

Querido Emigrante:
Musical Perspectives of Dominican Migration
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Abstract Millions of Dominicans have migrated to New York City and Boston since the 1960s and are now involved in extensive transnational movement between the two countries. Along with this human movement, the fast-paced dance music genre of Dominican *merengue* has spread around the globe, becoming an important popular medium for expressing Dominican migrant experiences. Despite the genre's transnational audience, however, contemporary merengue written and performed by Dominican migrants has remained a very national and self-aware music, with local references intended for a Dominican audience. The case of Dominicans and merengue music may present challenges to some theories of transnationalism. As Dominican music is highly relevant to migrant experiences, it provides the researcher with an alternative lens for looking at Dominican migration.

Key words: Dominican migration, transnationalism, music, merengue

‘Querido Emigrante’

Te vas buscando un sueño;
nuevos caminos encontraràs,
llevando solo recuerdos.

Te vas jurando un día volverás
a ese cielo que anhela volverte acariciar,
a ese suelo que siempre en tu alma vivirá.

‘Dear Emigrant’

You go seeking a dream;
you will meet new paths,
carrying only memories.

You go swearing that one day you
will return
to the heaven that wishes to cherish
you again,
to the land that will always live
in your spirit.

(Milly Quezada 1998)

The singer of these lyrics is Milly Quezada, a Dominican-born musician who moved with her family to New York City in the 1970s. From the heart of New York's Dominican diaspora in Washington Heights, she formed a merengue band that launched her to

eventual international stardom and gave her the title of ‘Queen of merengue’. The lyrics of ‘Querido Emigrante’, written twenty-five years after she first moved to the United States, are sung in the perspective of a migrant who has returned home. The words of her song evoke the image of a letter sent to a far-away friend reminding her that she will always be a part of the Dominican homeland.

Quezada’s emigrant represents the thousands of migrating Dominicans who will receive her message not by letter but instead over the radio, in a CD, or in a cassette they can purchase at any Latino *tienda* throughout North and South America. In the Dominican Republic, any person with media access cannot help but receive countless references a day to migration, whether they be tragic tales in the newspaper of drownings en route to Miami or the plane crash in December 2001 in which over two hundred Dominicans returning to Santo Domingo died. Songs about ‘Nueva York’ fill the radio, while letters, emails, and telephone calls from family members abroad constantly keep the experiences of migrants circulating in a variety of social contexts. Several Dominican writers have produced short stories and novels about migration that have become bestsellers in the Dominican Republic and in the United States, including Julia Alvarez and Junot Díaz.

The popular fast-paced dance music genre of Dominican *merengue* in particular has been an important medium for expression of the migrant experience. Played on street corners, radios, television, dances and at concerts, merengue reaches all Dominicans with its stories of the migrant. Merengues, originally carried to international locales through migrating Dominicans and their social networks, are now recorded, produced and distributed in several different countries. Today, a merengue artist must be successful in New York in order to sell records in the Dominican Republic. Merengue has achieved an internationally-known and acclaimed status, selling albums over the internet and in record stores around the world.

This proliferation of information regarding migration in merengue music and other media reflects the great extent that the migrant experience has become a part of Dominican national consciousness. According to estimates, one quarter of the population of eight million Dominicans were involved in transnational migration in 1995. These numbers have been steadily increasing over the last four decades, making the migrant an

important and influential member of Dominican society while not even physically present. 'Considering its small size, the Dominican Republic is one of the countries in the world most dramatically affected by immigration' (Grassmuck & Pessar 1991: 20). To echo the words of Milly Quezada, the migrant is dear, indeed.

The volume of academic material written about international migration from the Dominican Republic is substantial. A large quantity of scholarship focuses on the transnational aspects of Dominican migration, emphasizing the international duality of social relations in the spheres of politics, economics and media. Accompanied by frequent travel back and forth between two 'homes' and the constant separation of family members, the Dominican transnational migrant has a multi-territorialised existence, even if he or she is not physically travelling.

Popular music, however, portrays a different perspective of migrant life: one that emphasizes not transnationalism and migration, but rootedness in Dominican geographic locales, identification with traditional Dominican values and loyalty to homeland. The themes of homeland, belonging, and locality expressed in Quezada's music concerning the migrant experience are widespread in contemporary popular music and other media in the Dominican Republic, presenting a contrast if not a contradiction of music that emphasizes a place in which musicians and audiences may not even live. This paper will look at the narratives in specific musical texts, highlighting the contrasts found in Dominican music consumed at home in the Republic and abroad in the United States, and attempt to set a range of factors contributing to how and why an extremely 'transnational' population creates and consumes a very 'national' popular music.

A second aim of the paper is to show how the orientation and prevalence of these contrasting themes question the relevance of some theoretical frameworks of transnationalism with which contemporary anthropological scholarship conceptualises migration practices. Challenges to the nation state, the formation of multiple identities and the divorce of identity from geographic locale have all been proposed in theories of transnational migration and will be explored in the context of Dominican music and migration. Indeed, there may be limits of some transnational theories in the case of Dominican migration as portrayed by popular merengue music

In the process of explaining the orientation of themes in migrant merengues as well as exploring the relevance of the contemporary field of transnationalism to this study, the paper will show how the study of popular music can benefit an understanding of migration. The study works from the premise that migration can be measured by its impact on the social relationships of home and host society as well as by the movement of ideas, technology, religions, and other media (Held et al. 1999). An anthropological study that situates music media in its historical and contemporary transnational field of meaning, as well as acknowledges the technicalities of musical structure, provides a new perspective on migration informed primarily by cultural articulations, as opposed to traditional approaches used in migration studies that analyse the economic or political activities of migrants and search for explanations behind movement. While economic reasons have been stressed as explanations for past and contemporary Dominican migration, it is important to acknowledge that a variety of other factors are now influencing population movement. Looking beyond strictly push-pull economic factors, migration scholars are advocating that we acknowledge a greater complexity of factors, such as variations in regional, class and gender differences in migrant groups (Guarnizo 1997: 290 and Bretell 2000: 103).

Studies find that rather than attributing migration solely to poor economic conditions in the Dominican Republic or labour demand from receiving countries, a major factor encouraging current migration is communication of positive experiences of previously-migrated family members and friends, as well as obligations to family members (Guarnizo 1992: 291). Relatives and friends of migrants living in New York hear stories of success and advancement and receive monetary support from abroad. 'It is precisely such "distant rumours of large wages" as well as concrete evidence from return migrants that pervade the Dominican Republic and make migration a widespread ambition' (Bray 1987: 154).

The suggestion that positive communications, rather than the classic theories of push-and-pull economic factors, form the largest impetus for new migration is provocative, and introduces a previously-mentioned alternative approach to migration research. The growing importance of communications through media for transnational populations is noted by Arjun Appadurai: 'The role that the media plays in people's

imaginations, in the past expressed in dreams, songs, fantasies, myths and stories . . . has now acquired a singular new power in social life' (1999: 469). These new approaches to migration studies imply that the ideas circulated in merengue music can have significant social impact.

Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Merengue in the Dominican Republic

Merengue is a fast-paced dance genre, identified by its distinctive beat and accompanying dance. It was created in the late 1800s from a creolised tradition of African, indigenous Taino and Spanish peoples living in the Dominican Republic and is today perhaps the most well known music of the Dominican Republic (for a more comprehensive history of merengue music, refer to Paul Austerlitz' 1997 work). Merengue maintained a regional diversity, varying in style, use of instrument, and lyrical content according to geographical area until 1931 when the dictator Rafael Trujillo became president of the Dominican Republic.

When Trujillo came to power, he chose the *merengue* from his native region of Cibao as the national music of the Dominican Republic. Throughout his thirty year administration merengue became established through concert bands, symphonies, and musical academies. Trujillo's protective and exclusionist policies restricted travel outside the Dominican Republic, giving artists little exposure to outside musical influences and allowing Dominican merengue to evolve in ways uniquely different from other Latin American merengues. Through *merengue*, Trujillo promoted white, Europeanised culture, emphasizing the style of the urban and predominately light-skinned Cibao region, which he claimed did not exhibit the African influences of other more rural regions. This is a fiction, as ethnomusicological research has now proved that merengue cibaeño has African influences (Davis 1998).

Its popularisation and continuous endorsement throughout Trujillo's thirty-year regime thoroughly established merengue as a national music and symbol of the Dominican Republic. Widely popular, people enjoyed merengue despite its subject matter. This connection with merengue proved strong enough to be maintained across

international boundaries in the major wave of migration in the 1960s following the assassination of Trujillo, in which Dominicans escaping persecution and poverty have been scattered around the world, carrying their music with them. Following this mass migration, merengue was influenced by a variety of outside music for the first time, such as rock and roll as well as other Latin American musics. Merengue has also influenced a number of hybrid urban genres in North America. Today processes of merengue production, distribution, and consumption take place in a variety of international locales.

