Sonic Boundaries of Alibabá: Defining, Evaluating, and Recontextualizing *Musicalidad* at the Carnival in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Fronteras sonoras de Alibabá: Definición, evaluación y recontextualización de la musicalidad en el carnaval de Santo Domingo, República Dominicana

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Resumen: Este artículo explora los significados disputados de la musicalidad en el carnaval de Santo Domingo, especialmente a través de los grupos carnavalescos de Alibabá. Al analizar las dinámicas entre los participantes del carnaval y los organizadores del evento, examino una protesta del grupo "Imperio Clásico" como emblemática de tensiones más profundas relacionadas con el reconocimiento cultural y la identidad. Utilizando el concepto de esfera pública auditiva de Ana María Ochoa Gautier, investigo cómo las definiciones de música, ruido y silencio moldean las percepciones sobre las representaciones de Alibabá. El trabajo de campo realizado entre 2010 y 2018 destaca las discrepancias entre las políticas del desfile nacional y las prácticas carnavalescas municipales. Finalmente, este estudio revela cómo las evaluaciones contradictorias sobre la autenticidad musical afectan el estatus y la representación de los grupos Alibabá dentro de la expresión cultural dominicana.

Palabras clave: República Dominicana, carnaval, Alibabá, auralidad, esfera pública aural, musicalidad

Abstract: This article explores the contested meanings of *musicalidad* in Santo Domingo's carnival, particularly through the lens of Alibabá carnival groups. Analyzing the dynamics between carnival participants and event organizers, I examine a protest by the group "Imperio Clásico" emblematic of deeper tensions surrounding cultural recognition and identity. Utilizing Ana María Ochoa Gautier's concept of the aural public sphere, I investigate how definitions of music, noise, and silence shape perceptions of Alibabá performances. Fieldwork from 2010 to 2018 highlights discrepancies between national parade policies and municipal carnival practices. Ultimately, this study reveals how conflicting evaluations of musical authenticity affect the status and representation of Alibabá groups within Dominican cultural expression.

Keywords: Dominican Republic, Carnival, Alibabá, Aurality, Aural Public Sphere, Musicality

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Introduction

On February 12, 2017, the Alibabá group "Imperio Clásico" mounted a protest during the first East Santo Domingo carnival parade of the season. This act was a culmination of unrest among carnival group leaders like Enrique "Momón" Scharbay, who decided to take a public stance and demand more clarity regarding how the municipality was managing carnival funds. The group, wearing black T-shirts and jeans to the parade in lieu of costumes, refrained from dancing or playing music in front of the judges, which they called a *protesta del silencio*. The group was thwarted by security and escorted from the parade route peacefully. Only once the judges were out of range did the "Imperio Clásico" musicians begin to play the telltale mambo rhythm that accompanies them during the carnival season. A video of the incident was recorded and posted to the online news website CiudadOriental.com and distributed on Facebook. Toward the end of the video, as Momón was being escorted away from the judging area, a reporter asked what the silent protest was about, to which he replied:

> El silencio es por el maltrato de los carnavaleros. No nos dejan expresarnos. No nos dejan dialogar, ni siquiera con el síndico. No nos dejan dar el sentir que nosotros tenemos de verdad. Pero, no se queda ahí la cosa. Nosotros seguimos con esto porque hay que tomar en cuenta que nosotros somos los artistas de ellos. Esta es la única industria que no paga, la única industria de la diversión que no paga. (El Oriental 3:18-3:45)

It is not surprising that Momón and his group used the power of costumes and music (or rather, their absence) to bring attention to the disconnect between carnival performers and event organizers. However, a more interesting question is why tensions culminated this way.

