; “*Qué vaina de concierto!*” (What a good concert!). However, if the concert had been bad they said exactly the same but this time with intonation and facial expression reflecting deception,: “*Qué vaina de concierto!*” (What a bad concert!).

not what most people listen to. Juan Luis Guerra is for people of a certain social class, not for everyone.

I thought of the test as very interesting and one evening when Ramón had finished playing his live music, I went up to the DJ who was located in a small booth playing music from a CD player or his computer. I asked him to put on a CD of the well-known musician but the DJ seemed uninterested by my request. He shook his head and replied that the carwash was not equipped with that music. Eager to carry out the experiment, I intended, with Ramón’s help, to get hold of a CD of Guerra in the low-class neighbourhood in other *colmados* or carwashes the days after. I did not succeed. Even though I did not manage to go through with my experiment, the course of events gave me valuable information about class identity; The fact that it was extremely difficult, and in my case impossible, to obtain a Juan Luis Guerra CD in the neighbourhood, confirmed that the low-class barrio members did not perceive **that** bachata style as their music but as belonging to other classes.

It is reasonable to take into consideration the low economic resources of the inhabitants as a reason to why the CD was nowhere to be found. It is clearly an important factor why some venues experienced restrictions in disposing a wide selection of bachata styles. However, I would argue that this was not the main reason. As the venues were often equipped with computers storing hundreds of songs, they could be distributed among the *colmados* and carwashes. This type of music exchange took place between the venues, so if songs of Guerra existed in el barrio I would probably have obtained it somewhere. To me, a more reasonable explanation to the difficulty of finding “refined” bachata music in el barrio is taste, rather than scarce economic recourses.

Bourdieu (1984) can illuminate why the bachateros obtained, performed and listened to different kinds of music. In “Distinction”, he explores the connection between taste, social class and culture. Three forms of ‘capital’, economic, cultural and social, are the recourses that individuals and groups compete for. The forms are to some extent interchangeable and this gives agents the possibility for movement in society. Cultural capital is the acquisition of the dominating cultural codes – or tastes – in society. It is obtained mainly through childhood and education. It can give power in form of knowledge of art or science, participation in politics, results in the educational system, distinguished consumer – or in this case – music preferences. The amount of capital connected to an individual is an indicator of which social class he or she belongs to. Because capital is scarce it can be viewed as a power resource because it gives different individuals and groups different value. Difference in capital is

therefore also difference in power. According to Bourdieu, this is the basis for social distinctions in society (Bourdieu 1984).

Social class seems to influence what our likes and interests are and how distinctions based on class are expressed in daily life. Tastes can be connected to major social divisions like class and ethnicity, distinctions between urban and rural, and between the highly and poorly educated. For example, *la clase baja* will prefer the barrio-bachata and go to *colmados* to dance or hang out. The rejection of “Americanised”, modern bachata reinforces connection to lower social classes. Higher classes will listen to Juan Luis Guerra’s bachatas and go to bars or discotheques where the environment is more cultivated. This reflects distinctions in taste and taste is classed. It indicates that my informants belong to a class which is not associated with much cultural capital, while the upper-classes are. Audiences’ and performers’ categories of “right” and “wrong” bachata influenced what styles of the genre were actually played in the low-class area.

Bourdieu concentrates on education as a strategy to develop “high” taste. Bachata was developed among the Dominican Republic’s uneducated poor and this is one of the factors why traditional bachata is still not connected to the high – but the low-class. Thus, taste in music will reflect class history. In “Outline of a theory of practice” (1991), Bourdieu specifies the concept of ‘habitus’. In essence, ‘habitus’ refers to regulated improvisations of internalized structures of the social order. These structures and processes can be understood through an examination of everyday practical acts. To Bourdieu, ‘habitus’ is passed on in families and becomes a taken-for granted way to live (Bourdieu 1991) – just as bachata has. These preferences can explain how taste in society is being maintained through time. A person's cultural preference is influenced by the class-based ‘habitus’ of which he or she belongs to. Class belonging reinforces particular ways of being and relating to the social world, and will therefore affect a person's taste.

Dominican musical tastes were especially established during the 30 year-long dictatorship of Trujillo where the President used merengue (accordion-based) as the national symbol. His political leadership created musical tastes in the country which persisted over time. Obligated to stand in the shadow of merengue, bachata and its audience has been affected by this. Nowadays, bachata is quite modernized, but the traditional barrio-bachata is still stigmatized to some extent and the higher classes, and some of the middle-classes, will not prefer this music as it does not correspond with the taste of their class. These classes will probably not attend traditional bachata concerts, go to carwashes or listen to Felix Cumbé. They cut out the emotional aspect that the barrio bachateros have to their music. By leaving

out the talk of passion and love for music, they rationalise their categorisation; it becomes easier to categorise the barrio bachata supporters as closer to “nature” than to “culture”. Themselves, on the other hand, stand closer to the cultural realm and talk of their emotional connection to the music they prefer. These “educated” people are simply habituated in different, privileged and dominant ways and would choose other styles and genres. In this way, ‘habitus’ – the embodied culture – influences everyday actions. Indeed, people’s cultural capital influences the process of social distinction and structures of judgement that produce boundaries between individuals and groups. As Jenkins says, “Habitus is simultaneously collective and individual, and definitely embodied” (Jenkins 2006:20).

The structures of taste function to reinforce social distinctions and maintain boundaries – boundaries between barrio individuals and centre individuals, between traditional bachata audience and modern bachata audience, between low and high form and between Haitian and Dominicans performers. Taste is used to contrast oneself from others. The habitual, bodily ways of behaviour and action reveal power relations. Certain culture behaviours that are associated with a person's class serve to emphasize these social hierarchies; broadly speaking classes are identified as bad, good, poor, rich, traditional, modern etc. As a group, the low-class barrio bachateros identify themselves and at the same time they are identified by others. They are categorized as poor and belonging to *la clase baja*. However, they are not passively being labelled because they too participate in the identity making of themselves – they can to some extent reject or accept the labelling from others – just as others can reject or accept the categorization from the barrio inhabitants.

The musicians also experimented with other performance strategies, such as mixing musical genres like bachata and guitar-based merengue. As I have mentioned, bachata and dance form a pair, and sometimes the bachateros incorporated a few songs of the fast-going guitar-based merengue in order to satisfy the audience’s need to dance. Because of the occasionally limitation in instruments, the musicians economised by playing the *bongo* (a drum essential to bachata) as a *tambora* (a drum essential to merengue) by playing it sideways when performing merengue and turned upright, as normal, when playing bachata. In her works, Deborah Pacini Hernandez (1991, 1995) discusses *la lucha sonora* (the struggle of sounds) – as the famous musician Luis Dias called the political and social tensions that were symbolically played out through Dominican musical development. With this term she understands the battle between musical genres in the market and in the social perceptions. Since merengue is perceived as the musical symbol of the Dominican Republic, it has

hegemony over bachata. Bachata is seen as more low-class music and not cultivated in the same manner as merengue – especially the accordion-style – (or salsa or regaettón). But notwithstanding this boundary between the musical genres, I experienced that these categorizations were not static, but rather flexible and negotiable. During some performances, I noticed that the bachateros incorporated merengues, however only a few as not to lose their “bachatero label”. The mixing of higher class music and music of low-classes – the masses – was an interesting twist the bachateros did which, in Felix’s words, *hace gossar a la gente* (makes people have a good time).

But according to what I experienced from observing dancing couples, there were not more people dancing when merengue filled the speakers in the carwashes and *colmados*. When talking to the fans and the performers they answered that merengue did not appeal more to the barrio audience than bachata. This can be explained by the fact that not only merengue, but also bachata has speeded up considerably over the years, and it can now be quite lively to dance to. If the performers did not have a merengue in their repertoire the audience seemed to have no problems with that. The tempo of fast-going bachata seemed to please the audience and there were always people who stood up and danced with a partner during the concerts. Actually, when the bachateros incorporated merengues it was not always to give the performance a danceable touch at all; as I observed several times merengue was played only in order to test the instruments in the beginning of a performance. This could happen when there were few people present to witness this genre. This shows that even though they perceived merengue as a national symbol it did not threaten bachata; the musicians performed bachata because it was bachata that their low-class audience preferred.

### Performing ethnic/‘racial’ identity

Stylistic features did also encode ethnic distinctions which functioned to construct differences and similarities between individuals and groups. I will now show how **lyrical** experimentation is used to mark – and determine – ethnic identity through interaction between audience and performers.

Former experiences with the Haitian bachateros’ performances had taught me that they sang the lyrics in Dominican Spanish. These observations corresponded with what they had told me considering their use of language; the bachateros claimed they did not communicate in Creole unless the people present spoke this language. Every one of them had Haitian accents, some more heavy than others; however they all had excellent knowledge of Spanish

vocabulary and in most situations they communicated through this idiom. However, one situation caught my attention as it contradicted what I had previously experienced during performances. I found that interesting information was embedded in the following use of lyrics:

One afternoon I brought some of my Dominican friends, who were light-skinned middle-class architects from the centre part of Santo Domingo, to el barrio. I wanted them to meet my bachatero informant Ramón and experience a great musical moment. In the first place, some of them seemed a bit reluctant to come along to a barrio where a large part of the inhabitants were of Haitian origin. Luckily, after a lot of persuasion from my side, I managed to convince them. Once in el barrio, we met up with Ramón and his musicians. This time it was a rather informal and spontaneous performance where we sat down on plastic chairs on the side of the road. Sitting in a circle, musicians and audience were randomly located in between each other. After having performed three bachata songs composed by his older Dominican friend, Ramón suggested they did one of his own songs. He started out singing with a nasal voice about how a woman once abandoned him and had left him with nothing more than a broken heart and a bottle of rum. In the middle of the song, when my urban friends clapped their hands and seemed to enjoy the performance, he all of a sudden switched to Haitian Creole. Singing Creole strophes and single words, mixed with Dominican Spanish in a clearly improvised way, he changed the song I knew so well into something new. The Dominican audience, who in the beginning had accompanied Ramón in the refrains, had now stopped singing and seemed somewhat unsure of how to react. They continued to smile but, strangely enough, I noticed that their participation had faded away. First, they looked at Rafael, then at me and then back at Ramón, and they maintained this questioning look until the bachateros performed Dominican Spanish songs again.