Contemporary merengue is typically lively and animated, playing constant variations of a theme in major mode. Its 'happy' quality, often contrasting with music that concerns distinctly unhappy topics such as broken hearts, separation from family and dictator oppression, has been remarked on by a number of ethnomusicologists (Manuel 1995, Austerlitz 1997), even called 'manic exuberance' by one writer (Manuel 1995). Its fast dance tempo, however, is an innovation of artists in the 1960s, when rock and roll influenced a number of Latin American musics.

Merengue is now the most internationally known Dominican music genre, and has certainly been the most popular music in the Dominican Republic for almost a century, resulting in an enduring historical importance as the national music of the Dominican Republic. Because its global dispersal is largely due to migrating Dominicans, a study of contemporary Dominican music would not be complete without an analysis of processes of transnational migration.

Transnationalism

The concept of transnationalism has been explored in a number of studies on Dominican migration. Robotham's 1996 study looks at formal and informal aspects of transnationalism in the Caribbean, concluding that Caribbean migrants have appropriated national symbols through the practice of informal transnational activities. Sørensen argues for the application of the transnational framework to Dominican migration, observing that conventional migration offers explanations too simplistic for the issue of migrant identity (1997). Portes and Guarnizo (1996) look at the role of Dominican

migrant networks that sustain informal but very successful business relations. These networks are often missed in discussions of economic globalisation by ‘formally’ structured multi-national companies. Although Eugenia Georges endorses a structural-historical framework in order to analyse the economic repercussions of out-migration, she uses the term ‘transnational’ throughout, even in her title: *The Making of a Transnational Community*. Audrey Singer’s study of migrants living in New York City originally from the Cibao region of the Dominican Republic finds that Dominicans live a ‘sojourning lifestyle’, unwilling to commit to a permanent residence in the Dominican Republic or in the United States (1998:8). Grasmuck and Pessar investigate complex cultural formations that arise through circuits of Dominican migration between New York and the Dominican Republic (1991), while Itzigsohn et al. map out the complexities of Dominican transnationalism (1999).

Indeed, transnational is an appropriate word to describe contemporary Dominican migration practices that include complex remittance-sending infrastructures, long-distance communications, multi-national entrepreneurial and political activities. The present study will not explain in great detail the complexities of these practices, as they have been well-documented in the literature. ‘As a theoretical construct about immigrant life and identity, transnationalism aptly suits the study of population movements in a world where improved modes of transportation as well as the images that are transmitted by means of modern telecommunications have shortened the social distance between sending and receiving societies’ (Bretell 2000: 104). This type of population movement would certainly apply to Dominicans, who are among the most migratory people in the world, with music that circulates through the most technologically advanced mediums of internet and international record companies.

In the literature of Dominican migration patterns as well as the development of the popular media of merengue, it becomes clear how ‘transnational’ Dominican migrants really are in the extensity and intensity of movement of people, ideas, images, and commodities across national borders. Yet along with this increasing movement and contact with different places comes the assumption in some transnationalist theories that people will no longer conceive of their ‘identities’ as belonging to one place:

transnational migrants, although predominately workers, live a complex existence that forces them to confront, draw upon, and rework different identity concepts—national, ethnical, and racial . . . the fluid and complex existence of transnational migrants compels us to re-conceptualise the categories of nationalism, ethnicity, and race, theoretical work that can contribute to reformulating our understanding of culture, class, and society . . . (Glick Schiller et al. 1992: 5).

A similar notion of transnationalism asserts that social scientists must rethink notions of community as transcending geographical boundaries (Brettell 2000: 104). Identity is certainly a complex issue among transnational migrant groups and diasporas, and the changes that take place concerning perceptions of identity and homeland are well-documented in the literature. But the reformulation of ethnic group definitions and notions of home-transcending geographic boundaries may not be a general characteristic of all groups that exhibit transnational characteristics in political and economic realms. As we previously saw how Dominicans have insisted that ‘merengue’ keep its name and remain ‘Dominican’ despite its stylistic changes, and as we will shortly see in musical narratives, there is certainly evidence in the Dominican case to the contrary.

Through the course of this study, we will find that there are limits to using aspects of transnationalist theory as a framework for Dominican migration, while other ways of conceiving transnational theory may be more useful. Despite all the structural characteristics of a transnational people (i.e. extensive travel over national boundaries, maintenance of ties in both countries), Dominican popular music actually promotes an identification/orientation with ideas of bounded groups, and only reinforces traditional and nationalistic notions of homeland and locality. The paradox is that the music itself (specifically *merengue*) has survived precisely because of international migrant circulation, and in the process has sustained significant changes influenced by ‘foreign’ musics, making it stylistically less ‘Dominican’. In their portrayal of Dominican identity through musical lyrics, Dominicans appear to be just as strongly ‘Dominican’ when travelling as when at home.

A more critical use of ‘transnational’ that differentiates between the many types of ‘transnational’ activities and mindsets is appropriate for this study, as well as other

research on migrating populations. Due to the wide use of the term, some scholars advocate that a distinction must be made between transnational, international and multi-national activities and apply transnational terminology to economic practices only (Portes and Guarnizo 1996). In a study that maps Dominican transnationalism, Itzigsohn et al. attempt to pinpoint what aspects of the Dominican migratory experience are 'transnational'. They write, 'Is transnationalism mainly an economic phenomenon, or is it a social field that affects all aspects of life, such as group and individual identities and symbolic practices' (1999: 320)?

Advocating a more critical use of the term, Vertovec (1999) has separated out various aspects of transnationalism in a six-part scheme, consisting of transnationalism as (1) a social morphology, spanning borders and containing extensive networks, (2) as a type of consciousness, incorporating 'multiple identity attachments', (3) a mode of cultural reproduction, (4) an avenue of capital, (5) site of political engagement, and (6) a reconstruction of 'place' or locality. These ways of conceiving of transnationalism will be explored in the present study of Dominican music and migration.

We might pause, however, with a question of great importance to this study. Can one draw the conclusion that messages put forth in popular music (tainted by the agendas of multi-national record companies and even nation-states) realistically reflect the feelings and opinions of Dominican migrants, even when music is written by migrants? Whether migrants internalise the messages and ideas found in popular music or not, this question can only be answered by first-hand empirical research in which migrants can be observed engaging in the music in its various contexts. As Sørensen notes, such popular music is 'portable culture, one could say, as long as we acknowledge that people carry their culture with them (for strategic purposes) and not *within* them (in Fog Olwig & Hastrup 1997: 307). This question, then, cannot be answered satisfactorily in this study. However, the question allows us to explore the limits of analysing the popular cultural product of music, its potential for capturing the imaginations of Dominicans, and even potential influence on decisions to migrate. For although a variety of factors influence the final product of *merengue* that is broadcast from radios, CD players and televisions, the fact remains that thousands of Dominicans at home and abroad are buying and consuming this music, meaning that they are certainly hearing its messages and perhaps

identifying with it in some way. Through the interpretations of songwriters, all of which have migrated or are currently living abroad, we can get some idea of how Dominicans conceptualise the migrant experience. Rapport observes that ‘ . . . specific writings of specific people can give us an insight into the society from which they emerge—and of course into the perspectives of the writer’ (Rapport et al 1998: 89). In the analysis of merengue songs in the next section, we will explore what these specific writings are, highlighting recurring musical themes in the context of migration practices.

Migrants’ merengues

Some of the musicians whose work will be analysed in this section include Milly Quezada, whose work spans a twenty-five year period in which she has lived in both the United States and the Dominican Republic (although her music found here was composed in the last five years), Bonny Cepeda, who migrated to New York in the 1970s, Juan Luis Guerra, the bands *Pochy y su Cocoband*, *Oro Solido*, and *Oro Duro*, among others. All musicians were born in the Dominican Republic but have migrated to New York or the U.S. where they established themselves as musicians, later becoming popular in the Dominican Republic.

In my review of twenty merengue albums made by Dominican artists in the past twenty-five years (most recorded between 1990 and the present), I found that over half contained one or two songs with the theme of migration, nostalgia for the homeland, or what it means to be a *Dominicano*. More songs regarding immigration appeared in albums made in the 1990s, and classics such as ‘El Dominican York’ reappeared on many of the later albums. The fact that most Dominican merengue artists feel it necessary to comment on some aspect of the migration process indicates that identity, hardships, promise, or nostalgia for family and homeland are relevant issues to the singer and audience.

The albums analysed here do not strictly contain *merengue*; several of the more recent albums such as Milly Quezada’s *Vive* and Juan Luis Guerra’s *Bachata Rosa* contain slower ballad-style songs. The songs cover a variety of topics besides migration,

notably some aspect of romantic relationships. Others present lyrics whose primary goal, it seems, is to incite the listener to dance. All songs about migration, however, are merengues.

Musical Themes

Several themes that recur in the texts of the merengue songs about migration will be the primary focus of this section. These themes can be roughly organized into two groups for the purposes of analysis here: 1) narratives of the life of the migrant, which include a portrayal of the United States (notably New York City) as a destination of material wealth and grandiose sites, but more often as a destination of hardship and exploitation; and 2) perceptions of home, which often emphasize the beauty of the people and the land in nostalgic recollections. There are similarities in both thematic groups: the orientation towards a specifically Dominican audience, achieved by use of geographical place-names familiar to Dominicans, as well as a specialised use of the Spanish language that incorporates Dominican slang. This very ‘Dominican’ orientation also stresses the notion of a shared identity abroad based on land (*tierra*) of common origins.