As a performance practice linked to the Santo Domingo carnival, the increasing prominence of the groups who compete as "Alibabá" (who derived their name from the folk tale "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves") is as easily attributed to their stylized Middle Eastern costumes and flashy dance steps as to their eponymous marching rhythm performed on percussion and brass instruments—one of the few genres of live music to be found at these parades.[1] The popularity of Alibabá among its fans is not surprising, as Alibabá musicians have been deeply influenced by the varieties of musical and environmental sound that have permeated Santo Domingo over the past four decades. Alibabá has become so vital to the neighborhood groups who continue to perform year in and year out that daily rehearsals now occur from August to February before the spring and summer carnival parades and competitions. Conversely, many residents of Santo Domingo consider the sound of Alibabá to be little more than urban noise. One of its primary instruments, the PVC-pipe trumpet called the *corneta*, is made of semi-truck air horns, further contributing to this perception. Moreover, Alibabá's association with specific bodies (predominantly young males) within

[1] Currently, there is no standard spelling of this carnival practice. In this article, I have chosen to spell the practice as "Alibabá" to distinguish it more clearly from the literary character and to reflect the way it is pronounced by its practitioners, with a prominent acute accent (*acento agudo*) on the final syllable of the word.

a specific part of the city (the *barrios populares*) has negatively shaped attitudes toward the practice in Santo Domingo. Based on my observations over ten years of research on Dominican carnival music, these performers from the heart of the capital's working-class neighborhoods still struggle for validation and acceptance of their cultural identity and musical practices.

Using Ana María Ochoa Gautier's concept of the aural public sphere as both a contested and constitutive space (see "Social Transculturation" 389), I investigate the power struggle between shared and disputed definitions of *musicalidad* to better understand musical practices as enacted by Dominican carnival participants themselves as opposed to those envisioned by parade administrators. First, I examine the relationship between the definition of *musicalidad* and prize allocation at the Dominican National Carnival Parade from 1983 to the parade's restructuring in 2006. Then, based on fieldwork conducted in the Dominican Republic between 2010 and 2018, I focus on the case study of East Santo Domingo carnival parades to examine the evaluation of *musicalidad* at the local level.

Constructing Sonic Boundaries Between Music, Noise, and Silence

Ana María Ochoa Gautier defines the "aural public sphere" as the settings and activities in which people participate in public discussions through sound ("Social Transculturation" 389). To forward the concept, she explores the ways that different actors employ various "modes of signification" to revalorize and recontextualize musical folklore (including "traditional" and "popular" genres of music) through place-based discourse—in other words, music tied to a specific space or a deep sense of identity (390). She details the efforts of individual, and often solitary, scholars in countries like Brazil, Cuba, and Mexico to preserve and protect one or several targeted local music and dance practices and to disseminate them to a broader audience in line with the "valorization of sonic localism crucial to nationalist postcolonial projects" in the twentieth century (394). In these and similar cases, those who carried out folkloric projects often succeeded in disseminating select practices to a larger audience. At the same time, these folklore projects were sometimes accomplished at the expense of the very people and musical practices that they were trying to protect, preserving a sound connection to the idea of a place while physically extracting it from its immediate surroundings (see Samuels et al. 339). More interestingly, Ochoa Gautier also offers examples of musical genres that have defied such consolidation (such as Brazilian *tecnobrega*, Mexican *narcocorridos*, and Peruvian *chicha*) and thus remain associated with "bad taste" (390). In her more recent work, she explores additional unintended consequences of such aesthetic inferences, documenting whose voices were considered "human" and "nonhuman" within the colonial project in the Americas (*Aurality* 5).

To analyze the sonic boundaries of Alibabá, I engage directly with three related terms: music, noise, and silence (see Novak and Sakakeeny 8–9). Ac-

cording to Matt Sakakeeny, the ethnomusicological definition of "music" emphasizes the interchange between sound structures and human behavior (112), echoing John Blacking's well-known concept of "humanly organized sound" or "soundly organized humanity" (99).