I knew that some of the other Haitian bachateros had composed songs which included Creole lyrics. But, to my knowledge, Ramón had not done that. His songs included only Dominican words, and of this reason the example above caught my attention. Why would he all of a sudden switch to Creole now? And why did the Dominican audience react in the way that they did?

I would argue that this stylistic expression was not accidental. It was rather a result of the specific situation between audience and performers. Goffman’s ‘impression management’ is useful here; during interaction individuals present specific identities of self to others. Simultaneously, they hope for this identity to be successfully received by others; the individual intends to control the impression others get of him or her. Individuals may control this reception, however not totally. As Jenkins adds: “[...] we are all at a disadvantage in that we cannot ensure either their [the significant others’] ‘correct’ reception or interpretation, or

know with certainty how they [identity signs] are received or interpreted” (Jenkins 2006:20). Ramón sent out a ‘self-image’ which was interpreted as a ‘public image’ during interaction with others, but he could not control the reception from the Dominican audience. He seems to lose support when they tone down their eager participation in the performance. The example illustrates that an individual can never predict with certainty the reception of his or her identity management. It also shows that Ramón’s identification of himself as Haitian in this situation has **consequences**. It is at these boundaries that internal/virtual/group/ and external/nominal/category/ identification is negotiated.

But why this strategy of switching to Creole? The bachatero takes the initiative to switch to Creole in order to present his Haitianness; his bilingualism is a quality he possesses in contrast to the Dominicans. Possibly, Ramón intended to demonstrate this skill. He is aware of this and is maybe proud of being Haitian in this respect. A pride of their African ancestry was also common among the other Haitian bachateros. Whatever the reason; it was a sign of Haitian belonging. Other spectators of Haitian descent that surrounded us joined to sing along to the Creole lyrics. Their and Ramón’s reactions illustrate a collective self-awareness; they are Haitians with same language and similar life experiences. They are members of a group. For them, it becomes necessary to emphasize this identity because it is existentially important.

The situation reveals that he **overplays**, rather than underplays, his Haitianness in order to make his ethnicity relevant and meaningful. Ramón uses this cultural feature as a sign of his difference towards the Dominicans, and he acknowledges and notices it. By overplaying he emphasises the ethnic aspect of his identity through his ‘impression management’. The Dominican’s sudden lack of enthusiasm could be of either negative or positive character. In other words, his strategy can be a disadvantage or a resource; A disadvantage, because Dominicans tend to perceive Haitian ethnic identity as inferior to theirs, or a resource because they are astonished by Ramón’s language- and improvisational skills (ethnic signs). In this particular situation I think it had a positive retrospective effect on the Dominican’s perception of the bachatero, because when I talked to the Dominicans afterwards they praised the musician’s good command of lyrical improvisation. They described him as a streetwise, creative and talented musician. They even gave the musicians 2000 *pesos* – which is quite a sum – because they were so content with the experience. Ramón’s improvisation with Creole and Dominican Spanish gives him a bigger repertoire to play on. This attribute has positive evaluation in El Barrio, **and** beyond. Drawing on Barth, Jenkins says: “It is not enough to claim an ethnic identity, one must be able satisfactorily to



perform it, to actualise it. That may require resources” (Jenkins 2006:98-99). In this situation Ramón overplayed a resource of his identity and his performance resulted in a successful reception.

Concentrating on why identity changes from context to context, it is important to emphasise the **relational** and **situational** aspect of interaction. Ramón uses this identity management to show who he is, and he does it when the audience is **Dominican**. The example must therefore be perceived as situational, relational, multivocal and context-bound. The development of interaction varies from situation to situation and epoch to epoch. It is the individuals present who make the situation, and in this sense the outcome would be quite different in another situation which presents other individuals. With Haitian performers and the ethnically mixed barrio audience the situation would probably be somewhat different. Here, however, Ramón intends to stress his Haitian identity in contrast to that of the Dominicans. On ‘the stage’ humans meet different individuals who they have to relate to in various ways; different individuals – different performances. The most important issue is not the cultural differences between groups and categories but rather which differences become relevant through social interaction. In this example, Ramón’s ethnicity became relevant, not his identity as a father, his age or his gender. A couple of hours later his status as a husband might be of more importance. What becomes relevant depends on the shifting social relations.

Having said this, identity is not something anyone can choose randomly. Nor is everyone doomed to have a specific identity in every context. Or are we? My response to the questions is that identity is both – it is both changeable **and** resistant (to some degree) – depending on the situation. In other words; identity can be both **imperative** (forced on) **and** chosen. ‘Race’, like other **imperative** identities such as gender and age, are harder to manipulate than other identities (Barth 1969:17). ‘Race’ is often thought of as imperative, because it is difficult to escape entirely due to visual, bodily signs. Therefore it is an identity which is more constraining than other identities. Although ‘race’ might be more visible than ethnicity which is based more on behavioural aspects, ethnicity is also often described as imperative. However, ethnicity can also be **situational**. As I have shown, Ramón’s ethnic sign, like here; his Creole language, is more likely to be situational than imperative; at least in this situation. He overplayed it, and he **could** also have underplayed it. He more or less chose which identity he preferred to perform, and decided on the Haitian biased aspects. Because there is an ability

to modify the expression of this ethnic sign, the identity can be called situational in this context.

The Dominicans left el barrio with a new experience of Haitian bachateros; the interaction had produced positive perceptions of Haitian bachatero identity. Here, it is clear how identity works due to mutual influence on self-image and public image. Ramón’s presentation of his self-image as an improvisational, clever, Haitian musician became a public image. The Dominican’s categorisation of Haitians had most likely been adjusted in a positive way. Such a result can occur when Ramón overplays his ethnic identity. He uses bachata as a medium to achieve this and to present himself. The perception of bachata as a genre becomes slightly changed through the experimental stylistic use of it. This is how bachata is being developed and transformed into new forms. But not only the musical genre changes – also the performers and their audience associated with it are perceived and perceive themselves differently. So, even though Dominican identity is dominant in the Dominican Republic, the Haitian bachateros are not subordinate or controlled by Dominican norms in all contexts. Dominican culture is a dominant reference, but so is the Haitian. Although these bachateros are stigmatised, the categorisation is not static – but flexible and changeable. Through interaction, both parts negotiated the definition of the situation, and it is important to remember that self-image and public image are two sides of the same coin, neither is more important than the other; they work in a perpetual dialectic with each other (Jenkins 2006). This is how interpretation and meaning becomes emergent in performance.

### **Performing gender – bachateras in a man’s world**

Bachata implies not only perceptions of class and race, but also gender. These are often cross cutting dimensions in Dominican bachata. As I touched upon in chapter 2, women have traditionally, and in varying ways, been a major focus in bachata over the decades. Its lyrics and contexts often reflect a macho attitude towards females. While bachata is listened to by both men **and** women, it is performed and composed almost exclusively by men (Hernandez 1990, 1995).

During my fieldwork I experienced numerous bachata performances, and only a few of them were by female lead singers<sup>64</sup>. But, females do constitute a large part of the audience, as listeners, dancers, drinkers and flirts. I was definitely not the sole woman in the audience. The *bachateras* (female bachata singers) I observed in El Barrio were the group “*Las bachateras del Swing*”. It consisted of two artists (and men as guitars- and *bongó* players which they “borrowed” from El Barrio). Both of the women were lead singers and dancers, one of which also played *la güira*. It caught my attention that the *bachateras* were white Dominicans from the town-centre, and one of the singers was even half-Spanish. I wondered why they performed in a low-class-, largely black barrio and not at more fashionable white arenas.

First of all, I think this is because bachata custom has left little space for women. Few females have gained access to the male dominated bachata sphere, and even fewer have had success<sup>65</sup>. So, women who try to make a bachata career meet difficulties and complaints about “messing up” the male-dominated bachata category. They are viewed as the outsiders who interfere with the insiders. Thus, *bachateras* are left with few alternatives and offers when it comes to which arenas to perform in. And the arenas they do perform in are perceived as “uncultured” by the middle/upper-classes. Since some middle- and especially upper-class Dominicans still stigmatize **bachateros**, they have an even harder time accepting **bachateras**. As a result, *bachateras* as a group experience double stigmatisation. In their search for acknowledgement, they are even more vulnerable than men in this sphere. Haitian *bachateras* – which I have yet to experience – would probably be stigmatised even further.

Secondly, I believe that how (virtual) *bachateras* (nominal) perform, have consequences for how they are perceived and perceive themselves (cf. Jenkins 2006), and consequently which class and ethnic audience they end up with. *Las bachateras Del Swing* delivered a clearly steamy and sensual performance. Regarding outfit, they dressed up in minimal clothes (top and hot pants), leaving little to the imagination. The *güirera*<sup>66</sup> not only played the instrument, but also used it to simulate sexual intercourse (a phallic symbol). Lyrically speaking, the words spoke explicitly of sexual acts between women and men. Even though bachata settings have changed throughout the years, this performance fuelled the genre’s strongly stigmatised connotations of the brothel/bar it was given during the 1970’s

<sup>64</sup> In Felix Cumbé’s band, his wife and her girl friend sing back up vocals.

<sup>65</sup> Hernandez mentions about ten women who entered the bachata scene, whereof only two, Mélida Rodríguez and Ardia Ventura, have become widely known (Hernandez 1995:179). At present, the Dominican bachata duo “Monchy y Alexandra” has gained popularity. Many say that Alexandra’s fame has only been possible via Monchy, the male singer.

<sup>66</sup> A person who plays the *güira*.

and 1980’s. The performance reflected this sexuality and temptation, something which consequently placed the bachateras lower in the hierarchy, towards black, low-class barrios.

Ramón repeatedly told me that “there are many prostitutes” at the arenas in el barrio, and that “nights means work for them [these women], while others [“the significant other women”], have gone to bed in order to get up early next morning”. His friends used to nod in the affirmative. For them, it was important to be seen with many women, in order to be perceived as virile. I also experienced proprietors of carwashes who grabbed the microphone, asking girls to raise their hands if they were going to be unfaithful that night. And most of them shouted with joy and waived their hands eagerly. However, for the bachateras it was important not to be labelled as prostitutes or promiscuous. They tried to avoid the external moment of identification (prostitutes) to becoming an internal moment of self-identification (Jenkins 2006). Indeed, they offered a highly visual and sensual performance-image, something which, in this bachata setting, draws on a prostitution-identity. But, this was in order to “get attention”, they told me. After the performance, they acted rather differently. For them, it was crucial to maintain their “cleanliness” and not behave like the other women. In their struggle to achieve this, they drew off an identity boundary towards the “easy women”, by not dancing intimately with men, sitting, just the two of them at one table, not drinking alcohol and not talking to or intermingling much with neither men nor women at the carwash.