Many of the songs effectively articulate the contrasting aspects of the migrant experience: the allure of wealth versus the dangerous and difficult circumstances of both the journey and life at the destination. The positive aspect of Dominican migration is that people can earn more money to support families both abroad and back home (albeit for a large price at times). Prospects for material wealth and a perceived higher standard of living are expectations transmitted through *merengue* in the lyrics and musical styles, contributing to what Guarnizo refers to as the ‘mythical images of the United States as the most desirable land to move to’ (1992: 34). Through description of the visits and gifts of returned relatives from New York, one merengue by the group *Pochy y su Cocoband* conveys the sense of material wealth that comes from migrating:

Everyone congratulates you, when you come from over there,
He came with seven suitcases, the man arrived loaded. . . .

What has New York got, that makes everyone look so good?
And what did you bring me?
A pair of sneakers.
And what did you bring me?
A polo shirt.
And what did you bring me?
Two boxes of corn flakes.

(Kugel 1999)

There is a bit of irony in this song—on the one hand, it wryly comments on the expectations of the family at home, but on the other hand, it illustrates the value placed on the bringing of gifts from the United States. The theme of material wealth in the United States and the expectations of people back home are common in songs, often juxtaposing an idea of a wealthy United States with a poor Dominican Republic. This conspicuous gift-giving has become a custom of return migrants in many parts of the Dominican Republic, where family connections are strengthened through the giving of gifts: ‘ . . . in addition to large amounts of cash, migrants came laden down with gifts of new and used “American” clothing, shoes, towels and linen, soap and cosmetics, watches, small appliances, and a multitude of knickknacks’ (Georges 1990: 151).

The theme of material wealth and the grandiose, larger-than-life quality of New York is further continued in a merengue by Luis Vargas. In this merengue we also get a feeling of awe experienced by a newcomer to this big city:

How many big things does New York have?
The Twin Towers, avenues that go up and down,
Broadway, St. Nicholas, anyone would go crazy.
How many sirens?
How many strange things? My God! (Kugel 1999)

In promoting the impressive and even positive aspects of migrant settlement, these lyrics refer to what Appadurai calls ‘possible lives’ offered to potential migrants (1999: 468).

The 'lives' are made available to their imaginations through the positive experiences of friends and families as well as through an increasing saturation of media products such as mass-produced music. This popular music figures in the imaginations of its Dominican consumers, at home and abroad, illustrating the dominance of the idea of Dominicans in New York. A large quantity of merengue is produced in New York and written on the topic of New York, as this North American city has been the primary destination for Dominicans over the last fifty years. Writers have even commented on how New York City 'is just another Dominican capital' (Sørensen 1997a). There are even merengue bands called 'The New York Band' and 'La Gran Manzana' (the big apple).

Merengues that present a high consumption of material goods as a 'reality' of life abroad not only call attention to the much poorer realities of life in the Dominican Republic but may create unrealistic expectations for potential migrants. Misleading impressions given by accounts from abroad in merengues can take the form of lyrics such as 'what has New York got, that makes everyone look so good?' Merengue albums like 'El Poder de Nueva York' (The power of New York) by *Oro Solido* further the mystique and glamour of New York. False impressions of what life is really like for migrants set expectations high, evident when relatives return with gifts or send remittances that are removed from the context of labour and hardships suffered to attain them. Seeking the 'possible lives' offered through the media, Dominicans take risks to attain the situations they see, hear, and read about. As the journey abroad is expensive, dangerous and very uncertain, only those with significant means can afford to move.

Although merengue promotes the material attractions of life in the United States, merengue artists do not hesitate to expose the negative side of living abroad as well. Often the music has a cynical quality, no doubt born of first-hand experience from the singer. A common topic is the initial journey to the U.S., which can be accomplished in several ways, besides simply flying to the destination, which is expensive and requires visas. Undocumented entry to the U.S. through Puerto Rico often involves taking a boat, or *yola*, across the Mona Passage, which is known for boat accidents and shark attacks. The Puerto Rican journey is the theme of a merengue by Wilfredo Vargas:

Puerto Rico queda cerca
pero móntate en avion
y si consigues la visa,
no hay problema en Inmigración.

Pero no te vayas en yola,
no te llenes de ilusioniones
porque en el Canal de la Mona
te comen los tiburones.

Puerto Rico is nearby
but board an airplane
and if you get your visa,
then there's no problem with
Immigration.

but don't go by yola,
don't be filled with illusions
because in the Mona Canal
the sharks will eat you.

Besides the difficult journey involved in reaching the destination, there is the challenge of living in a foreign country, a less dramatic but nevertheless difficult ordeal, especially in the beginning. This challenge is another common theme in *merengues*, such as in this 1994 song by *La Banda Loca*, recorded and distributed by Rico Records in New York City.

'Nueva York no es como antes'
Todo el mundo quiere llegar a Nueva York

para realizar sus sueños de vivir mucho mejor.
Sabemos que la ilusión
Cabe cualquier equipaje.
Todo aquel que encuentre el modo
decide emprender el viaje.

Y aquí en un principio todo,
resultas ser muy bonito
Con muchas invitaciones,
uno que otro regalito

En un par de semanas

'New York is not like it used to be'
Everyone wants to come to New
York

to realize dreams of living better.
We know that a dream
fits in any suitcase.
All who find a way
decide to begin the trip.

And here in the beginning
all results are good,
with many invitations,
one little gift like the other.

In a couple of weeks

llegar el fin del protocolo
y desde a llenar delante
hay que bandeársela solo.

the protocol ends
and from then on
they have to move to and fro alone.

Así quien llegó creyendo
en un reino de un abundancia
a cinco a de ver existe
igual lejana distancia.

The ones who arrived believing
in a kingdom of abundance
immediately realize
they are far from it.

This song effectively communicates how the high expectations and dreams of the migrant, which included ‘believing in a kingdom of abundance’, are dashed after the initial welcome daze of the first two weeks. A migrant lucky enough to have used networks for initial support must eventually try to make it on his or her own and even be able to contribute to that support network for the next Dominican that makes the long journey to the United States.

Even with well-developed migrant networks, the process of moving and adjustment can be very difficult. This process is documented in the widely popular merengue hit by Juan Luis Guerra entitled ‘Visa for a Dream,’ his lyrics suggest the difficulties of even getting to the United States in the first place:

Eran las cinco en la mañana.
Un seminarista, un obrera,
Con mil papeles de solvencia,
Que no les dan pa’ ser sinceros.

It was five o’clock in the morning.
A seminarian, a laborer,
with a thousand documents of
solvency,
that do not make them honest.

Eran las siete en la mañana.
Uno por uno en el matadero,
Pues cada uno tiene su precio,
Buscando una visa por un sueño,

It was seven o’clock in the morning.
Lined up at the slaughterhouse,
each one has his price,
looking for a visa for a dream.

El sol quemándoles las entrañas,
Un formulario de consuelo,
Con una foto dos por cuatro,
Que se derrite en el silencio.

The sun burning their insides,
an application form of consolation,
with a two-by-four inch photo,
that melts away in silence.

Eran las nueve en la mañana,
Santo Domingo, ocho de enero.
Con la paciencia que se acaba,
Pues no hay visa para un sueño.

It was nine in the morning
Santo Domingo, January 8th .
with patience that was ending,
as there are no visas for a dream.

Buscando un visa de cemento y cal
¿Y en el asfalto, quién me va a
encontrar?

Seeking a visa of cement and limestone
And in the concrete jungle, who will I
meet?

Buscando visa, la razón de ser,
Buscando visa para no volver.
¡La necesidad, que rabia me dá
¿Golpe de poder, que más
puedo hacer?

Seeking a visa; a reason to be,
Seeking a visa; never to return.
Necessity, how it enrages me!
A powerful blow, what else can I do?

Para naufragar, carne de la mar,
La razón de ser; para no volver.

To be shipwrecked, food for the sea
A reason to be; never to return;

(Guerra 1995)

Feeling he has no choice but to move away, the man in Guerra's song has no illusions about what he will find once he gets there. The trying process of acquiring a visa will only introduce him to more hard work, most likely manual labour, as there are not many options for work for those who have limited English skills or lack legal work documents. As musician Bonny Cepeda mentions in his merengue entitled *Dominican York*:

En la bodega, en la factoria
en la esquina, no hay nada.

In the store, in the factory
on the corner, there is no work.

Yo soy un equilibrista por las calles

I am a tight-rope walker through the
streets.

Sandy Reyes has an equally abysmal outlook on the New York experience that reflects Dominican concerns about crime as well as poor work conditions:

Aquí la vida no vale
una guayaba podrida
Si un tigre no te mate
te mata la factoría.

Here life is not worth
a rotten guava
If a hoodlum doesn't kill you
the factory will.