In practice, however, an aesthetic component to defining "music" draws contrast to "noise," whereas music connotes beautiful, desirable, organized, and intentional sounds. Noise, therefore, signifies those sounds which are unfamiliar, unintended, or unwanted (see Novak 125, 130). As David Novak suggests:

> Even in the fundamentally relativistic context of musical aesthetics, noise is defined by its mutual exclusion from the music category. Yet noise is inherent in all musical sounds and their mediated reproductions; it has been used as a musical material and can even be considered a musical genre. (126)

Similarly, "silence" in the Western sense denotes the absence of sound. However, as we have already seen, sound-makers can actively mobilize "silence" to communicate as loudly as other sounds, from protest to deep contemplation (see Losseff and Doctor 1, 3). At the same time, sound-hearers can implement "silence" to ignore, avoid, or forget that they were ever listening to anything (or anyone) at all. Therefore, and most pertinently to my discussion of Alibabá and *musicalidad* in the Dominican Republic, for all such matters of perception, the factors that determine whether the same sound should be present/absent or be desired/disqualified highly depend on the time, the place, and the people involved. In what follows, I examine how decisions regarding the definition, evaluation, and recontextualization of *musicalidad* among carnival groups at the national level have played out at the local level.

Defining *Musicalidad* at the National Carnival Parade

Any discussion of Alibabá must first consider the complicated discourses of local, regional, and national identities and tastes that comprise Santo Domingo carnival. Contemporary carnival practices in the Dominican Republic can best be described as an amalgam of performance events, from February to April and in August. There are two general categories of carnival celebrations, both unique to the Dominican Republic: the *carnestoladas* (relating to the Catholic calendar) and the *cimarrón* (relating to traditions of Afro-descendant populations that occur during Holy Week). The *carnestoladas* revolve around a marquee national holiday: Independence Day on February 27 in the spring and Restoration Day on August 16 in the summer. Unlike spring carnival, summer carnival is primarily celebrated in the largest cities, including Santo Domingo, La Vega, Santiago, and San Pedro de Macorís. Although summer carnival activities revolve around the celebration of Restoration Day, in Santo Domingo, it also subsumes the celebration of the city's founding on August 4.

This article focuses primarily on the spring carnival celebrations, which feature a mix of performance contexts, such as parades and competitions at the level of neighborhoods, municipalities, towns, and cities, in addition to the Na-

tional Carnival Parade held annually in Santo Domingo. Before the 1980s, popular carnival celebrations in Santo Domingo were predominantly neighborhood affairs in February and August, creating conditions for the first Alibabá groups to emerge in the National District.

Dominican sociologist Dagoberto Tejeda Ortiz recounts the origin of Alibabá in the same way that I heard it from countless others during my field research:

> Un domingo de febrero, en plena época de carnaval, Luis Roberto Torres, conocido como Chachón, un joven coreógrafo del barrio popular de Villa Francisca estaba comprometido a participar en un anunciado concurso de Salsa en un ambiente de carnaval, pero no tenía un vestuario impactante para poder participar.
>
> Estando en la sala de su casa pensando en la solución de esta dificultad, vio salir a su madre para el baño, con una bata y una toalla en la cabeza. Impresionado por esta imagen, no vaciló en solicitarle dicho atuendo, se vistió de árabe […] Chachón salió con su vestimenta y comenzó a inventar coreografías. Después de un tiempo de estar en esta tarea, al volver la cara hacia atrás, lleno de sorpresa vio que los niños del barrio imitaban todos sus movimientos. Ahí nacieron los Alí-Babá como personajes de carnaval. (219)

Today, Alibabá performers are still immediately recognizable by their combination of dance and costumes. Yet, the most important aspect distinguishing Alibabá from other Dominican carnival groups is that they also play live music during parade performances, as groups like fantasy, popular creativity, and diablos mainly dance to prerecorded music or even to no music. Collectively, the musicians are referred to as an *Alibanda* (a play on words combining Alibabá and the Spanish word for band) or as a mambo (named after the rhythm they play). At full capacity, Alibabá groups can feature multiple snare drums, bass drums, and *cornetas* supported by *tamboras*, cowbells, *güiras*, and *timbales*—although they can perform with as few as two or three snare drums and bass drums.[2] And yet, no matter how many musicians participate, the main function of Alibabá music is to play as long and as loudly as possible for the dancers, meaning that their playing is highly percussive and repetitive, and deemphasizes melodic or lyrical components.