Wilson’s model from Providencia Island offers a separation between reputation : low-class : men : public :: respectability : middle-class : women : private (Wilson 1973). But my ethnography challenges his formulation. In everyday (Dominican) life, categories are more blurry than that. Even though most men strive to have a reputation-identity by interacting with many women and drinking beer, especially two of my Haitian-descent informants, Felix and Robin, told me that they were not *mujeriegos* (seducers) and that they liked being with their family. And even though most women try to be respectable by sticking to the house and family, my observations show that women do participate in men’s world, either as an audience or (less frequently) as performers. They try to be eloquent, sing and dance bachata and even capture many men. This shows that women and men have to deal with **both** moral systems. As Jenkins (2006) would have put it; respect and reputation are two sides of the same coin and they rub up against each other. But there is a **tendency** that women in bachata settings are perceived, by themselves and others, as disrespectable – as a “special kind of women”. Women connected to the private sphere are largely perceived as “essential”

respectable females and they stand in contrast to women interacting in male bachata public arenas, who run the risk of being categorised as immoral, inferior and a “matter out of place”<sup>67</sup> (Douglas 1966). In general, women have to behave in accordance with the morals of respectability in order to maintain worth as a woman. And as *Las bachateras del Swing* perform bachata with heavy weight on sensuality, they are conceived of as losing their respectability/whiteness/middle-class and become associated with reputation/blackness/low-class. Because they confront established collective gender (and class/ethnic) categories, they are viewed as having no self-control (respectability) and therefore cannot control their sexual desire (reputation) (Hernandez 1990:358, Wilson 1973).

### **Style as an expression of class, ethnicity/‘race’ (and gender)**

There are complex connections between ‘race’/ethnicity and class and they stand in an ambiguous relation to each other. Having said that, while lyrical use in bachata can be an ethnic sign, it does not exclude its class dimensions. To have good command of language while performing bachata is as much a characteristic of *la clase baja* as it is a sign of Haitian ethnic identity. This vocal style locates Ramón in the lower social strata and at the same time it displays his African influences. The correlation between the two is clear because it shows how my informant – through stylistic use of language – belongs to a specific social class and also to a specific ethnic group. Both categories are indicators of ranking, and important indicators of social identity. My Haitian informants viewed themselves, and were viewed by others, as belonging to lower social strata; their music had low-class connotations, the performers and audience were poorly educated and it was African-related in that they used Creole. Women can become darker and lower class if they are audience or bachateras, because they are categorised as vulgar (disrespectable), as opposed to decent home-staying women (respectable).

Deborah Pacini Hernandez (1995) may add information which emphasises bachata’s class- and race connotations; she found that the African roots of bachata practitioners and audience can be noted through specific language use in song texts. References such as *negro/a*, *prieto/a* and *moreno/a* – all terms which describes skin colour of men and women – have been used by

<sup>67</sup> The British anthropologist Mary Douglas was the first to launch the concept ‘matter out of place’. It refers to disturbance in the established order of categories and is connected to taboos (Douglas, 1966).

several bachateros. This stylistic use situates the bachateros in an ethnic context because it stresses the link to African heritage (ibid. 1995:135). These formulations are often done by those who have dark skin **and** stand low in the social hierarchy.

Even though class difference may be an indicator of ethnic differences, the criteria are not the same; they are not reducible to each other and need to be analytically divided. There are markers of class which are not related to ethnicity and *vice versa*. Here, I have shown that lyrics use may be an identity marker of class and ethnicity, but bachata practitioners and their audience do not view themselves, or are not thought of by others, as being of Haitian descent just because they perform and listen to a genre which is connected to low-class.

### ***Middle-class bachata and the expression of class, ethnicity/‘race’ (and gender) – what barrio bachata is not***

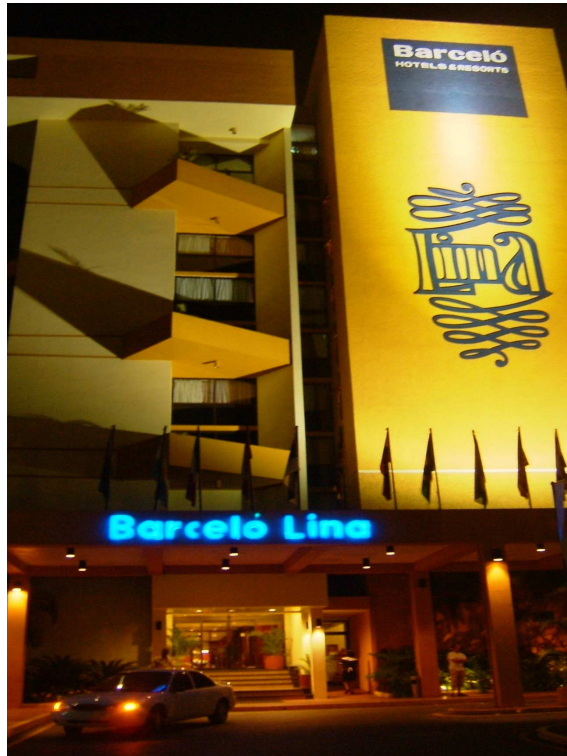
Can we learn something of class and ethnicity through a comparison of bachata performances? I will argue that by contrasting Dominican middle-class bachata and Haitian low-class bachata we can get a clearer picture of what characterizes the two forms. Identities are confirmed through their negation, towards a *proper alter*. So, one bachata style becomes meaningful in contrast to another. With the forthcoming comparison, I hope to make my informant’s social identities probable through a focus on social distinctions such as class and ‘racial’/ethnicity.

### ***Setting – El Hotel Barceló Lina bachata***

The piccolo came towards the taxi and asked if I had luggage he could carry. I responded negatively and smiled as I looked up; the hotel towered me. Entering, the receptionist welcomed me with a nod and a “*Buenas tardes*” (Good evening) -saluting from behind the large counter. He wanted to know if he could help me and as I told him I was going to attend a bachata contest, he indicated the way to the Piano Bar, where it was held. I walked down the stairs and past the lobby with the sofa groups and fountain. I entered the Piano Bar and observed that it was already full of people. Finally finding a seat and sitting down, the waitress quickly came towards me and informed that I had to order something. I understood the etiquette of this hotel straight away... if I wanted to be one in the audience I had to consume. Deciding on a Coke, I observed the nice dark sofas along the sides and the heavy dark coloured chairs and tables that were occupied by the hotel’s guests as well as friends and family of the bachateros. It was a much less low-class setting than I was used to in El barrio. The glass door entrance at the end of the room displayed the

neighbouring luxurious casino. A staircase on the side lead up to the raised stage where some of the musicians were already present to do the last check on the instruments, speakers and wires. The bachatero singers were separated from the audience, waiting on their turn in the hall outside. I noticed that most of the workforce, audience and musicians were light-skinned. The majority of the girls present had dark, but not curly hair, and I remembered I had heard that straitening out Afro hair, which the majority of Dominicans and Haitians have, was a common trend. People were dressed up in fancy clothes like suits for the males and skirts and dresses for the females. They all looked well prepared and interested in behaving in a sophisticated way.

Drinking and chatting, everyone was waiting for the contest to begin and it started on time. The hotel owner said some introductory comments about the nights’ happening and mentioned by name and profession each of the judges sitting at a panel in front of the stage. One by one the musicians went up and performed both bachata radio hits and self-composed songs, accompanied by the bachata instruments of two guitars, a *güira*, and *bongós*. I noticed that they had incorporated a keyboard which I knew some of the Haitian bachateros did not use. All of the songs were in Dominican Spanish. No one danced to the music, as we all observed the musicians from our chairs. There were little connection between the musicians and audience when it came to greetings like “This is for you – my people”. Despite this, the audience was enthusiastic, clapping their hands and showing a positive, forthcoming attention. When done with their contribution, the performers went out of the room to wait for the judge’s decisions. It took a while for the judges to decide upon the best bachatero. In the meantime bachata, salsa and merengue CDs were played and some in the audience started to mingle. I kept my seat while I took a few notes of what I had observed until now. Beside me sat a journalist scribbling down something on a paper. During the concert, he had eagerly taken pictures of the performers and the judges. This was all going to be published. I was astonished to see cameramen located on the tables in front of the stage. This was definitely a different setting than the ones in El Barrio.



Hotel Barceló Lina where the bachata contest was held.



Bachata performance at the hotel.



Audience attending bachata performance at Hotel Barceló Lina.



I soon recognized that the performers and audience belonged to a higher social class and different ethnic groups than the ones in El Barrio. This, I observed through various markers. First, the setting was not taking place in a low-class *colmado* or carwash, but in a fine hotel. Second, the communication between the performers and audience was less active in terms of *saludos* (greetings) and dance; in El Barrio there were always dancing couples and saluting. Thirdly, the lifted stage drew a physical and symbolic boundary between the musicians and spectators; the stage where the Haitian bachateros performed was at the same level as the audience. Fourth, the bachateros were not intermingling with the hotel owner as they were supposed to wait outside the room for their turn; my Haitian informants used to sit down with their friends and drink before they went on stage. Fifth, there were fewer dark-skinned individuals here than in El Barrio.

### Performing class identity

The Dominican bachateros performed a specific style which marked and established social distinctions. As I will now show, they were – just like the Haitian bachateros – strategic in their use of dress code/appearance, instrumentation and lyrics. These strategies seemed to be common for both groups, nevertheless their way of acting them out differed.

A couple of days before the whole event started at the hotel, Javier and Alejandro decided to order new **suits** for the performances. They emphasised that it was really important to present themselves in an elegant outfit. On a rainy day I came along to a tailor in the centre. I knew they were youths with little economic recourses, but still they invested a lot of money in a tailored suit. They were extremely engaged in the planning of cut, colour and size of the suit, and I knew they went to the tailor many times just to check if he did it right. Randi, my third Dominican informant, had also bought new clothes; a light blue suit with a white shirt inside. In addition, he added a couple of sunglasses to look really stylish. None of them had old or borrowed outfits and everyone had watches that worked. Some of them even emphasised that if someone had not worn modern or rather new outfits they would not have taken the performance seriously enough. I also noticed the bachateros frequently visited the *peluquerias* (hairdressers) where they cut fancy hairstyles and got their beard trimmed. I remember that Robin described middle and high class members as addicted to hairdressers. He explained:

“Some of them do that *vaina* on a daily basis! I take care of my bachatero look too, but I do it myself”. The Dominican bachateros were image-conscious, Randi made it clear to me: “Your image is determinant”. I understood straight away that the focus on outfit, accessories and appearance in general was very important for all the participants.