These types of songs may even overemphasise the hardship and terrible conditions; Georges found that while Piñeros residents in New York had no illusions about what they might encounter once abroad, they expressed the opinion that it was not as bad as they thought it would be (1990: 226). Their views, as well as the messages found in merengues that emphasize material wealth/success and misfortune/danger, show that messages often conflict and not all accounts are accurate. This is evident not just in song material but also in the circulation among migrant populations abroad of rumours and misinformation concerning immigration procedures and legal technicalities (Singer & Gilbertson 1998). Whether the narratives presented in merengues are accurate or not, these songs certainly contribute to an ethos of hardship and suffering that can potentially inform Dominican perspectives on migration at home.

Nostalgia, Home and Belonging

In addition to expressing the benefits and hardships of migration, merengues use 'home' as a common theme. Home is presented in merengues as a preferred and utopic locale in contrast to the difficult life in the new society. Songs express nostalgia for home and family, unbreakable ties to the *tierra* of the Dominican Republic, and the general beauty of the land, people and culture. This style of music resembles the Latin American and

Spanish *costumbrista* style in literature and music that celebrates homeland by depicting it as a land of idyllic scenery and beautiful people. Songs emphasise the desire of the singer to reconnect with family members and return, even if only briefly, to the homeland. *La Banda Loca's* merengue 'Quiero estar con mi familia' expresses these sentiments:

Quiero estar con mi familia
y no puedo en este instante.
Ellos son parte de mi
aunque me encuentro distante.

I want to be with my family
and I cannot at this moment.
They are part of me
although I am far away.

Cuando uno se siente así
el teléfono no basta.
No es suficiente una carta;
quisiera volver a casa.

When one feels like this,
the telephone is not enough.
A letter is insufficient;
I want to go back home.

Cuanto diera por estar ,
reunido con los míos.
Pero no puedo salir
de aquí donde estoy metido.

How much would I give to be there,
reunited with my family.
But I cannot get out
of this place where I am stuck..

The songwriter, having spent all of his money to move so far away, is now stranded, lonely, and homesick. His song appeals to all Dominicans who have been in the same situation. Other songs that have nostalgic appeal include Bonny Cepeda's 'Sali a Papa y Mama' (I left Father and Mother) and 'Despierta America' (Goodbye America), in which Cepeda describes leaving his homeland in the first song, then returning in the second one. Milly Quezada's 'Querido Emigrante' appeals to any feelings of nostalgia that a migrant might have towards 'home', and she emphasises an identification with the *tierra* of birth. It delivers the message that the migrant will always be accepted back home because she was born there.

Audience and Locality

References to the homeland make it clear that this music is addressing a specific audience: Dominicans at home and abroad. Despite the international popularity and global reach of Dominican *merengue* (in terms of other Latin American audiences, production and distribution), the music has a local appeal intended for a specific audience of Dominican people who comprise a population of migrants (or people affected in some way by migration). Here, 'local' is associated with place and with intimate knowledge of social practices that originate in a specific geographic location. The word 'local' is used as a contrast to the cosmopolitan character associated with people engaged in frequent international travel, although it must be acknowledged that theories of 'multi-locality' incorporate notions of 'locale' into transnational modes of thought, an idea that will be expanded on later (Rapport & Dawson 1998, Goldring 1998).

When discussing the 'local' aspects of music, 'local' is referred to not just as an opposition to global or world (as indicated above), but also as a non-dichotomous concept that includes various levels of meaning. Local refers to shared understandings: consider a 'local' dialect, 'local' recipes, or the 'local' traditions of a community. 'Local' may indicate closed meaning systems where one's understanding of what constitutes 'local' is dependent on insider status. Exclusion, then, is often a factor in the creation of 'locality', and increasingly 'locality' in music is tied up with factors of exclusion of outsiders through the choice of employing certain knowledge systems.

Locality is a graded and relative term; 'local' meanings correspond with categories like community, region, nation state, continent (geographically oriented words that take on new meanings in a constantly moving migrant population), starting from the smallest (typically face-to-face) and most exclusive meaning system of local knowledge and gradually expanding in the size and scope of social meaning distribution. This understanding of 'locality' containing various levels of meaning is evident in musical audiences for merengue. From the standpoint of language, the use of Spanish immediately excludes English-speaking North America, but includes the 'locale' of the entire continent of Latin America. Becoming more specific, the use of Dominican slang excludes audiences other than Dominicans.

George Lewis calls local musics ‘symbolic anchors in regions, as signs of community, belonging, and a shared past’ (Mitchell 1996: 89). Yet the element of ‘locality’ has become more than a meaningful reminder of the past; it is now a marketable type of music in the world music industry, where the local issues of perceived ‘exotic’ societies are featured and made internationally known through music. Beginning in the 1980s with the establishment of world music companies, certain ‘national’ characteristics or identifiable symbols of culture were superimposed over a ‘western’-style bass beat (Mitchell 1996). Supporting the promotion of local issues, famous North American pop stars allied themselves with various causes of the third world. For example, Mickey Hart from the California band ‘Grateful Dead’ took on a number of ‘rainforest projects’ in which a portion of music proceeds was donated to various Amazonian communities.

Though merengue is a ‘world’ music in the sense that it is internationally known as well as a music with a large amount of locally Dominican appeal, it has not been appropriated by the world music industry to the extent that Latin American salsa music has (Mitchell 1996). Although the merengue analysed here is created in several different countries, it involves Dominican musicians, producers, mixers and distributors, and is marketed not for world music audiences in North America but for Dominicans and other Latin Americans. In Dominican merengue, locality is expressed in overt and subtle ways that include lyrical narration but are not restricted to it. Locality is expressed through several different characteristics of the music: language, references to specific geographical locales, and the use of certain Dominican instruments.

The use of Spanish is a strategic choice that excludes potential audiences in North America (the majority of whom do not speak Spanish), especially when singers are bilingual and most lyrics are not translated into English. Unlike Latino artists Ricky Martin and Cristina Aguilera who have received unprecedented fame by singing in English, many Dominican artists such as Milly Quezada, Bonny Cepeda, Juan Luis Guerra, and Oro Solido write music with Spanish lyrics. Certainly Dominican merengueros want to sell as many albums as possible and do not discriminate between buyers, but their continued use of Spanish indicates a strong identification with the

Spanish language and Spanish-speaking audiences. A move to English would alienate the bulk of their audience in Latin America.

Merengues specialise even more in their language by using Dominican slang, which further establishes the intended audience as Dominican. Slang is used in songs about migration, such as the very Dominican term for migrants: ‘Dominican York’. Sandy Reyes refers to *un tigere*, a Dominican term that has a variety of meanings. Other slang uses include *yola*, the Dominican term for a type of boat. The use of colloquial words imparting a sense of informality is noted in other ethnomusicological analyses of Dominican music (Duany 1994: 78).

Dominican merengue also emphasises Dominican ‘locality’ in a more concrete way through references to geographical location. Specific place names are common in lyrics, recalling locations meaningful to Dominicans, such as Santo Domingo, the capital city of the Dominican Republic, ‘Quisqueya’, the indigenous term for the land that is now the Dominican Republic, and ‘Washington Heights’, a borough of New York City and site of the largest Dominican community. Bands take their names from these locales and therefore base their identity on an aspect of their displacement: The New York Band, La Gran Manzana, Milly y los Vecinos (Quezada named her band Los Vecinos, or ‘neighbours’, to emphasise her tight-knit migrant community).

Even the Dominican slang word for a migrant in New York, ‘Dominican York’, combines two geographical locales to represent identity. The term ‘Dominican York’ was coined in a merengue by Bonny Cepeda and is now used in everyday speech, serving the purpose of connecting the Dominican migrant to the specific geographical locale of New York City. Through repetitive playing in popular music, song lyrics enforced this term to the point that it has now become a part of migrant discourses:

Llegó el dominican york.

A Dominican York arrived.

Cual es tu mente?

What do you understand?

Entré a una tienda en Nueva York
porque no hablaba nada de español.

I entered a store in New York
because I didn’t speak any Spanish.

Compré una camisa, pagué cien pesos.	I bought a shirt, I paid 100 bucks.
Cuando iba salir, me agarraron preso.	When I went to leave, they kept me prisoner.
Llegó un dominican york que fue mi salvación.	A Dominican York arrived who was my salvation.
Llegó un dominican york que hablaba. inglès	A Dominican York arrived who could speak English.
Le pedí que le explicara que yo pagué: ‘¡Presento mi loco, él te pagó!’	I asked him to explain that I paid: ‘Listen, crazy, he paid you!’
‘¡Suelta al dominicano, él te pagó!’	‘Let the Dominican go, he paid you!’

‘Dominican York’ has taken on both positive and negative connotations over the past four decades to Dominicans at home, but in the song, ‘El Dominican York’ by Bonny Cepeda, the ‘Dominican York’ who has learned English is portrayed as a saviour to the newly arrived ‘Dominican’ who cannot communicate at all. In this song, the migrant has just moved to New York and doesn’t speak English. He gets ripped off in a store and is then accused of shoplifting. Miraculously, a ‘Dominican York,’ street savvy and bilingual, happens to arrive on the scene to explain to the store clerk that the ‘Dominican’ paid.