In 1983, a small group of folklorists, scholars, and politicians from the Dominican capital developed the idea of creating a separate national parade: the Dominican National Carnival. Its purpose was to display the popular carnival traditions of the entire country at one time and in one place. To do so, the organizers encouraged participation by awarding prizes for the best groups according to three general criteria: by *affiliation* (such as from the outer provinces, from within Santo Domingo, as a part of an educational institution, or as a part

[2] In Dominican traditional music, the *tambora* is a two-headed drum featured in many styles of music (especially merengue), traditionally positioned horizontally in the lap, where the right hand strikes the drumhead with a *palo* stick and the left hand strikes the drumhead directly. For Alibabá, the *tambora* is carried upright, and both hands strike only one side of the drum with *palo* sticks. The *güira* is a Dominican metal scraper that provides rhythmic support in many styles of Dominican music; not to be confused with the Cuban wooden scraper (*güiro*).

of a cultural club, etc.); by *theme* (like historical, traditional, and fantasy); and by *individual elements* (such as originality, musicality, and choreography) (see Tejeda Ortiz 132).

Alibabá was not recognized as a category in the early days of the National Parade. However, because no clear policy was in place to determine prize allocation, Santo Domingo's carnival groups dominated the early National Parades, which, in turn, fostered an environment that allowed for the increased presence of Alibabá from 1983 to 2005. For example, Chachón's Alibabá group is one of the most highly decorated and one of the most diverse in terms of thematic components, winning many first and second place awards in almost every category, including traditional, historical, and fantasy themes and individual elements such as originality, musicality, and choreography (see Secretaría del Estado de Cultura 11).

It is beyond the scope of this article to surmise why other Dominican carnival groups historically have not integrated more live music into their performances prior to the rise of Alibabá. However, examining factors in the continued debate surrounding *musicalidad* at this Dominican carnival is possible since the Ministry of Culture recognized Alibabá as an official carnival genre. In 2005, organizers in Santo Domingo voted to restructure the National Parade to refocus on creating a more balanced "national" diversity by better representing the variety of characters found in local carnivals nationwide. Among the sixty-eight agreements reached, only three focused on "motivating" the presence of music at the Dominican Carnival (*Primer Congreso Nacional de Carnaval* 22, 33). Despite their desire to promote live music making in general, other elements complicated the full integration of musical performance among other non-Alibabá carnival genres in the capital, none more so than the Carnival Congress's suggestion to reevaluate carnival practices around "reaffirming" (21) Dominican identity through a diverse celebration.

To implement the Congress's resolution to foster a holistic Dominican identity at carnival, National Parade organizers updated and simplified how prizes were awarded. This led to category-based prizes alone, with six classifications for groups: *diablo*, fantasy, historical, traditional, popular creativity, and Alibabá.[3] The Ministry of Culture (MINC)—formerly known as the Secretary of State of Culture from 2000 to 2010—established the current definitions for prize categories in 2006, publishing and distributing them in the official National Parade program each year:

> 1. Diablos: Es la representación más numerosa del carnaval dominicano. Existe una gran variedad de versiones de diablos como personajes de carnaval local. Esta multiplicidad de diablos es tan grande como emblemática. Los más conocidos

[3] In this article, I do not discuss the two additional categories of "best individual costume" or "best mask," as groups are not eligible to compete for these prizes. Since the 2017 celebration, the Ministry of Culture revised the prize allocation system for the National Carnival Parade again in a way that is more reminiscent of the 1983 allocation system, awarding prizes for "Best Provincial Production," "Best Sectorial Production" (i.e., from Santo Domingo), plus an overall grand prize. This decision was not without controversy, and it remains to be seen how this may impact the inclusion of live music making among non-Alibabá groups in the future.

son los diablos cojuelos. Pero también están los diablos cojuelos de La Vega, los lechones de Santiago, los macaraos de Bonao y de Salcedo, los toros y civiles de Montecristi, entre otros.