That human beings have bodies is obvious. It is something upon which identification can play (Jenkins 2006:52) and it is an important indicator of social differentiation. All kinds of things can be put to use in self-identification and here I have focused on clothing. The embodied individual – a referent of individual process – is simultaneously indicating collectiveness where people have something in common (Jenkins 2006:18). Clothes are an index for a collectiveness which in this case is classed. Focus on new and glamorous clothes – and not old and out-of-fashion ones – were important aspects in bachata performances which indicated middle and not lower class belonging. Social formation of people involves a dialectic between self identification and others’ identification – or in Jenkins’ terms – between the individual and collective identification. This dialectic is always present when the individual identifies with the **significant others**. Self-identification involves the perpetual back-and-forth of the internal-external dialectic (Jenkins 2006:49).

Also inside a group there are negotiations between the members – about their collective similarities and differences, good and bad, appropriate and unsuitable. When I attended the *espectaculos* (shows/performances), I overheard people in the audience who commented on the different dress codes in both negative and positive ways. This was something that the performers were aware of and had in mind when they entered the stage. They wanted to present themselves from their best side to the rest of the individuals in the room. The perpetual dialectic between audience and performers is obvious in this context, just like in El Barrio.

When it comes to **lyrical usage**, Randi had quite clear thoughts about how a good bachata song should be, and what kind of audience he aimed at:

I want to perform songs for an audience who **thinks**, and I sing to an audience which is reflective, like me. I read a lot and my people [audience] take out the dictionary and look up terms. I want to create awareness. The people here tonight are that kind of people. I may not be a famous singer... yet [laughs], and I may not be rich, but it’s not always money that indicates who you are. People can still be poor and have a certain class, because they have a certain *educación* (manners). I think my audience and I are quite alike in that aspect.

The musician describes himself and his spectators as having good breeding, intellect and being conscious of foreign words. The retrospective influence the performer and his audience have on each other is important for Randi. When I ask him about bachata from los barrios surrounding Santo Domingo, he answers:

That’s lower kind of bachata. It sounds... like... they say, *orillero*, [at the border/margin/edge]. No, I don’t like it, it’s like it hasn’t... I don’t know... like it hasn’t got culture. It’s when a thing... when people can take what you do but it hasn’t got class, quality or harmony. El Chaval [bachata singer] says: “*Estoy más perdido que un conuco*” [“I’m more lost /confused than a smallholding”]. To me, it doesn’t have any literary meaning. But they have it’s *público* [audience], there are places, I don’t know if you have been there, which are brothels, like in los *bateyes* and los barrios. Those bars and the kind of music that is played there, it’s *musica de amargue* [bitter music], the lowest of the low, which is never heard on the radio, but you can hear it there... Felix Cumbé, Robin Cariño, El Chaval... Well, you can hear El Chaval nowadays, but not before. I have a song which is about the tragedy of prostitution; it has socially important content. I try to make people love each other more, and I want people to say: Listen! Randi has a message that we identify with.

The descriptions illustrate that Randi makes a clear distinction between himself and los barrios bachateros and their respective audiences. To emphasise his point he refers to both venues and lyrical content. To him, it is crucial that the words make sense to the audience. He uses the bachata of El Chaval as an example of lyrics which he perceives to give restricted meaning to him.

Even though Randi claimed he was not fond of barrio bachata, he told me that long time ago he had been to a low-class neighbourhood to perform. He was the only one, to my knowledge, who had done that. During the interview he recalled the experience:

Once I went there [barrio]. My half-brother lives close to a *batey*. I went there for *un concierto sencillo* (a simple, coarse concert) in one of these *colmados*. I sang one song, about problems that we face in today’s society, like robbery and stuff. When I think of it now... maybe it wasn’t the best song I could have chosen [laughs]. You see, here was **no** response from the public. I mean, like nothing. Afterwards I sang *una canción de amargue* (a bitter bachata song) and then they shouted that they could *tomarse un trago de ron* (drink some rum) to that one! They like songs which have to do with drinking alcohol, *cortarse* (cutting), *matarse* (killing)... you know.

The description illustrates, once again, how a performer presents himself to an audience, how his performance is perceived and then played back to him. In this case, Randi chose to switch to lyrical content that was more meaningful to his spectators – articulating lower class everyday life to receive response from the barrio inhabitants. However, when he performed At Hotel Lina, the lyrical content was clearly not about bitter love or rum, but about a passionate love or awareness around social problems in today’s society.

The Dominican bachateros were also conscious about their use of **instruments**. They incorporated and applied them in strategic ways as a demarcation of their style. Synthesizers, electric bass and other electronic textures were common in order to make a bachata with *brillo* (shine). When I had returned to Norway, Alejandro electronically sent me his newest composed bachata song. The intro remarkably resembled Aventura’s song “*Obsesion*”, where a telephone ringtone is heard, followed by a girl answering. Alejandro’s inspiration is obvious; the Caucasian/American modern tradition that Aventura also plays upon; To use a telephone sound symbolises modernity in terms of technology and development associated with those parts of the world. It is a move to express avant-garde tendencies, middle-class belonging and probably an attempt to reach even further; the higher classes. The Dominican bachateros employed highly technological remedies to create these effects. These sophisticated mixers were used to upgrade the sound of their music.

Neither Alejandro nor Javier used maracas, which both of them described as being for people in poor areas and *zonas rurales*. In addition, they mentioned that they often played *los bongos* with sticks instead of their hands, and explained it to be because they and their audience thought this was a less low-class-way to perform bachata. I never observed them using piano or violins, but when I asked Alejandro, he answered that he would incorporate them in the future – just like Juan Luis Guerra.

Guitar practice is also an example which establishes and maintains identity during interaction between performers and audience. When I observed the Dominicans compared to the Haitians, I noticed a change in the way they used the instrument; The Dominican bachateros seemed to front the guitar to a lesser extent than the Haitian musicians. Ramón and the others incorporated sections of *trinis* (guitar riffs), while the Dominicans – still having the guitar, bachata’s most characteristic feature, as the leading instrument – more often than not left out the most enthusiastic riffs. When I asked why they did not amplify the guitar solos, they explained it as being similar to street-level bachata and that their audience probably felt the same way.

### Performing ethnic/‘racial’ identity

On the same level as the Haitians, the Dominican bachateros expressed ethnic identity through performances. I will here concentrate on how they did this by manipulating **lyrics**. Although the use of language was a mutual way to articulate ethnic identity, the content of the lyrics often varied between the two groups.

Obviously, the Dominicans applied Dominican Spanish as an overall tendency, because this was their mother tongue. Compared to the Haitian musicians, who had a Creole accent to a greater or lesser degree, they had flawless pronunciation. They used no Creole words when performing, and never spoke of applying it in the future. In the beginning I was taken aback by the non-focus on this language, as both Alejandro and Javier notified me of their childhood in an ethnically mixed neighbourhood where many were Haitians. They experienced making close friendships with them and had even learned some Creole. My immediate assumption was that they would experiment with these language skills as well, because improvisation and playfulness with words is common in bachata. However, I did not at any time witness incorporation of Creole in their songs.

One reason can be that the words their friends had taught them were forgotten since the years had passed and they no longer lived in closed contact with Haitians. Another, and even more plausible reason, is that it is the result of traditionally forced racist ideology which is expressed through the Dominican’s bachata performances. For a long time, associations with African ancestry have been scorned in the Dominican Republic even though Haitians make up a large percent of the population, and their expressions in society are massive at a popular level (e.g. vodú, palos etc.). Presented with racial perceptions passed on through colonialism and Trujilloism, the Dominican bachateros avoided Creole because it is in line with this tradition.

Randi, who had experienced less interaction with Haitians, had difficulties with Haitian accent and Creole words. He clarified this when I asked what he thought of Felix Cumbé:

I don’t listen to Felix Cumbé... I’m not a fan of him. He is very popular there [barrio/batey], but I don’t understand what he’s singing. It’s not that it doesn’t move me. But he sings and he sings, in his dialect, he uses words of his dialect which is almost impossible to understand. He has a typical style.

Language creates contact between performers and audience. Consider Randi, he does not feel connected to the ethnic language practice of Felix Cumbé, even though he admits that he is emotionally affected by his music because they have a love for the same genre. Even though he is not Felix’s biggest fan he knows that Felix has an audience who adores him – and among them are many Haitians.

As pointed out, the Dominican informants favour Hispanic definitions of Dominican identity through the use of Spanish language. In addition, one of the bachateros, Alejandro, seemed especially interested in applying American words as well. Almost every time I met him, he wanted me to teach him American words that he could integrate into his bachata lyrics. His level of mastery was minimal but he hoped to improve it. He explained that one of his inspirations was Aventura, who often sing in Spanglish (mix between Spanish and English). He aimed to reach a modern, Westernized audience, he told me. The interesting aspect about this observation is that he probably has as little knowledge of American English as he has of Creole. Still, he prefers the former. His decision fuels and acknowledges the racial ideologies of the Dominican state.

### **Performing gender – bachateras in a man’s world**

As already mentioned, bachata seems to be a masculine establishment, where women have been the silent voices of men’s categorisation of them. At the hotel there was one woman who challenged the habitually male bachata sphere as a bachatera, and there were many women in the audience as well. The female performer, like *Las bachateras del Swing*, and their respective audience, are examples of women who play upon the morals of ‘reputation’ by interacting with the public. And, stepping into a male sphere might have consequences. When the bachatera entered the stage, I overheard a man in the audience who told his friend in a whisper; “In order to sing bachata well, you’ll have to be a man”. Judging from his commentary, poor applause and low rating, she met prejudices as a bachatera. Also Alejandro, who got support from Javier, expressed his scepticism towards the female performer and bachateras in general:

It’s strange to see a bachatera up there. I believe that it’s more difficult for *el sexo debil* (the weak sex) to perform bachata because men are stronger, both physically and mentally, and they can

handle pressure of fame much easier. Besides, women aren’t used to bachata simply because they’re in the street less. They’re cleaning, taking care of the family; they are not where bachata is played.