In the literature of Dominican writers we find references to geographic locales that are enforced through music. The short stories of Dominican writer Junot Díaz, though fictive, are set in real places in the Dominican Republic and Washington Heights. He even refers to specific streets, restaurants, and stores in Washington Heights neighbourhoods, associating these locales with Dominican music in an attempt to portray the contradictions and hardships of migration and growing up with a Dominican background in the United States.

More overt emphases on place and geographic locality in Dominican merengue music; namely, how the notion of ‘land’ is an element of identity and belonging to the home country. Not only does music label migrants with geographical labels like ‘Dominican York’, place them in temporally specific locations such as ‘Santo Domingo, 9am’, and refer to a variety of ‘Dominican’ transnational locales, the notion of

‘homeland’ (*patria, tierra*) portrayed in music presents geographic locale as an inextricable part of the migrant. We have already seen how the notion of homeland is used to evoke feelings of nostalgia in several previous examples. *Merengueros* sing of ‘Mi Tierra’ as an integral part of a person born in the Dominican Republic, crossing class divisions and remaining intact when the migrant is thousands of miles away. Quezada’s ‘Querido Emigrante’ mentions the importance of *tierra* in the line, ‘the land that saw your birth loves you equally’, and ‘come back to the land where you were born’.

‘Mi Tierra’ by *Pochy y su Cocoband* echoes sentiments of being attached to a homeland in the following merengue:

Amo esta tierra, la tierra donde yo nací.	I love this land, the land where I was born.
La quiero y la llevo muy dentro de mí.	I love it and carry it deep inside of me.
Yo vengo de muy a dentro del corazón de mi tierra, y mi tierra es donde nacen todos las cosas mas bellas.	I come from deep within the heart of my land, and my country is where all of the most beautiful things come from. (1992)

Geographic Locale

Inherent in music is its ability to place people in a specific geographical location:

In *The Place of Music*, Leyshon et al. note that

different spatialities are suggested as being formative of the sounding and resounding of music. Such a richer sense of geography highlights the spatiality of music, and the mutually generative relations of music and place. To consider the place of music is not to reduce music to its location, to ground it down into some

geographical baseline, but to allow a purchase on the rich aesthetic, cultural, economic, and political geographies of musical language (1998: 4).

In considering the non-lyrical, more subtle associations of music and locale, we find that emotional qualities in music take the listener back to the context in which the music and the migrant 'belong', in a sense; to the physical place in which the person first experienced the music. In using the word 'belong' we are not speaking of music as something primordial or containing 'pure' elements that originated in and can be linked to one geographical place. Contemporary music, as ethnomusicologists increasingly discover, can no longer be discussed in terms of its authenticity, as folklorists once did in their attempts to discover the 'essence' of nations in traditional folk music. As a social practice, music cannot exist in a vacuum of non-change or outside influence. On the contrary, the use of 'belonging' here refers to the type of images presented by music concerned with a particular place in which audiences no longer live permanently. To Dominicans, merengue 'belongs' to the Dominican Republic as its national music, and this idea is reinforced by music that expresses itself through Dominican language vocabulary and Dominican subject matter. Merengues emphasise that their Dominican audiences also 'belong' to the Republic.

Merengue and Dominican Identity

For a music that uses exclusive local knowledge to create a common Dominican identity in audiences *outside* a homeland, it may be helpful to look at other discourses on identity within the Dominican Republic. Dominican ethnicity is no straightforward matter to begin with, differing within and without its national context. 'Dominican culture . . . had at least two different expressions since the nineteenth century: the white orientation of the upper class and the predominately mulatto identity of the lower class' (Alcantara Almánzar 1990). While a white/black dichotomy historically separated Africans from Spaniards, after centuries of mixing, those categories have become blurred. Dominicans with mixed backgrounds of predominately West African, Indigenous Taino and Spanish

origin now make up seventy-five percent of the population. Conflict with Haiti, largely African in its make-up, has been instrumental in shaping contemporary Dominican ethnicity into very anti-African terms, and Haitians have faced persecution and discrimination in the Dominican Republic for two hundred years.

With its practice of Catholicism and use of the Spanish language, mainstream cultural practices, especially in the Northern region of Cibao, are associated with Spain. Western areas of the Dominican Republic with more Haitian people have very different cultural practices that include the voodoo-related *santería* religion and *gaga* music. Sørensen advocates that the concept of ‘creole’ be used in reference to the marginalised areas of the Republic, which differ significantly from a ‘mainstream’ national culture, which has attempted to inflict a singular Hispanicised national identity upon a diverse people (1997b: 299). In the context of migration, the popularity of a music that was nationalised by a blatantly racist dictator furthered these notions of Hispanic identity over African. Even though the music may not have necessarily been overt in its promotion of Hispanic identity, its history carried these connotations.

Now migrating Dominicans must deal with social contexts outside of the Republic, where dialogues of identity are more complex than those with an African/Hispanic undercurrent. Dominicans who settle in international cities like New York find themselves in a society where they may be considered ‘black’, or where they may be lumped together in a ‘Latino’ or ‘Hispanic’ category with all other Latin Americans. The black/white dichotomy takes on a different meaning in the United States, and the notion of ‘class’ is subverted when migrants go from the middle class in the Dominican Republic to the lower class in the United States. A study of Dominican children in a Rhode Island high school found that although they are seen in U.S. society as ‘black’ (by the ‘one-drop’ rule), they think of their own ‘race’ in terms of the ethno-linguistic identity of Dominican, Spanish, or Hispanic (Bailey 2001, Goldring 1998). Migrants may also identify with the term ‘Dominican York’, uniting a community abroad. But, as mentioned earlier, as this label has also taken on negative connotations among Dominicans at home to mean ‘snobby’, ‘immoral’, and ‘drugs and crime’, migrants may be alienated even from their own people.

Portrayal of Identity in Merengue

Identity portrayed in merengues is oriented differently from national discourses that emphasise racial and cultural elements of 'Dominican' identity, focusing instead on 'land' as a key component of being 'Dominican'. Merengues seem to gloss the nuances of identity for migrants, which in an ambiguous transnational situation must be difficult to negotiate for many. While migrants must root themselves in certain places out of necessity, ambiguities in identity may still arise from a variety of factors including dual citizenships, multiple 'homes', and unclear and even undocumented residential status. Even though the Dominican national identity was formed on notions of ethnicity, not origins of territoriality as in the case of Mexican immigrants, for example (Guarnizo 1992: 32), the lack of a definitive home and ensuing senses of uprootedness must create some ambiguity over where migrants feel they belong or what group they belong to. In Quezada's 'Querido Emigrante', however, she acknowledges merely that 'in a foreign land you are different from the rest,' presenting a very simplistic and vague notion of difference that results from being simply 'Dominican' outside the Republic.

Merengues that appeal to nostalgia also seem to gloss over the particulars of life back home. Quezada further entreats the listener to come back to the land that 'loves you equally' whether 'rich or poor', forgetting that 'home' is a very stratified class society, where citizens with Haitian backgrounds are deported and mistreated on sugar plantationsⁱ and politicians spend billions on beautification projects amongst extreme poverty. Merengues overlook the unattractive aspects of homeland by repeatedly emphasising its beauty and good people, and we find few reminders of why the migrant left in the first place. In searching for explanations for these themes of homeland praise, we might consider that the lyrics may not always be taken literally; in the tradition of Dominican *costumbrista* music and literature from which many contemporary merengue artists take inspiration, lyrics that praise the nation are largely formulaic, a necessary inclusion in that particular art genre. We must also consider that merengue is no longer a music for the 'poor' as it once was, and that migrants are not poor *cocolos* who experience the majority of social injustices in the Dominican Republic (Duany 1994: 78).

Merengues that emphasise *tierra* or *patria* often link it Dominicans by virtue of their being born in the Republic. This idea of ‘birthright’ is the uniting factor for Quezada and so many other merengue musicians, who, as we have just seen, emphasize the primordial quality of Dominican *tierra* in a person. Songs present this component as almost a physical part of being, a trait of being ‘Dominican’. Rather than articulate this situation of multi-territoriality, like the migrant music of many other Latin American societies, merengues present a dialogue that *de-emphasises* any ambiguity in identity with messages such as ‘your homeland will wait’, the soil of the Dominican Republic will always be in your blood, and your family is waiting for you with high hopes . . .’. Merengues offer the answers to problems of identity by straightforwardly declaring the importance of land and birthplace.

Analyses

Towards a more critical use of ‘transnationalism’

The previous sections have analysed merengue music and Dominican migration in their historical and contemporary social contexts in order to establish that Dominican migrants and their families live highly transnational lives in terms of travel, political, economic, and entrepreneurial activities. These transnational activities involve processes that have influenced and distributed merengue across many countries, even though textual analyses revealed how the music has a strong orientation towards Dominican audiences with its themes of homeland, belonging, and specific Dominican locales, all characteristics that promote the maintenance of ties to the Dominican Republic.