2. Tradicional: Están compuestas por personajes de la cotidianidad que adquieren característica carnavalesca y se presentan de manera tradicional en los carnavales dominicanos, tanto en Santo Domingo como en las distintas provincias.
3. Historia: Son las que se constituyen a partir de la representación de personajes, vestuarios y situaciones ambientadas en épocas del pasado.
4. Creatividad popular: Su contenido recrea elementos populares resaltados a través de lo imaginario y la creatividad.
5. Fantasía: Su contenido desborda lo imaginario y lo común expuestos a través de personajes, vestuarios, máscaras, dimensiones artísticas, originalidad y una creatividad sin límites. La variedad del colorido y el uso del brillo es parte de sus características.
6. Alí-Babá: Se distinguen por sus vestimentas, que en la mayoría de las oportunidades simbolizan el folklore del Asia, Oriente, Europa y muy recientemente de la cultura dominicana. Bailes acrobáticos, cadencia musical y coherencia de elementos temáticos que hacen alegoría [sic] a diferentes ritos, leyendas y otras etnias. Son personificados con más frecuencia en el carnaval de la ciudad de Santo Domingo. (Ministerio de Cultura 59–60)

Correspondingly, the element of creativity was incorporated into the definitions of popular creativity and fantasy, while being absent from the definitions of *diablos*, historical, traditional, and Alibabá categories. Likewise, the only group now defined by originality and colorfulness is fantasy. Most tellingly, now the elements of choreography and *musicalidad* only appear in the definition of Alibabá.

With the elevation of Alibabá as a nationally recognized carnival category, one might expect that the presence of Alibabá music would increase substantially. However, Alibabá has never represented more than five percent of the total participating groups in a given parade since 2006. Moreover, carnival regulations promoting diversity do not readily explain the continued absence of live music performances at carnival parades in Santo Domingo, especially among groups with a stronger presence, such as *diablos*, fantasy, and traditional groups. Moving away from the spotlight of the National Parade, I now shift my focus to East Santo Domingo municipal parades.

Evaluating *Musicalidad* at Municipal Carnival Parades

Prior to 2001, the entire province of Santo Domingo consisted of a single municipality. However, due to urban and industrial growth in the capital, the Dominican National Congress voted to divide "Greater Santo Domingo," separating the National District from East Santo Domingo (SDE), West Santo Domingo, North Santo Domingo, and Boca Chica.[4] While the first SDE carnival

[4] Since 2005, Santo Domingo Province has included seven municipalities: East Santo Domingo, West Santo Domingo, North Santo Domingo, Boca Chica, San Antonio de Guerra, Los Alcarrizos, and Pedro Brand.

exposition was held just before the territorial division, these parades only became an annual event in February 2008. At present, Santo Domingo's municipal carnival parades occur every Sunday during February. The municipal parades maintain open registration so that any group that wishes to participate may do so. However, only the winners are invited to compete at the National Parade, typically on the final Sunday of February.

SDE presents an interesting case study because rural agricultural communities exist alongside urban zones, occupying the largest percentage of Santo Domingo's territory. In the opinion of the SDE Department of Culture in charge of organizing the local municipal parades, while carnivals in other parts of the country may be more organized due to their highly commercial nature, parades in northern cities like La Vega or Santiago do not feature enough diversity because *diablos* dominate them. Thus, the goal of SDE municipal parades is to maintain a more diverse carnival experience by encouraging a variety of groups to participate. Traditional groups receive special attention because they represent an important part of the unique local identity of East Santo Domingo.

Musical performance is perhaps the most contentious of all expressions informing Dominican carnival practices. The most unique characters at the Dominican carnival are primarily costume-based, including the *robalagallina,* King Califé, and *indios*.[5] Yet, describing these groups as entirely musically silent would be inaccurate. Throughout the history of Dominican carnival, *tambora* and *güira* have offered accompaniment and rhythmic support to traditional groups. However, the current SDE carnival prize categories are similar to those established nationally in 2006. Again, the opening paragraph of the SDE municipal parade prize guidelines, in theory, informs judges and participants that awards should be considered both in terms of individual characteristics and the categories that are quoted below.[6] In practice, judges tend to award winners based on category definitions rather than individual characteristics in line with the national categories. Once again, *musicalidad* is relegated only to the domain of the Alibabá category:

> La profesionalidad y autenticidad de las distintas manifestaciones creativas en término temático y musicalidad, así como en la originalidad. Las comparsas se escogerán entre las 7 categorías mencionadas de donde el jurado elegirá 1er y 2do lugar.
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> 1. COMPARSA TRADICIONAL: se toma en cuenta una comparsa que represente a los personajes tradicionales del carnaval dominicano.
>
> 2. COMPARSA CREATIVIDAD POPULAR: se tomará una comparsa que exponga la creación de elementos populares resaltados a través de la imaginación y la creatividad.

[5] In regard to Dominican carnival, *robalagallina* (sometimes styled *roba-la-gallina*) is a female character typically performed by men in drag with exaggerated breasts and buttocks; King Califé (akin to Rey Momo) is a character whose costume includes an oversized top hat and black suit, performed in blackface with white-painted eyes and mouth; groups known as *indios* dress in costumes that evoke stereotypes of native populations that once lived on Hispaniola, such as the Taínos or Arawaks, often performed in brownface by painting clay over their skin.

[6] Gladys Olea, Head of Culture and Folklore, East Santo Domingo City Council, Department of Culture and Folklore, provided me with the list of SDE prize categories.

> 3. COMPARSA FANTASÍA: se tomará en cuenta una comparsa donde cuente lo imaginario expuesto a través de los personajes, la originalidad y la creatividad sin límites.
>
> 4. COMPARSA DE DIABLOS: se tomará en cuenta una comparsa que represente las diferentes versiones locales de diablos como personajes del carnaval.
>
> 5. COMPARSA ALIBABÁ: se tomará en cuenta una comparsa con vestuario, coreografía, musicalidad y coherencia de elementos temáticos propios de este tema tradicional de carnaval.
>
> 6. PERSONAJE INDIVIDUAL: se tomará en cuenta los personajes individuales que representen creatividad, colorido y elementos de la identidad local en sus vestuarios.
>
> 7. COMPARSA HISTÓRICA: se tomará en cuenta una comparsa que represente la ambientación de la época, el vestuario, los personajes, etc. (Olea)

The growing popularity of Alibabá in East Santo Domingo (from one group in 2008 to at least seven in 2018) is complicated by the fact that only the top two groups from each category qualify for the National Parade. This has led to conflict between carnival judges and carnival participants who want to perform live music and advance to the next round of parades. The most significant source of tension has arisen over the appropriateness of "non-traditional" music genres (such as Alibabá) among traditional groups. Again, as musical performance pertains only to the domain of the Alibabá category, some judges have inadvertently limited the presence of music among the other categories, especially for traditional groups.

For example, during the 2015 parade cycle, a few judges went as far as disqualifying traditional groups that included Alibabá music but did not compete in the Alibabá category. A specific case was made against a group participating in a preliminary carnival parade on February 8. They were then disqualified because they included a snare drum playing the Alibabá rhythm as part of their performance. I first learned about this issue by hearing from my colleagues, and watched the parade events later in videos posted by local news outlets like *De la Zona Oriental* on YouTube.

This controversy was so unprecedented and unexpected by carnival participants that the following week, another news organization (Ciudad Oriental) interviewed the judges José Ricardo Ventura, Vidal de la Cruz, and Maritza Silverio. In general, the majority of head judge Ventura's comments refer to the participants' (mis)interpretation of the categories. Here, Ventura emphasizes how the combination of Alibabá and traditional groups diverges from the judges' goal of maintaining diversity via a strict interpretation of the prize category definitions:

> Ciudad Oriental: ¿Cuál es la situación en que están atravesando Uds., los que son jurados, acá en este carnaval de Santo Domingo Este?
>
> José Ricardo Ventura: Hay una parte importante, José Ricardo Ventura, presidente del jurado ya por cuatro ocasiones, una parte importante sólo por los comparseros. Los comparseros nos están confundiendo la filosofía del trabajo que estamos desarrollando. En un tradicional, no coloca un Alibabá. En un Alibabá, no coloca un tradicional. Y es una problemática que estamos nosotros tratando de que los comparseros puedan unificar los criterios y que no realicen el concepto de la comparsa distorsionada que,