There was an overall agreement that *bachateras* coped worse with “fame”, or “reputation” in Wilson’s terms, than men. Their entrance in men’s worlds has the consequence of blurring gender boundaries in bachata and creating social disorder rather than social stability (Hernandez 1990).

But, even though this illustrates general ideas of women and men’s responsibility of keeping to different spheres, they may not be shared by everyone. Randi, gave female musicians credit and even felt threatened by their competence: “I think the *bachatera* sang great! She sang with sentiment, and men often lack that. I like it when women sing bachata. Sometimes I’m scared that they’ll steal the whole show!” This illustrates that the conformity, dominating view, ideology of bachata or whatever we chose to call it, contains incongruent perceptions of gender. Despite the dominant norms of men in bachata, there are always different perceptions which will challenge the contents of gender identity in bachata category (Jenkins 2006).

Randi made it clear, however, that he did not like all kinds of *bachateras*;

Me: What do you think of *Las bachateras del Swing*?

Randi: Ugh! They wear clothes up till here! (showing the short skirt hemline on his thighs). God bless them. I hope they’ll have success and use the money to buy clothes so they won’t have to show off their body like that anymore. They sell their body, not the music. And that’s not quality to me.

Me: What if they participated here, at the contest?

Randi: Ha! I would say; Go away! Come on! Get out of the way!

The other Dominican bachateros agreed on this and they added that “it’s a reason why *Las bachateras del Swing* have been performing for 15 years and not become more popular”. I observed that their performance differed in style from the Hotel bachatera performance. First, the Hotel bachatera’s lyrics did not contain sexual association, but rather references to romantic love. Second, she did not use instruments as symbols of male body parts, and third, she was not wearing as revealing clothes as the bachatera group. These stylistic features

reflect that she is of higher class, and consequently “whiter” than the barrio performing bachateras. In general, it is important for the males to keep their distance from bachateras because they forsake their respectability for reputation, something which “decent women” are not supposed to do. It is when bachateras challenge the-taken-for-granted gender features in this music, that they are sanctioned (Jenkins 2006).

### **Style as an expression of class, ethnicity/‘race’ (and gender)**

Social class always implies dimensions of distribution of power and ranking. Ethnicity, on the other hand, is not inevitably associated with rank as it can be egalitarian (they are just **different**, not more-valued and less-valued). Analytically, this division is necessary. However, it is not unproblematic to apply a neat analytical term to the complexity of everyday life. Lyrical use in bachata, for example, is not only an indicator of class-, but also of ethnic membership. The Dominican’s and Haitian’s performances speak to a strong correlation between class and ethnicity. It seems to be likely that bachateros belonging to a certain social class also belong to a certain ethnic group; Dominicans to middle-class and Haitians to low-class. Also gendered meanings are included in bachata, and gender is class- and ethnicity related. Based on gender and performance of gender, musicians and their audience can be perceived as achieving or having different class and ethnic identities. There seems to be a tendency in bachata which pulls together the categories of bachateras, Haitian/dark-skinned and low-class, against the categories of bachateros, Dominicans/light-skinned and higher class. So, even though my informants are all involved in bachata, their **work** as bachateros/as may not mean **worth** as bachateros/as.

In this chapter I have shown that bachata is an expression of social conditions earlier explored in this thesis. Past, as well as present conflicts, – such as ethnicity, class and gender – are articulated through varying styles. Clothes, lyrics and instruments are among what the bachateros use in order to reflect their class and ethnic values and beliefs. The use of styles in bachata has the effect of fixing and marking both class and ethnic identity of my informants and their audience. I have emphasized that identity management becomes possible through interaction with performers and audience. The different venues provide the scenery for the interplay of innovation and tradition in social life and the communicative situations express



shared experiences of the group, create social redefinitions and promote class, ethnic and gender identity.

The Haitians contrast themselves towards the Dominicans in order to make sense of their own identity, and *vice versa*. For that reason I have compared them in order to pinpoint their characteristics. The groups and categories rub up against each other with their differences and similarities. Together, they try to reach a common interpretation of everyday situations.

How have the bachateros themselves experienced contact with bachata? What brought them into it, what obstacles and possibilities have they encountered and has musical engagement improved their lives in any sense? And how do their life stories call attention to dimensions of class, ethnicity and place? These are questions I will focus on in the next and last chapter.



## 5. BEING AND BECOMING A BACHATERO

### *El inmigrante*<sup>68</sup>

(The immigrant)

By: Felix Cumbé

Cuanto sufrimiento  
Cuanto dolor  
Cuanto sufrimiento  
Cuanto dolor

Cuanto sufrimiento  
Cuanto dolor  
Dejar a mi tierra  
Tengo que pasar

Lejos de mi tierra  
Tengo que pasar  
Porque yo no soy de por aqui  
Cuanta diferencia para mi  
Yo soy un ser humano igual que tu y ellos  
Yo lucho para ti y tu luchas para mi  
Yo estoy en paz contigo amigo  
Yo soy un ser humano igual que tu  
Yo quiero pedirte un poquito de respeto  
Con eso no te digo que no lucho por lo tuyo  
El que no tiene nada de vada vale  
Por eso es que yo lucho por tener  
Una persona que me mire asi de frente  
Que me ayude a confiar y a comprender

Ay hombre  
Yo quiero estar en tu corazon  
Por eso yo estoy aqui  
Cuanta diferencia para mi  
Pero si tu no quieres me voy  
Estamos navegando en el mismo barco  
Y no sabemos cuando volvemos  
Necesito saber que ocurre entre nosotros  
Yo no maté en mi pueblo  
Yo no robé en mi pueblo  
Si yo tengo que irme yo me ire

At the beginning of this thesis, I focused on the historical transformations/structures of Dominican society and music. In this heavily empirical chapter, however, I emphasise on the individual. Despite structural restrictions, individuals have choices. Focus will be on perceptions of self as a means to test how class, ethnicity and race categories set a framework for the choices for the bachateros. The differing results of the bachateros' choices will be central. Stories that the bachateros told me can give important information about how they understand themselves and their culture. The ways they represent themselves can be used to reflect over the dimensions of class, ethnicity, gender and place in the life of bachatero tradition. I choose to focus mainly on two of my informants – Alejandro and Ramón – as they

<sup>68</sup> Translation of the song in appendix.

represent the two most contrasting life stories. In addition, I will incorporate examples of the two other Haitian bachateros, Robin and Ramón, as their life stories also reflect aspects of social division.

It is not a simple task to succeed as a bachatero in the Dominican Republic. Traditional ideologies connected to bachata have put many restrictions on their pathway to recognition. However, involvement in this genre is a key strategy to improve everyday life. My aim in this chapter is to show – through the voice of my informants – that commonalities and differences of their life stories incorporate aspects of possibilities (individual/actor) and restrictions (structure) which are complexly entangled in class, ethnic and place perceptions.

### ***Expression of identity as a self***

In “Anthropology and autobiography: Participatory experience and embodied knowledge” (1992), Judith Okely – among others – calls attention to the importance of autobiographies in anthropology. She successfully challenges the view that accuses this type of narratives of self of producing intellectually unproductive and trivial texts. I agree with Okely in that stories as ethnography are not ‘narcissistic’ but rather contributions of self-awareness (ibid.:2). In this aspect, I would argue that explicit references to my identities in the field – mentioned in this thesis –, is not a fronting of myself at the expense of my informants; in contrast it is an attempt to position myself and reflect upon the consequences my identities might have for the anthropological project. This approach decreases the possibilities of ‘exotifying’ the Other, as we become aware of historically transcendent categories that shape our ethnographic presentations and working methods (ibid.:2).

Like Okely, Marianne Gullestad emphasises the use of autobiographies in ethnography. In her book “Everyday Life Philosophers” (1996), she analyses Norwegian life narratives and relates them to this country’s culture. The material is collected from 630 entries made to the competition “Write Your Life”. By choosing four of the autobiographies, Gullestad illustrates that each of them presents different self-reflections. The selection of informants represents varying generations and their stories show differences in values depending on age, class, gender, urban and rural background and ethnicity. The researcher uses the stories to reveal changing and continuing aspects of cultural values in Norway over time (ibid).

The forthcoming stories of my informants are not autobiographies. I have (re)constructed them. Still, they are stories of the self – heavily focused on the voice of the bachateros themselves – which are important to the comprehension of bachatero life in Dominican society. Gullestad states that “every interpretation is by necessity an interpretation from a particular point of view” (Gullestad 1995:48). Similarly, I am aware that my own analyses are influenced by my interests, views and attitudes. In this sense, it is important to be aware that the social and historical contexts of both researcher and informant influence the ethnographic research. All individuals are historically constructed, and the stories our informants give us speak both of their perception of themselves, **and** their culture and social background. Already in the introduction Gullestad mentions that autobiographies reflect history. This is, among other things, because “life story usually contains historical information about people and events” (ibid.:9). Through their storytelling my informants reflected aspects of cultural transformations in the social history of bachata.

Even though the way people tell about their lives varies from culture to culture due to historical and social conditions, it seems that storytelling is universally important (Gullestad 1995:8). It is important in order to achieve social acknowledgement as a human being. This is no exception for my bachateros. They told me stories of their life in order to make their situation comprehensive, both for themselves and for me. As Gullestad argues; “At the same time as their [the informant’s] life stories are socially produced, they are also productive” (ibid.:8). By narrating their experiences – from the past – of being a Dominican or a Haitian bachatero in the Dominican Republic, my informants constructed, rationalised and produced their identities – in the present. To reflect upon their history helped to create and locate themselves in their instant world, and this again had implications for their future.

### **Different paths in bachata**

I have integrated the following empirical excerpts in order to present ‘thick-description’ analysis. The examples represent varying outcomes of bachatero life and I hope to render the multifaceted responses and results of their strategies.