The findings in the texts present a contrast to contemporary theories of transnationalism which describe the nation state and formations of migrant identity as ‘deterritorialised’, or that perceive Dominican migration as a ‘field of social interactions and exchanges that transcend political and geographical boundaries of one nation.’ Such theories advocate that we conceptualise social spaces in terms *other than* geographic locations in the nation-state, while discourses that focus on the perceived embeddedness of one geographical space in one social space are labelled by some scholars as essentialist

and absolutist (Pries 2001: 23). Additionally, migrant perceptions of 'home' are being described as increasingly non-geographical, complex and multi-dimensional, manifested instead in social practices and social imagination. Appadurai has suggested that 'the world consists of deterritorialised ethnoscapas whose culturally constructed places of identification often will not coincide with their actual physical locations' (in Fog Olwig & Hastrup 1997: 7). Continuing with this idea, Rapport and Dawson comment, 'Certainly in terms of individual awareness, even if not universal practice, movement has become fundamental to modern identity, and an experience of non-place (beyond 'territory' and 'society') an essential component of everyday existence' (1998: 6).

The portrayal of the migrant experience in merengue music contrasts with these notions of deterritoriality that imply that migrants are no longer rooted, mentally or physically, in any geographical place. Despite the fact that merengue is consumed, created and performed by transnational migrants, its narratives are very *territorialised* and sensitive to a particular geographical locale, calling upon loyalty to the *patria* throughout the songs. Geographic place still remains a dominant metaphor for culture and is tied to the portrayal of a very essentialisedⁱⁱ migrant identity. Even merengues about migrant destinations such as New York are grounded in local detail that includes description of Dominican neighbourhoods and specific geographical terrain crossed during the journey.

In a discussion of 'locality' in the transnational social sphere, Guarnizo and Smith (1998) question the notion of 'deterritorialised' because it overlooks the fact that migrants do form roots and engage in the social relations of the places they move to. In the Dominican case, migrants rely on the relationships they make in their various 'homes' to make the difficult task of moving easier, which is why social networks are so crucial to migrant communities. Musicians have produced particular understandings of places until they have become a part of mainstream Dominican culture, such as the now commonplace word, 'Dominican York'. These narratives of place, so widespread in merengue, illustrate the engagement of migrant musicians and their transnational 'homes' (yet always remind the listener that the real 'home' is in the Dominican Republic), while at the same time they promote a continuing identification with the Dominican Republic that inevitably informs their perception of the migrant destination.

The orientation towards ‘local’ music among migrating populations is found elsewhere. The research of anthropologist Bruno Riccio with Senegalese immigrants in Italy demonstrates the persistence of conventional conceptions of home in formations of migrant identity: ‘. . . many of these migrants are firmly embedded with transnational social fields, and indeed benefit from transnational networks, yet have not reappraised their definition of home’ (2002). Commenting on Riccio’s findings, Al-Ali and Khoser observe that collective identity in Senegalese migrant communities ‘. . . draws strongly on symbols of home’ (2002: 10).

Another example is found in communities of Arab migrants in Detroit who have a particularly strong attachment to homelands in Lebanon, Palestine, Yemen, and Iraq. The music of Arabs in Detroit uses lyrics to appeal to nostalgia and ethnicity, creating an Arab-American identity for its consumers (Abraham & Shyrock 2000: 486). ‘If Arab Detroit tells us anything about local experience in a deterritorialised world, it is that the social imagination, even in a global age, cannot remain deterritorialised for long. Using a language (Arabic) that is strongly associated with another place, Arab immigrants try to attach themselves to Detroit by attaching Detroit to an original, ancestral homeland’ (2000: 58). As with Dominican music, the use of the native language excludes mainstream society in the receiving country and unites the newcomer group.

Expressive cultural products other than music, such as objects and images, can also serve as markers of place, as Ruba Salih has shown in her research with Moroccan women living in migrant communities in Italy. She explains how women bring back crafts and pottery sold in tourist shops in Morocco, and how these items come to represent authentic Moroccan culture for the Italian acquaintances they are given to. While home is a complex concept of ‘double belonging’ for Moroccan women, ‘. . . “home” in Italy is also constructed through objects that signal the Moroccan and Muslim belonging’ (2002: 65). The connection of a craft item to the place of its origin becomes meaningful in the transnational context. ‘While keeping a simultaneous relationship with their country of origin, women paradoxically also increase their need for territorialisation and secure identities’ (2000: 65).

Challenges to the nation state

Along with discourses on the deterritorialisation of transnational populations, social scientists have proposed that transnationalism is challenging the ability of nation states to define legal and cultural identities (Appadurai 1991, Kearney 1991). 'Transnationalism from below' theories identify the increasing power and scope of informal social networks, which compete with state-sanctioned multi-national companies who dominate the world economy 'from above'. Other scholars have identified transnationalism as having ' . . . to do with forms of identity which are not constrained by national boundaries' (Kearney 1991: 55).

While the once taken-for-granted autonomy of the nation-state is being challenged more and more by 'ethnic' groups around the globe, we should not overlook the current nation-building efforts of nation states with large emigration rates. The Dominican nation state and its official national music are strongly involved in the promotion of 'Dominican' identity for very strategic reasons: a music with a rhetoric of national praise has great value to a nation whose economic survival is largely dependent on migrant remittances. As the national music of the Dominican Republic with an enforced thirty-year legacy of praise for the Dominican government, merengue is the 'official' musical symbol of 'Dominican-ness' for Dominicans and outsiders. This historical connection of merengue to the Dominican nation is enforced in many ways today: when merengues are played in Dominican national parades in New York and Boston, when CD compilations of Latin American music feature merengue as the 'national music of the Dominican Republic', and when advertisements in New York play merengue tunes to promote nationally popular products like Dominican rum.

As illustrated earlier, some transnational theories underestimate the role of the nation state in migrant life or assert that the concept of the nation is disintegrating. A look at Dominican merengue, on the other hand, makes it clear that national discourses should not be dismissed, as they are firmly embedded in music, consumed by Dominicans at home and abroad, and celebrated in nationalistic displays by thousands of migrants. The presence of national ideals in the lives of dispersed peoples is amplified by the fact that migrants are subject to the hegemonies of not one but two different nation

states. Basch et al. (1994) found in studies of Caribbean migrants that a continued connection to the home country, nurtured by the nation state, is a migrant strategy of resistance against the dominant social pressures of the new society.

Abraham and Shyrock's (2000) study of Arabs in Detroit grappled with the same issues of the persistence of place and nation in the transnational migrating context. They challenge claims that the nation state is disappearing in importance, finding that people are still creating identities according to national definitions, and that too much focus on the 'transnational' ignores the real and ongoing creations of national identity, especially as it is reproduced through popular culture (2000: 56). Despite counter-hegemonic discourses in media that openly defy state powersⁱⁱⁱ (or, as we saw earlier, that defy the hegemony of the receiving nation state by identifying with the home nation state) to resist as well as rely on underground or highly informal networks of distribution, Shyrock entreats us not to forget that commercial goods are originally from certain places, that mass media and international markets are 'fragile, highly complex forms of organization that connect places', that 'media and markets are variously secured by, dependent on, and answerable to the power of states, which govern places', and 'that contemporary states are nationalist in design' (2000: 33).

Identifications

The rhetoric of nationalism attempts to unite a diversity of people into one category, epitomised by the merengue lyrics we have analysed that offer a pan-Dominican identity to all people with the *tierra* of the homeland in their blood. Such a portrayal ignores class, racial, and gendered inequalities that also inform identity, while glossing over the domestic problems that precipitated migration in the first place. While portrayals of identity in merengue diverge from colonialist *racial* classifications that are still very persistent in the Dominican Republic, the promotion of birthplace as a marker of identity is still highly essentialist. The essentialisation of identity as a nation-building strategy is exemplified in the work of Basch et al. in *Nations Unbound*: 'All nationalist formations

derivative of European nation-building, including constructions of the deterritorialized nation-state, homogenize differences of class, gender, region and history' (1994: 279).

Views found in merengue that enforce the hegemony of the Dominican nation state are certainly endorsed by the migrant musicians who compose the music, and to some extent by the audiences who buy their CDs, a fact apparent from record sales. But beyond that, we are limited in our conclusions about interpretations, and must assume that based on the diversity of migrant backgrounds, the understanding of and identification with Dominican music (not just merengue) is widely varied among migrant groups and Dominicans at home. On some level, audiences may identify with merengue, but on the other, they may consume it simply because it is something familiar for a homesick person in a foreign place.

In his book, *Merengue: Dominican Music and Dominican Identity*, Paul Austerlitz traces the development of merengue from its nineteenth century origins in the Dominican Republic to its contemporary international presence, arguing that 'In addition to affirming Dominican identity for those in the diaspora, merengue's stylistic pastiche came to embody a transnational identity for all Dominicans' (1997: 130). The present study questions this analysis of Dominican merengue both as transnational as well as embodying the same meaning for all Dominicans. An anthropological approach emphasizes the importance of the multiple perspectives and non-dominant discourses. Although merengue is the 'national' music and the 'official' symbol of Dominican identity, the diversity of migrant groups guarantees that its consumption is extremely varied. The messages promoted may not be meaningful for everyone, and in some places merengue may not even be available to Dominicans.