> realmente, quiere la organización de este carnaval. Es una problemática que estamos nosotros desde hace años tratando de llevar la conciencia de los comparseros, pero no hace el caso. ("Conozca porqué" 0:00-0:54)

As the interview continues, Ventura's colleague de la Cruz contributes to his opinion on how carnival participants misinterpret the traditional category by including Alibabá music. More importantly, de la Cruz goes one step further to condemn the larger trend of SDE carnival groups incorporating any non-traditional music into their performance:

> O sea, tiene que tener claro cuando viene con una categoría. Si vienen de Alibabá, ¡son Alibabá! Si vienen de fantasía, son fantasía. Si vienen a una categoría histórica, son una categoría histórica. E incluso, hay quienes vienen de una categoría histórica y le meten reggaetón. Entonces, es ahí donde hay que tener claro, como dice José Ricardo, el concepto de lo que van a representar. Porque se inscriben con una categoría y después vienen con un arroz con mango. (3:23-3:53)

In the opinion of de la Cruz, groups that include Alibabá or reggaetón as a part of their performance are aptly described as *arroz con mango*—a Dominican phrase used to describe things that do not make sense together.

In general, the judges' interview shows that they are at least sympathetic to the popularity of Alibabá music and thus, by extension, the existence of an Alibabá prize category. However, the judges emphasize their frustrations in evaluating groups in the other categories that do not readily conform to category standards. The bigger problem is that carnival participants seem unaware of the judges' evaluation practices. This is evident not only in the judges' comments regarding participants' misinterpretation of the categories but also in their comments on the divergence between the judges' final evaluation and the perceived reception of the participants themselves. Unsurprisingly, the consensus among the judges is that they should maintain how prizes are allocated. Instead, they recommend that SDE carnival groups adopt their philosophy of maintaining diversity by strictly adhering to the category definitions.

Despite evidence to the contrary, Ventura adamantly maintains that the judges' evaluation practices are clear. Ventura repeats that the participants should educate themselves and research before starting their conceptual designs. However, this opinion contradicts de la Cruz's previous statement, which demonstrates that overall, carnival groups are confused about the judges' actions:

> Y se ven muy bonitos, quizás el público también lo ve muy bonito, y ellos creen que vienen ganadores. Y cuando ven que no salen ganadores, se sienten mal y no saben quizás ¿por qué? … ¿Cuál fue la razón por la que … no salieron ganadores? (3:50-4:02).

The interview featured in this news story shows no specific hostility against musical performance at carnival in principle. In fact, the judges' reaction is at its core a response to a real concern held by many that the popularity of Alibabá contributes to the decline of other traditions. This fear is not unfounded, as several traditional groups have already fallen by the wayside in favor of Alibabá. One Alibabá group leader from East Santo Domingo recounted to me that as

a young boy, he participated in another longstanding traditional group before an Alibabá group supplanted it. Elsewhere in Santo Domingo, the acclaimed percussionist known as "El Chino" attributed the decline of "Los indios de San Carlos"—a very famous group that has not participated in carnival since 2000—to the rise of Alibabá (Díaz Ferreras 0:00-2:30).

The goal of the Department of Culture to maintain the diversity of SDE carnival practices by reinforcing the sonic boundaries around the Alibabá category makes sense given how the municipality values carnival traditions. However, the judges' interpretation of this philosophy in practice keeps all elements of Alibabá out of traditional categories, especially *musicalidad*. In short, although some traditional groups in East Santo Domingo may choose to include Alibabá music, they are disqualified at the local level. As these groups are subsequently prevented from qualifying for the National Parade, this, in effect, precludes traditional groups from incorporating musical elements at the national level as well.