**Alejandro: “I’ll never forget *la gente de abajo*, because I once belonged there too”.**

My origins are the lower classes. I come from *la gente de abajo* (reference for marginalised, low-class people). I used to have Haitian friends because there were a lot of them in my barrio. From the age of seven to twelve my friends and I shined shoes in the streets. It was hard work and the few pesos I earned I had to give to my parents. Yes, we were very poor, but low-class people are *humilde* (humble, modest), good people. In addition, my parents got divorced so my mum brought me with her to the capital from San Juan, where I was born. She got a cleaning job in a house owned by really good people. They even paid for my education at a middle and high class college called La Salle so I didn’t have to grow up and become *una persona bruta* (an unintelligent/brutish person), which would be bad. Many in my neighbourhood were *brutos*. In order to subscribe, my mum had to display my birth certificate. Time passed and my mum changed to another job. She began to baby-sit for the child of a well off couple. The husband had an engineer company where I finally started to work, or help out with all kinds of stuff. He taught me things and assigned me to a computer course, and after a couple of years I did a lot of computer work in his office. He paid well and my finances were real good at that time, I felt like a middle-class person. I learned how to behave properly when I was with these people. In 2000 I got another job, selling car insurance, and that’s where I am today. Besides being a bachatero, of course. I’ll never forget *la gente de abajo*, because I once belonged there too. Even if I win the contest at Hotel Barceló, I will remember this [Alejandro, Dominican bachatero, 25].

To Alejandro, it is important to stress that he feels connected to his low-class background. He even mentions that he had Haitian childhood friends (at present he has no Haitian social network). He has experienced marginalisation and refers to poverty and his work as a shoe shiner which he began at an early age. Fortunately, his mother and her employers offered help to gradually improve his situation. His birth certificate opens up these possibilities. Already at this point, Alejandro has a more advantageous starting point than many low-class Haitians (and Dominicans) in the Dominican Republic. From the era of Trujillo and up to today, many of them have been denied identity papers and consequently been regarded as illegal immigrants with no constitutional rights.<sup>69</sup> To make a bachata career in the Dominican Republic without documents is impossible, and this is a reality many low-class Haitians and Dominicans experience. As Alejandro’s parents fortunately obtained his birth certificate, he is not affected by this problem which would have had immense consequences for his life and

<sup>69</sup> The Dominican constitution declares that those born on the soil of the republic, with the exception of those born ‘in transit’, have the right to citizenship. However, in practice, this law is not always applied. Actually, the lack of birth certificate affects many low-class Dominicans as well as Haitians (Wooding & Moseley-Williams 2004:50).

musical advancement. Rather than focusing on such restrictions for his personal development, he can emphasize aspects that have opened up possibilities; help from friends and family, hard work and education. Without this, he believes he would have ended up as an unskilled and brutish person – a stigma Alejandro perceives as undesirable.

There is an ambiguity in his presentation though; to begin with, he acknowledges his social low-class background and expresses sympathy for the ones who still belong to this category. He stresses that he will never forget his roots. Then, he distances himself from *personas brutas* which he associates with low-class and “black” people (Haitians). It would be unfortunate if **he** had become such a person. The seeming contradiction is a result of Alejandro’s struggle to rationalize and connect who he once was – low-class and Haitian connected –, to who he is today. Definitely, my informant ascribes positive characteristics to low-class people as well; they are humble and modest. This is a quality which Alejandro still wants to be associated with. However, he distances himself from the label *bruta* and instead draws attention to how he has developed and become disconnected to brutishness; his education, mixing more with Dominicans than Haitians and moving from a rural to a urban place, are aspects which avoid this negative connection. Alejandro changes between presentations of himself in terms of a collective identity as Dominican and middle-class, and presentations that stand in contrast to this. His struggle to become “whiter”, urbanised and of a higher class are aspects also reflected through his bachata practice. He underscores his musical development and participation in El Hotel Lina contest. As already mentioned, the Hotel Lina bachata has other stylistic features than those of my Haitian informants; it is more sophisticated. He – as a performer of this style – is thus categorized the same way. Bachata involvement becomes a reference of class, ethnic and place belonging.

He continues to reflect upon his involvement in and progress with music:

My two friends and I formed a group when we were children. We used to sing in birthday parties and stuff. But that was nothing serious, just for fun. It started to change when I got to know Luis Segura [pioneer in bachata] at the age of twelve. One day I went past his house and I knocked the door to ask if he wanted me to shine his shoes. He opened up for me and was very welcoming. From that moment on we stayed in touch. I started to visit him frequently. I used to watch him play the guitar, it was incredible to experience his command of the instrument. Alejandro noticed my interest in music and enjoyed my participation of singing when he plucked the guitar. Soon, we did a test recording of a song I wrote and it turned out beautiful! He gave me the cassette and the whole episode inspired me. With his encouragement and my faith I started to believe that I

could be a bachatero. After a while I ascribed myself to a guitar course. My friends thought I was going crazy, that I thought exclusively of music, but I didn't think much of those comments. Continuing my dream, I wrote several songs per day, and finally I had various songs which I introduced to a recording company. However, the company went bankrupt and my project fell apart. But I knew that I had music in me and after a while I signed myself up to a bachata competition where I got all the way to the last round. There, I met Javier and we figured out that we could form a group together. But we didn't have means with which to record or rehearse. One day Javier and I were walking in the street, we observed a sign post at a front door saying: "Instruments for hire". We decided to check out what they offered and knocked the door. A guy opened up and from that day on we rehearsed in this guy's studio. After that I began to perform, for real. Now, this competition at Hotel Lina will hopefully take me even further. If I win I can make a name for myself.

Despite his young age, Alejandro has experienced huge changes in his life. From doing informal music performances for friends and family, he has gone to develop a good friendship with Luis Segura – "The Dad of bachata" – a respected national and international Dominican bachata artist. He has also managed to participate in the Hotel Lina competition. The encounter with Segura is a turning point for Alejandro's involvement with bachata. Even though many young performers today consider Segura as out of date and representing "yesterday's bachata", Segura's inspiration has been crucial to Alejandro. Nevertheless, my informant does not perform the same bachata style as Segura, as he considers it of great importance to be "modern". This reflects Alejandro's struggle to avoid a negative stigma as an old school marginalised bachatero – something Segura has experienced by being a bachatero throughout the most stigmatising years. Still, he appreciates what Luis Segura stands for and their friendship. Just because Alejandro describes himself and is perceived by others as modern and middle-class, it is not evident that he is like this. At the time of my fieldwork, he had frequent contact with Segura, who represented a more traditional, low-class bachata. This illustrates that apparent stable categories are part of changing identifications through people's use of them.

I attended all the rounds of the Hotel Lina contest, included the final one. I was delighted to witness that two of my informants, out of eleven participants, reached top placing; Alejandro came in second, while Javier came in first. The prizes were the following: Javier won 30 000 pesos, a trophy and a weekend for two at the Barceló Bávaro Beach Resort. In addition, he signed a contract to perform bachata in the Piano Bar for one month. Alejandro received 15 000 pesos, a badge and a weekend for two at the Barceló Capella Resort. The final was broadcasted on national TV and journalists from various newspapers eagerly



interviewed the winners. After my return to Norway, Alejandro told me via MSN<sup>70</sup> that the promotion they received from the contest had had positive consequences; He has recorded many songs in one of the best studios in Santo Domingo, and at present (June 2007) one of them is played on the radio. He has expanded his musical social network which allows him to rehearse and record in the studios of his friends. In addition, he has become a member of SGACEDOM<sup>71</sup>, an organisation which works for the rights of Dominican authors, composers and editors of music. Considering Alejandro's social background (low-class and living side-by-side with Haitians in a rural place) and his young age, he has achieved a lot through his gung-ho spirit, social networks and musical skills.

### **Ramón: Neighbourhood recognition, national invisibleness**

The Haitian bachatero Ramón is a locally recognized bachatero; almost everyone in El Barrio knows who he is. His musical status is acknowledged and admired here. When walking around with him in the neighbourhood or attending his performances, I noticed that people always approached him, touched his shoulder, smiled and talked to him. Ramón came up with some clever phrases or entertained with a desired bachata song in response. I witnessed barrio inhabitants asking him for his CDs, however, he had no more copies. His friends often bought him beer, food, lent him mobile phones, gave him a lift home and when he entered a *colmado* or carwash *el dueño* (the owner) often switched to one of his songs as a gesture. He sure was a recognized musician in his neighbourhood and even in surrounding barrios he had an audience (at least according to himself). Still, he had no national success. His **individual** history reflects the **nation's** history. "Individually, 'the past' is memory; collectively, it is history [...]. Neither, however, is necessarily 'real': both are human constructs and both are massively implicated in identification" (Jenkins 2006:26). There are intertwined collective perceptions in Ramón's life story:

My first meeting with bachata was when I was only a child. My father used to dance bachata a lot, in a Haitian style. He was a very good dancer. He also drank a lot and spent plenty of time with

<sup>70</sup> MSN Messenger is a freeware instant messaging system which was developed and distributed by Microsoft between 1999 and 2005 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MSN\\_Messenger](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MSN_Messenger), May 14 2007).

<sup>71</sup> *Sociedad General de Autores, Compositores y Editores Dominicanos de Música* was created in 1996. A fee has to be paid in order to become a member.

women. He was *un hombre de la calle* (a man of the street)<sup>72</sup>. He strolled a lot around in the poor barrio. In addition, he was a *brujo*, so I come from a *raza de brujos*. I saw all this. At a later age, I decided to become a bachatero because I liked the music. Ramón Torres was a bachatero from La Romana, known in the early 1980s, and I was inspired by his style. It was pure, raw language and I liked it. I still remember the first time I performed one of his songs. I was exited and when I was finished the audience applauded and shouted “One more!” (Ramón sits back on the plastic chair, smiles and looks into the horizon with dreamy eyes). I remember I thought; “I can be a bachatero! As time passed, I came in contact with Radio Guarachita, but I never recorded with Aracena. But he ended up with using my songs without me getting a peso for it. If you don’t have *una empresa* (enterprise) *la vida no se mueve* (life doesn’t move). I’ve written 48 songs. I don’t perform a lot, and I don’t make good money from this”.

From early childhood, Ramón experienced the traditional bachata context with drinking, prostitution and growing up in a poor neighbourhood; characteristics that indicate his class, ethnic, gender and place belonging and which for a long time have been connected to bachata. They are definitely dimensions that decide Ramón’s social position as a bachatero today. He has also been exploited by Radio Guarachita, and has no company to promote him. Some of the Haitian musicians performed more than others and Ramón played the least. He had no CDs out for sale in record stores, no recording equipment, studio, guitar<sup>73</sup> or songs played on the radio. None of my Dominican bachateros had heard of him. He was not a nationally recognized bachatero.