Merengue is not a significant symbol of 'Dominicanness' for all Dominicans; for example, Dominicans in Spain who come from regions where people listen primarily to bachata continue listening to it abroad (Sørensen forthcoming). As with musical audiences, migrant populations are composed of a variety of people from many different regions, classes, and with varying gender composition, all of which are crucial to a more nuanced understanding of migration practices and listening preferences.

In fact, ethnographic data presents complexities of migrant life absent from merengue. Identification with different genres of Dominican music, such as bachata,

gaga, or even North American musics must be considered, even though merengue's long-term promotion and position as the most mainstream music in the Dominican Republic has prevented the circulation of musical counter narratives in the media. While the penetration of Dominican nationalism in migrant cultural products very evident, ethnographic studies in Dominican York communities show that perceptions of identity can vary significantly according to many factors, challenging strong nationalist identifications in Dominican migrant groups. Sørensen finds that Dominican migrant women challenge traditional views presented in nationalistic discourses. 'The current making of transnational communities affects women and men differently and enhances particular images of masculinity and femininity that present a challenge to states: to the efficiency of state boundaries (in promoting particular national identities) . . .' (1998: 264).

The popularity of Milly Quezada's music among female migrant audiences, which challenges traditional roles of women in Dominican mainstream society (although endorses other traditional Dominican perspectives) provides evidence that migrants do not always identify with nationalistic loyalty imposed on them through media. Generational differences also influence identification with a 'homeland'; the construction of new merengue/rap hybrid musics by urban youth of migrant families (such as *ritmos callejeros* and *merenhouse* music introduced earlier in the paper) indicates a changing identification with traditional perceptions of 'Dominican'. Ethnographic accounts and narrative literature acknowledge a diversity of migrant perspectives not always captured in musical narratives (Sørensen forthcoming, Levitt 1998, Díaz 2000, Alvaréz 1997).

Contributing Factors

Why are the themes of specific geographic localities or territorialities and of Dominican membership and loyalty to homeland so common in merengue music written by migrants, when their lives are uprooted in constant transnational migration practices? ^{iv} Having established generally that place is an important reference point for the construction of 'culture' within a transnational social space and that locality can be a persistent reference

point of identification, we now look for more specific factors that may both contribute to and sustain migrant constructions of Dominican ‘culture’ through merengue.

This contrast is not limited to only one aspect of the music; in the process of analysing merengue songs, we have discovered several other related contrasts between the musical perception of the migrant experience and the realities of Dominicans as migrants and as citizens living inside the Dominican Republic. Dominican merengue is spread around the world and listened to by international audiences, despite the fact that it is oriented to Dominican audiences, while Dominicans are also dispersed throughout North and South America but consume a music that largely focuses on one place. As alternative, non-traditional identifications do exist among Dominican migrants, why are they not more frequently expressed to any significant extent in this music? Merengue audiences include those whose hardships at home have forced them to migrate, while the music they consume expresses the beauty and goodness of the place left. Some songs present migrant life as perilous and disastrous, while other songs emphasize abundance and material wealth of the United States. Finally, contemporary merengue emphasises that Dominican membership is dependent on birthplace, rather than reinforcing national discourses that promote very racialised identity. Instead of making definitive conclusions about the existence of these contrasts, these final analyses set a range of factors contributing to merengue and its orientation towards the previously discussed themes. Indeed, many factors related to the Dominican transnational situation make place an important metaphor for culture, while the historical factors introduced in earlier chapters are also very significant.

We have already discussed the embeddedness of nationalistic discourses in merengue music, by historical association and by the promotion of essentialised Dominican identity. Merengue is, without a doubt, a genre of national praise. Unsurprisingly, a government dependent on the income of its displaced peoples continues to support a music that evokes the traditions, values, and most importantly, the locales within a nation. After all, the ‘country’ (*país*) is formed on the idea of place, as a bordered, specific geographical entity composed of regions, cities, and towns—all celebrated in contemporary merengues: ‘Paradoxically, the expansion of transnational practices from above and from below has resulted in outbursts of entrenched, essentialist

nationalism in both ‘sending’ and ‘receiving’ countries. . . States of origin, on the other hand, are re-essentialising their national identity and extending it to their nationals abroad as a way to maintain their loyalty and flow of resources “back home” ’ (Guarnizo and Smith 1998: 11).

Rather than declare conclusively that there continues to be an overt nationalist agenda to promote Dominican identity in merengue, we can call attention to some crucial links in a production chain analysis of merengue. The creation and broadcasting of music (and hence enforcement of popularity) was initially connected to funding from Trujillo, who established still-existing national musical academies, national merengue orchestras, and merengue concert venues. Elite support officially continued through the *payola* system in the 1970s, in which air time for merengue was bought by record company elites with transnational business ties in New York and throughout the United States. Today, Dominican radio stations (the largest of which is the government station) broadcast a specific type of music almost exclusively (with the exception of the growing popularity of bachata). Dominican government-sponsored parades in Boston and New York continue to play merengue music.

As we have already discussed, national interests cannot be the only or even the main explanation for merengue’s orientation; the phenomenon is more complex, as government and corporate elites are not the only parties with a vested interest in maintaining a strong connection with migrants. Departing from a discussion of political agendas to a level of much smaller scale, the families and relatives of migrants living in the Dominican Republic, who make up a large audience for merengue, are dependent on remittances. Times can be difficult for migrant families; Dominican fiction is full of stories of the husband who never returned, who eventually stopped sending home money and forgot his Dominican family (Alvarez 1991, Díaz 1997). Merengues are almost a plea at times: ‘not to forget those who love you dearly’, as Quezada says. Reminders in references to land, memory and happy times are critical for encouraging remittances and keeping fresh the social pressures and feelings of guilt that quickly condemn the ones who forget their ‘roots’. This encouragement may play a large part in merengue’s popularity within the Dominican Republic among non-migrants who nevertheless have family abroad.

There may be other reasons why songwriters constantly refer to Dominican locales as well as present an essentialised version of Dominican identity. In addition to the national agendas that attempt to maintain diasporic links through the support of ‘pro-Dominican’ cultural products, we find that among displaced peoples, essentialisation or ‘reification’ of identity is a common phenomenon, exemplified by Baumann’s study of migrant groups in Southall, England (1996). Migrants are constantly exposed to the dominant culture in which any difference is highlighted, and cultural practices, foods, and music become reified symbols of identity for the migrant community as well as mainstream society. An example of this phenomenon can be found in Salih’s (2002) study of how crafts and pottery come to represent an ‘authentic’ Moroccan culture for Italians and Moroccans. We find another example of the essentialisation of identity in Arab communities in Detroit: ‘Like other American ethnic groups, Arabs in Detroit have come to rely heavily on music, food, and the traditional folk arts to represent their ‘culture’ in American settings’ (Abraham & Shyrock 2000: 29). Symbols and traditions of Arab identity are commodities, able to be bought and sold—not because they have any particular essence or primordial trait.

As we have seen in the case of Dominican merengue, popular songs saturate the market with references to local places, people, activities, and situations that involve the migrant. In this way, they construct a ‘Dominicano’ or ‘Dominican York’ identity for consumers. It is worth noting that on the albums with music about migration, sixty to seventy percent of a typical album contains music about other issues, such as romance, fiestas, drinking, or simply repetitive dance choruses. Songs like ‘Mujeres, comida y ron’ (women, food and rum), ‘Biberón vacío’ (empty bottle), ‘Esta noche beberé’ (Tonight I will drink), ‘Humo y cerveza’ (smoke and beer), and ‘El hombre Latino’ (The Latino Man) that glorify a sense of machismo and drinking are still more widespread than Milly Quezada-style feminist songs. Merengues that present a very simplistic and traditional view of Dominican gender roles further essentialise Dominican identity. The promotion of male pride may appeal to Dominican men in transnational situations where identity is ambiguous and there is a loss of control of income (through exploitation of their labour), sexuality, and power over women.

The essentialisation of identity and emphasis on Dominican locales may also arise from other ambiguities in the transnational situation. Milly Quezada said in an interview, 'Living in the United States is—you don't belong here, and you are not there, so you're kind of in limbo' (Austerlitz 1997: 130). Despite the fact that people engage in their communities in the many places they may live, they may still feel an uncertainty or element of unknown in their situation, whether they are in the liminal stage of becoming a U.S. citizen, simply undocumented and constantly wary of immigration 'busts' by the INS (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service), or unable to really settle on where 'home' is because their family is split between two continents. In migrant communities in places like New York, Boston, and Miami, one can try to emulate life as it was back home, or he/she can try to integrate by participating in mainstream US society. Plans of eventual return can also affect integration and one's feelings regarding what 'home' is. For those attempting to live as closely as possible to traditional 'Dominican' ways, music that defines identity clearly and essentially decreases the ambiguity of the migrant situation.