Recontextualizing *Musicalidad* in the Dominican Aural Public Sphere

My primary motivation for studying Alibabá music and dance in Santo Domingo has been to better understand the practice in its social context and, in doing so, to define what Alibabá is and what it means to its practitioners. The time I spent interacting with musicians throughout my field research gave me insight into their ideas regarding the status of Alibabá in Santo Domingo. Through this process, I discovered that one of the primary concerns of group leaders is feeling that neither they as performers nor their music is appreciated. Not surprisingly, this recognition issue emerged as a central theme in many of my interviews and conversations with Alibabá leaders and group members who feel that Alibabá has also been subsumed within the negative perceptions of urban life regarding poverty and crime. More surprising is how Alibabá groups are beginning to realize their value and are proactively removing themselves from the soundscape of Dominican carnival as a form of protest.

In particular, Alibabá groups have started taking to the streets to voice their disapproval over the perceived failures of their local governing officials and cultural agents, often to the sound of rapid-fire snare drums and PVC-pipe trumpets of the Alibabá mambo, but also in the form of silent protests. In other words, these groups are currently mobilizing the power of music, noise, and silence to bring attention to the disconnects between the goals of performers and event organizers, especially to those aspects of carnival deemed more valuable to some but less valued by others. As discussed in the introduction, the group "Imperio Clásico" mounted a silent protest during the first municipal carnival parade of the season. Less than a month later, this same group continued their protest outside of the SDE Townhall, using their sound to draw attention to their cause and possibly annoy the functionaries working inside—until the National Police were called to end the demonstration.

Using Ochoa Gautier's ideas as a framework, I argued that the status of public performance practices that successfully combine costume, dance, and music can be better understood by examining the competing sonic boundaries of the various stakeholders involved. In this case, Alibabá is implicit in any discussion of sound articulation as music, noise, and silence within Santo Domingo's aural public sphere. Tracing the history of decisions related to defining, evaluating, and recontextualizing *musicalidad* among carnival groups in Santo Domingo reveals the complex relationship between carnival organizers and participants regarding the performance of live music in various carnival celebrations in the city.

While folklorists, anthropologists, governments, and cultural organizations are often responsible for deciding within the aural public sphere whose sounds will be included, whose will be excluded, and why, listening audiences and performers also participate in these processes by embracing, adapting, or ignoring these efforts. In other words, while carnival organizers have been the primary actors in articulating Santo Domingo's soundscape, Alibabá performers have been essential in its interpretation.

While MINC and other similar cultural entities have allowed more and more flexibility with Alibabá groups competing in most of the other categories since 2006, they have also become more protective of the traditional category to reaffirm the identity of specific carnival practices as "traditional." Interestingly, Alibabá groups competed in the traditional category in these parades until 2010. This includes an Alibabá group who dressed as the King Califé character, accompanied by an Alibabá rhythm, and won third place in the traditional category that year. Since 2010, MINC has adopted a policy which no longer permits Alibabá groups to compete as traditional at the national level—in short, affirming that Alibabá is *not* traditional. At the local level, this idea of what is and is not considered traditional has been reinterpreted to mean that traditional groups cannot include Alibabá music—or that traditional is *not* Alibabá.

Although I suggested that some carnival organizers have internalized a philosophy that has favored maintaining tradition over encouraging innovative musical performance, I have not done so with the intent of criticizing these regulatory and evaluative decisions or claiming that Alibabá music should be permitted in other prize categories. Rather, I have attempted to explore the divide between the desires of Alibabá performers and carnival organizers in Santo Domingo, resulting in neither group realizing their goals. However, it matters most because of the aspiration of Alibabá leaders to be accepted as executors of Dominican culture and because of a continued and concerted effort by MINC to include more musical performances in carnival activities. These ideas have formed the basis of my analysis of Alibabá, allowing me to demonstrate that Dominican carnival practices can have an inherent value for the people passionate about them and, more importantly, an apparent value for those who may be discounting them. As I see it, the future success of Alibabá resides in its ability to bridge the desires of the Dominican people and Dominican cultural entities, while at the same time not limiting the potential creativity or spontaneous nature of these musicians.

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