Despite his elevated social position in el barrio, his life situation was marginal. As Robin said; “There is a big difference between asking for and being asked to play a concert”. Ramón mostly asked. A typical stroll around in el barrio included visits to *colmados* and carwashes to require performances. But notwithstanding his drive, weeks could pass between his concerts. I asked him why the situation was heavy and he answered that the bankruptcy in 2000-2003 (Hipólito Mejía's administration) still affected the life situations of poor people. His explanation is very likely; I was astonished how expensive everything was; housing, gasoline, food, drinks, clothes and this affected my informants and others in similar situations<sup>74</sup>.

<sup>72</sup> The term is used to refer to males spending most of their time with friends, especially women (prostitutes) outside the house. Drinking and showing off are characteristic of *un hombre de la calle*.

<sup>73</sup> Ramón told me that his ex wife had smashed his guitar in his head when she accused him of unfaithfulness, probably with good reason because Ramón had several women. Since the incident, he had not had money to buy a new guitar.

<sup>74</sup> The current president of the Dominican Republic, Leonel Fernández, is said to have stabilized the economy and aim at battling poverty. Others argue that basic needs such as food, education and health are not much improved. Fernández’s first Presidential Period was from 1996-2000, his second from 2004-present (<http://en.wikipedia.org>, June 11, 2007).

Alcohol, a characteristic ingredient in bachata context, was also costly. Ramón blamed his infrequent performances on the economic situation; expensive alcohol, less people, less parties and less performances.

In the barrio I also witnessed garish disco light in the *colmados* – coiled up against speakers – and people dancing to a CD. Ramón explained that a *dueño* preferred this as it was cheaper (f.ex 2000 pesos) than to pay for a group of musicians (f.ex 8000 pesos). Ramón felt threatened by the sought-after disco lights as he feared that technological equipment (computers and lights) would replace his live performances. I would add that his Haitianess, barrio and class belonging restricted his success in bachata as well. He had neighbourhood recognition, but he was nationally “invisible” as a bachatero.

Even though structure has restricting affects on individuals, poor Haitians are not helpless. On the contrary, they find ways of coping and bettering themselves. Ramón showed great resourcefulness by promoting himself;

Because I have no managers, I sometimes get some friends to drive around in a car with speakers tied to the roof with a message saying for example; “Come to El *Colmado* at 10 o’clock tonight to see Ramoncito<sup>75</sup> del Barrio”. That’s the way most people get information about where they can come to my parties. I also have another way of keeping up my name. Have you seen my CD? On it, is written my cell phone number, so people can call me for a party. I also try to keep my CDs in the *colmados* to make my sound fill the barrio.

His creativity of keeping a copy of his CD in barrio establishments, using speakers and writing his telephone number on the CD, contributed to maintain his barrio popularity. However, at times, Ramón expressed a sense of being trapped in his fixed surroundings. He once said: “I don’t have this life because I want to. It’s because I **can’t** have another life”. Thus, even though bachata was a medium which gave acknowledgement, collective class-, ethnic/’racial’- and place differences were perpetuated. His marginal situation is in a large sense the result of the ideologies of class, ethnicity/ ‘race’ and place of Dominican society.

### **Robin: “The story of my life”**

<sup>75</sup> *Ramoncito* is the diminutive for Ramón.



Skin colour transformation from dark to light.

One of the many songs I was fascinated by was Robin's "The story of my life"<sup>76</sup>. It struck me the first time I heard it. He told me about his song:

It's about my childhood. My mum came to the Dominican Republic at the age of three. My father was *cocolo*<sup>77</sup>. I don't know Haiti, all I know is that I'm from a certain *raza*. I was born in La Barahona and when I turned 13, I went to La Romana and there I started to work, *picando caña* (cutting sugar cane). My father didn't want me to because it was the hardest and lowest work there was. Nobody else but poor Haitians and Dominicans cut sugar cane. At times we starved, and from there I grew up with a friend of mine and we sang as we worked in the fields. We managed to get hold of a guitar and I learned to play a little, and then I went to the capital. The capital helps a lot, it's the place of Rhadames. And here I started to work in construction. But all I had in my head was music. I went to Radio Guarachita and started to create and record my own songs. When I saw that people were going crazy, I made many more. I've been deceived many times, companies have not paid me. My songs are being played on FM radio and people know who I am. I remember the first time I heard a song of mine on the radio. My body colour changed! I was so excited, I couldn't believe it. In addition, I wanted to make more Haitian music, like palos, gaga. I didn't want to leave that culture behind, but I was already too known to do that. Now, I have 14 CDs with bachata, 140 *temas* (songs). Every year I have produced a new CD. I have a brick house and I've had two cars, but my situation is not good.

Robin was a talented musician who had experienced a rough childhood, with hard work and starvation. Still, he pulled through a bachata career where he became not only well-known in his neighbourhood, but also nationally. Due to traditionally negative racial perceptions, he realised he would not achieve popularity if he focused on Haitian inspired music. He decided to turn to a more promising genre; bachata. His many productions, radio broadcastings and

<sup>76</sup> Lyrics at page 75-76.

<sup>77</sup> The term *cocolo* refers to the migrants working on the British sugar plantation of Hispaniola.

requests for performances called for a lifted social position, however he still lived in a poor low/middle-class neighbourhood and had few economic recourses.

In order to sell more CDs, Robin told me about how photo shooters whitened his front cover pictures:

After the photo is taken, they pass it through a machine which makes the skin colour whiter. They've done that with many of my covers. It gives more prestige. It's more artist. I'm much darker in real life than this (showing me CD). But it's funny, because you can look at a beautiful face, but the voice can be *feisimo* (very bad).

This example shows what the bachatero can do with his appearance in order to fit the majority/dominant category of 'race' in Dominican society. As Wade says: "Bodies are in themselves socially constructed. In addition, bodies are not immutable [unchangeable]: plastic surgery is the most obvious example, but hair-straightening, skin-lightening and sun-tanning are all ways of altering the body that can have an impact on racial identification [...]" (Wade 1997:20).<sup>78</sup> This manipulation of socially constructed 'biological differences', was a common way to change the body – and thus identity – among dark-skinned bachateros. Both Robin and Felix had experiences with this strategy.

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During my time with Robin I learned that he was sick and was not given necessary treatment. Back in Norway, I received the sad news that Robin Cariño had passed away due to a thrombosis. Unfortunately, there was not even money enough to pay for his funeral. Robin was an idol for Ramón and Felix, and for so many more. Despite his hard work, dedication,

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<sup>78</sup>Other ways of manipulating identity – which also can reflect class, ethnic and place belonging – is to change names. Robin told me he knew of Haitian bachateros who changed their names to what may seem more Dominican. Wooding addresses attention to the same praxis when discussing assimilation of Haitians into Dominican society; "[...] some may hide their Haitian origins when dealing with Dominicans, for example by changing their surnames" Wooding 2004:48).

love for bachata and popularity, he was restrained by dominant Dominican ideologies of class and ethnicity/‘race’.

**Felix: “I’m respected, but I can’t leave my foreignness aside”.**

Like my other informants, Felix Cumbé started out with a rough childhood. He was born in Haiti in a poor part of the capital Puerto Prince. Similar to so many Haitians, he migrated to the Dominican Republic in search of a better life. Felix recalled the day he crossed the border and the following years in the Republic:

At the age of thirteen I migrated here. One night, a friend of mine and I went there in a *taptap*.<sup>79</sup> To be honest with you, I was very afraid because I didn’t know where we were going. I had a sister who was already in the country, in Haina.<sup>80</sup> My friend was Dominican, so he knew more or less where to go. I had no documents, while he went legally. I risked my life; something could have happened... Luckily, the trip was direct and without any problems. After two days I was reunited with my sister. After a while I started to work in a floor tile company. I stayed there for eight years, working hard, but a strong feeling inside me said I should work with music instead. I liked singing and writing. I knew a few words in Spanish before I came here, this Dominican friend of mine taught me some phrases. The first thing I learnt was to sing songs in Spanish, without knowing what they [lyrics] meant! With the merengero Fernando Villalona<sup>81</sup> I had the chance to compose the song “Felix Cumbé”. I became famous with that song. Television and stuff... After some years with Villalona I began in another group, also merengue. I still earn money from those merengue CD’s being sold, even though I’m a bachatero now. They don’t sell well here in the Dominican Republic, no, but in the U.S., Puerto Rico and such places they do. Today, I’m the best known Haitian bachatero in the country, and there aren’t many of us.

Felix’s story is far from unique. Migration, hard child labour and a strong wish for involvement in music is shared by many Haitians in the Dominican Republic. At the same time, it **is** unique because Felix managed, by starting to perform with a famous Dominican merengero, to build a career and become the most famous and respected Haitian bachatero in the Dominican Republic. Of all my informants, Felix was the musician who received most inquiries about performances. Still, he has to deal with his Haitianness and experience

<sup>79</sup> A *taptap* is the Haitian answer to a Dominican *guagua*.

<sup>80</sup> Haina is a suburb situated southwest of Santo Domingo. It is mostly inhabited by low-class people.

<sup>81</sup> Fernando Villalona is one of the Dominican Republic’s most famous merengeros whose popularity started to grow in the 1980s and has not declined since then ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fernando\\_Villalona](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fernando_Villalona), June 25, 2007).

situations where his ethnic/'racial' and class belonging is challenged. His involvement with different genres exemplifies this; he began with merengue, and then he switched to bachata, where he is today.

I would argue that his genre-change implicitly deals with class and ethnicity. As I showed in chapter 2, Presidents of the Dominican Republic have historically encouraged Dominicans to embrace Spanish Catholic roots rather than African ancestry. Dictator Trujillo made strategic use of "white" merengue, in order to "clean" the Dominican nation. Since bachata has not undergone a similar severe manipulation, bachata is not as institutionalised/established and embedded with high class and "whiteness" as merengue. Merengue, as an example of Dominican identity, is constructed against Haitian identity. This is probably why Felix did not manage to maintain his merengue popularity in the Dominican Republic (while he instead sells CD outside this nation where the "Haitian question" is less inflammable) and why he ended up as a bachatero. Undoubtedly, Felix is a charismatic and skillful musician, however his merengue success was in large part due to help from a Dominican artist. Simply put, merengue as opposed to bachata does not permit Haitian integration.

Despite few possibilities of success for Haitian musicians in merengue, there are definitely restraining ethnic/'racial' and class ideologies in bachata as well. Felix explains;

I'm telling you that I've not had an enormous success in merengue, so I changed to bachata. Haitians like bachata a lot. But everything has a problematic aspect. I'm not from here, I'm a foreigner and I can't get rid of that. Many respected people in the Dominican government have told me that I'm one of them now. I'm here legally and everything. I've earned some respect through my hard work and my legal way of living. I've been number one, the only Haitian on the hit lists. I thank the Dominicans for that, I'm respected, but I can't leave my foreignness aside. I've had to work harder than any Dominican to get where I'm today. And I can't be totally Haitian here. I mean, I speak Creole but if I sang all my songs in Creole they wouldn't play them. There are things between Haiti and the Dominican Republic which aren't good and I can't go beyond what they [Dominicans] have allowed me to. The problem is my colour. It's all about the colour.

In his house, Felix has hung up most of his trophies from Latin American countries and the U.S. He now has contracts with music companies, recording possibilities, a Jeep, a brick house and rather good economic recourses. However, he admits that it takes more of him, than of a Dominican, to make a bachata career. Also, he says that he cannot be fully Haitian

without receiving negative responses from ‘the others’. His Creole is an example. His whole career would be at risk if he performed in his mother tongue.

I started this thesis with an empirical example of how shop assistants in “Musicalia” cut off the song “The Immigrant”<sup>82</sup> by Felix Cumbé. The musician composed a song about his experiences of how it is like to be an immigrant in the Dominican Republic. But, even though he is a famous bachatero, the shop assistants, individuals having habituated collective class, ethnic and place ideologies of the Dominican society, decided to turn it off because they were offended and embarrassed.

### **Straight versus winding bachata road**

In this chapter I have presented my informants through their own stories of themselves. The narratives show that even though there are structural class and ethnic/’racial’ aspects affecting and restricting the bachatero’s lives, they actively and creatively apply strategies in order to receive acknowledgement as a musician – and thus as a human being. Bachateros dominate, and they are exposed to domination.

The stories reveal contrasting life histories and are important expressions of identity as self. With his charisma, Felix may have achieved the same as the Dominican Alejandro, however he is still a Haitian confronted with an African-ancestry hostile society. Alejandro has become an accepted bachatero in a short time, while Felix has build up his career over many years. Ramón and Robin have had more difficulties with making a career, mostly because they are Haitians. The life histories confirm the statements I have made by looking at self expression and history; individuals “work” peoples’ memories of the past through performance. They speak for the necessity of understanding the virtual in relation to the nominal. This is altogether the basis for social life.

Besides being a musical genre that both my Dominican and Haitian informants like, bachata enables potential acknowledgement. In addition, for Haitians, it gives hope for integration, albeit a limited one. They do not acquire another social class or become recognized as Dominicans just because they are bachata musicians. Being a bachatero does not catapult them out of their difficult situation. Nevertheless, it helps them to cope with everyday life.

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<sup>82</sup> Lyrics of “The Immigrant” in appendix.



## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This thesis' major focus has been on the making of bachateros' social world through performance. I have argued that Dominicans and Haitians, males and females, do not simply enact the social positions they have been born into, but actively create their identities and group memberships through performance. I have also given an account of a world in change, as opposed to a static and permanent one. This gives rise to questions concerning the endurance of social differences and similarities: Is it so that the performance of bachata may give rise to changes in historically conditioned patterns of categorization and group membership of self-ascription? Definitely, there is no one-dimensional answer to how bachata identity is created and maintained. However, in my attempt to respond to this question, I will sum up the threads of my overall analysis by addressing three issues.

The first matter deals with the extent to which ethnic relationships change as Haitians receive a part recognition as bachateros. A classification system based on ethnic/ 'race' collective ideas equates people of Haitian origins with the uncultured, black, and barely human, as opposed to cultured, white and civilized Dominicanness. In accordance with the Trujilloist and Balaguerist state's controlling nationalistic framework, bachateros categorise others as well as ascribe these characteristics to themselves. Dominican bachateros are "whitish" although they can be dark-skinned, whereas a more fair-coloured Haitian bachateros even struggle to be associated with the lowest strata of Dominican *indio oscuro*. Phenotypes are in many situations inevitable and extremely hard to keep away from categorisation, and they are though to be symptomatic of certain behaviours.

Nevertheless, I have also shown that these stereotypes are not determining for social actions as bachateros have the potential of innovating action and creativity within these structures. There are different and often competitive perceptions of bachata identity and the conditions for inclusion and exclusion, members and non-members, sameness and difference, processes that are always in the making. Bachatero identity is therefore never set. The ambiguity gives room for change and potentiality for mobilisation and integration of Haitian bachateros into Dominican society. As I have shown, the hard conditions under which these individuals live have not ruined artistic creativity: Verbal dexterity, modesty and adaptability are highly valued skills in Dominican society, and they are especially connected to the mainly

black, low classes where bachata also sprung up from. Consequently, Haitian bachateros can be categorised in positive identity terms, and ascribe these characteristics to themselves as well. Bachata identity, as all kinds of identities, is best understood as both - and, rather than either - or (Eriksen 2004). And it is through the interaction between Dominican and Haitian bachateros that ethnic tensions come to expression, and it is therefore beneficial to analyse social and cultural diversity through the lens of bachata styles.

In the thesis, I have also stressed that bachata is increasingly winning an audience also among the middle- and upper strata of Dominican society. In light of this, it is reasonable to ask whether this potentially influences the way bachateros think of themselves and perceive of their class belonging. The association of low class establishments of brothels and *colmados* to which bachata was traditionally connected is challenged in today's Dominican society. Nowadays, bachata is an upward moving genre that is listened to by the middle classes. Even higher class people might dare to be associated with it. Dominican musical taste (cf. Bourdieu 2005) seems to have undergone changes. Many say that bachata is even challenging the national musical of merengue. New arenas have opened up for bachateros, and in my ethnography, Hotel Lina stands out as a typical example of this. Also, Felix Cumbé, and Robin Cariño, speak to the possibility of making a bachata career despite his original low class belonging. The decreasing stigma of backwardness, poor barrio-music, misogyny, heavy alcohol consumption and brutality has consequences for bachateros and their audiences. Involvement in bachata becomes a strategy through which both Dominicans and Haitians may improve their social position. This is promising for marginalised low class and middle class people who aspire to social recognition. Even though most of my Haitian bachateros did not experience national acknowledgement, it could at least elevate their social status in their neighbourhoods. This shows that class categories reflected in bachata are not given, but rather paradoxical, and they are continuously constructed and re-evaluated through musicians' and their audiences' identity negotiations.

Still, the colonial and dictatorial past haunts contemporary Dominican society. Social mobility seems to be more of a reality for Dominican than Haitian bachateros, and this can be so because class dimensions runs along ethnic/'race' lines. The biggest marginalized groups in the Dominican Republic are black, and they continue, to a large degree, to live under harsh conditions in more or less forgotten slums. In this aspect, the Haitian location revealed these conditions and the bachateros' and audiences' everyday life struggles were reflected through bachata performances.

Gendered meanings are also communicated through bachata, either performed by Dominicans or Haitians. I have documented a dominantly male bachata space, rather hostile to females. One can wonder if gender relationships are undergoing change within this field of practice with the emergence of female bachateras. What can be said is that bachateros and bachateras negotiate the cultural content of complex and ambiguous collective gender categories by the power of agency, but restrained by structure. I have explored how bachateras may be identified with female reputation by entering the bachata sphere, and in so doing they blur the Caribbean boundaries of private and public, male and female. The consequences for a bachatera can be that she loses social support from both men and women, however she can also be accepted and ascribe this identity to herself and her group of females. The outcome of the categorisation and ascription might depend on the use of bachata lyrics, instruments and outfit used in performances. The different styles mirror gender relations in the society at large, and their similarities and differences rub up against each other and work in a perpetual mutually relationship. Both reputation and respectability are part of bachata gender identity, however which trait is to be most associated with which gender, varies according to the situation. In addition, bachatero/a identity must be seen in light of political, economic and cultural circumstances.

In my analysis on the interaction between individuals and groups, I have argued that gender intersect with other collective categories such as class and ethnicity. Bachateros/as thus inform and are being informed by all of the three categories, but to which extend they are emphasized is a situational question. Now that bachata has crossed over into the mainstreams, it will be interesting to see whether more female bachateras enter the bachata world, and eventually what effects this will have on bachata. In the prolongation of a question, I wonder if, and how, women will answer to male discrimination and prejudice through bachata and how this again affects the relationships between Dominican men and women.

Altogether, I believe that Haitian bachateros can see something of themselves in Dominican bachateros and *vice versa*. They are bachateros on a small island in the Caribbean Ocean. In this sense, they are partly in the same boat and face many of the similar struggles and pleasures. At the same time, the Bachata Sea has been formed by past winds and these have created both rough and calm waves which affect the navigators. Notwithstanding their class, ethnic/ 'race' or gender identity, Dominican, Haitian, bachatero and bachatera, are all aiming at the same horizon - the horizon of recognition.



## APPENDIX

### *“Somos”*

Blas R. Jiménez

We are

A people of half men  
Half black  
Half Spanish  
Half Indian  
Half African  
Half Latin American  
Half people  
Half men

### *“El inmigrante”*

Felix Cumbé

The immigrant

How much suffering  
How much pain  
How much suffering  
How much pain

Far away from my land  
Do I have to face  
For the reason that I'm not from here  
For me it is so different  
I'm a human being just like you and them  
I fight for you and you fight for me  
I'm at peace with you, my friend  
I'm a human being just like you and us  
I want to ask you for a little respect  
With this I don't say that I don't support what's yours  
The one that doesn't have anything, is worth nothing  
That's why I struggle to find  
A person who looks me in the eyes  
Who helps me to trust and to understand

How much suffering  
How much pain  
Leaving my country  
Do I have to face

Oh man  
I want to be in your heart  
That's why I'm here  
For me it is so different  
But if you don't want to I'll leave  
We're navigating the same boat  
And we don't know when we'll return  
I need to know what's going on between us  
I didn't kill in my town  
I didn't rob in my town  
If I'll have to go, I'll go

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