The essentialising tendencies that we find in merengue also emerge in contexts where there is a perceived need to express a difference. Even before migration was widespread, the Dominican government attempted to homogenise the identities of a very mixed nation by creating the concept of *indio*, itself a very territorialised concept that rooted a population with globally dispersed origins to one island. In this case, *inside* the Dominican Republic, there was a desire to express difference from Haitians, while in the international emigration context, there may be a desire to express difference from North Americans. Itzigsohn et al. (1999: 333) find in their study of Dominican youth in New York that 'Dancing merengue is a defining element in the definition of Dominican identity, which differentiates them from other youth, such as Puerto Ricans and African Americans'.

There is also the consideration that nostalgia for homeland locales sells, especially in a migrant context where items of 'culture' are constantly reified for commercial purposes. While nostalgia is a common element in the lyrics of many types of music because the intrinsic emotional qualities of music evoke memories and places, this quality becomes all the more powerful for the migrant because of her displacement.

Appeals to place of birth in merengue music bridge the large distance between two countries by filling the imagination of the listener with images of home. Lyrics that evoke the idea of family and ties from birth are powerful because they seem so 'natural' a component of Dominican ethnicity. In merengue music, we find that continuous reference to homeland and geographic locale keeps memories fresh and reinforces connections with the 'home'. This is the case with the music in other migrant communities; Armbrust writes, 'the global spread of Arab sounds has been equally (if not more) important in collapsing distance and shaping notions of nation, culture, and identity in Arab Detroit. Music links diaspora to the homeland, synthesizes elements of both and fills the distance in between' (2000: 561).

In the highly ambiguous and transnational lives of Dominican migrants, merengues' consistent references to Dominican locales decrease the conceptual distance between a snowy New York neighbourhood and a hot Puerto Platan barrio. For those Dominicans who have dual citizenships, homes, or operate businesses and support families across national boundaries, listening to the latest merengues reminds them where they are from, where their loyalties should lie, and how they will always be tied to Dominican soil and its people. It is also familiar, a comfort when everything else is so new. Milly Quezada commented on listening to merengue music when she first arrived in New York in the 1960's, 'Merengue was a way of not being so lonely. There wasn't much else that was familiar' (Hanly 1991: 45). Dance that accompanies the music is an enjoyed form of social activity, popular among not just Dominicans but many other Latin Americans. For poorer migrants who cannot afford to return frequently to the Dominican Republic, consuming nostalgic music may be related to the need to be reminded of home.

Applying transnational theories

As we have seen, the orientation of themes in merengue are in part dependent on factors related to the transnational situation, although factors such as historical context also play a significant role in the orientation of the music. These local orientations in migrating groups have been incorporated into a number of transnational theories. Guarnizo and

Smith note that ‘transnationalism, far from erasing the local identifications and meaning systems, actually relies on them to sustain transnational ties’ (1998: 15). The stylistic changes that have taken place in merengue are an example of what Vertovec (1999) describes as ‘transnationalism as a mode of cultural production’, in which processes of ‘syncretisation, creolization, bricolage, cultural translation and hybridity’ in expressive cultural forms are characteristic of transnational populations. These changes in cultural production have only reinforced the music’s national orientation, with new sounds both celebrating old traditions and ‘reconstructing “place” or locality’. Hastrup and Fog Olwig advocate that we ‘ . . . examine the historical and social significance of these “cultural sites” as focal points for people who, in their daily lives, are involved in a complex of relations of global as well as local dimension’ (1997: 11).

Related transnational theories include those of Smith (1998), who argues that a certain ‘transnational locality’ exists in the migrant practices of the Ticuani of Mexico in the United States, which include building hometown associations and community development projects. ‘Increasing numbers of migrants are maintaining and deepening long-term links with their communities of origin and holding identities from these places, *and* the governments and local authorities of their countries of origin are also cultivating these links and identities’ (1998: 200). Goldring also ponders the continued connection to place of origin, finding that the ‘locality of origin provides a unique social and spatial context within transnational communities for making claims to and valorizing social status’ (1998: 167).

These theories show how the local, traditional, and nationalist orientations found in music and other expressive cultural practices are sustained and even manifested by transnational situations taking place in many different migrating populations. Many of the previously described factors that influence merengue’s themes emerge as strategies for grounding an existence that spans two continents. Conversely, one could argue that because of the historical background of merengue as a national music, the commercial appeal of a world music marketed as ‘local’, and the economic interests of the Dominican nation state, merengue and migration could be analysed independently of a transnationalist framework^v. However, the intensity and extensity of transnational practices which pervade political, economic, media, and other social spheres of

Dominican life, as well as ethnographic evidence revealing a diversity of migrant perspectives and interpretations, provides a compelling argument for using transnationalist frameworks in conceptualising the orientations of themes in merengue.

But what of the contradictions presented by using a theoretical framework founded on the breaking down of the bounded categories that transmigrants continue to identify with? These contradictions are discussed by Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc, who identify the paradox of embracing transnationalism as a concept that challenges bounded notions of national identity, race and ethnic group, when transmigrants continue to identify with these same hegemonic categories. 'Underlying this contention stand contradictions between the transnational practices of the migrants and the manner in which all hegemonic constructions simultaneously reflect, distort, and delimit aspects of lived realities'. The contradiction stated, however, is based on the assumption/claim that transnational migration creates multiple identities and 'deterritorialised' realities that challenge traditional concepts of geographical region, nation, race, and ethnic group. Conversely, a use of a transnationalist framework in the descriptive sense (explained earlier) that instead concentrates on the back and forth movement of goods, ideas and people is a more helpful and less contradictory way of understanding Dominican migratory phenomena and its cultural articulations. We can follow the example of Michael Hertzfeld, who states that the current challenge of anthropology is to ' . . . stop treating both the nation-state and essentialism as distant and unreachable enemies, and to understand them instead as integral aspects of social life' (1997: 2). This statement makes the point that essentialist and nationalistic messages, such as the ones found in merengue, must continue to be acknowledged as long as they remain meaningful to social actors, a fact evident by the consumption and creation of nationalist music by Dominican migrants.

Itzigsohn et al. conclude that the practice of listening to merengue by Dominican migrants in New York an example of ' "broad" cultural transnationality', referring to cultural practices that create definitions and boundaries of 'being Dominican', which are complex and informed by both North American perspectives as well as Dominican views (1999: 325). This perspective moves away from transnationalism as an erosive process on national and geographic identifications and instead acknowledges the coexistence of

local/traditional/national *and* multiple/syncretised/hybridised identifications. Transnationalism conceived of in this way concentrates on the complexity of factors that shape migrant values, opinions, tastes, and identifications. As this study has shown, in some cases, transnational migratory practices in the descriptive sense maintain, rather than challenge or break apart local and national orientations.

Conclusions

Thematic orientations in merengue have emerged and been sustained in part due to the migrating situation in a transnational social field, even though the messages in merengue are instead very *national*. Lyrics *re-emphasise* nationalistic essentialisations of Dominican identity, glossing over the complexities of gender, race and citizenship roles in migratory groups. By the strength of the diasporic appeals and other elements in merengues, it is apparent that the local aspect of the music is very immediate and overt, repeated with each broadcast, performance and recorded playing. Even songs that specifically address migration are rooted in Dominican local language, values, and emanate an ethos of suffering and hardship in the receiving society that only reflects positively on the homeland.

The 'local' imagery of homeland and geographical place found in the material and expressive cultural products of migrants is overlooked by many transnational theorists in their haste to deconstruct essentialised notions of 'culture' and 'nation', even though these notions are still a vibrant and prominent component of migrant discourses. In a similar vein, recent theories have emphasised that transnationalism is deterritorialising populations, challenging the ability of the nation state to define legal and cultural identities, and breaking down the ideas that bind social space exclusively to geographical space. This study offers evidence to the contrary by presenting an analysis of a migrating population with a distinctly geographical, localised music.

While the present study challenges some transnationalist theories, it finds others helpful, but only after critically defining the meaning of this often-used term. Using a critical approach to transnationalism that questions its many uses and definitions in the

literature, the paper first draws a distinction between ‘transnational’ as a descriptive term to describe the sustained back-and-forth movement of people, ideas, cultural products, information and money across national borders and ‘transnationalism’ as a theoretical construct in which identities and social practices of migrating populations can be conceived. ‘Transnational’ theories have been both contested and embraced in the course of this paper, illustrating the variety and divergence of ideas under one terminological umbrella and therefore the need to differentiate critically between the meanings of the term.

To express the extent to which Dominicans have been epitomised in the literature as a ‘transnational’ population in the descriptive sense, the study has charted, through secondary literature, the increase of migration over the past forty years following Trujillo’s death up until present, when today thousands of Dominicans continue to travel to the United States through legal and illegal means. Dominican national music has followed a similar journey, distributed throughout the world by migrants and made into an internationally famous genre of music. Establishing the descriptively transnational nature of this globally dispersed population movement made evident the contrast of its very ‘locally Dominican’-oriented music.

In the process of merengue’s migration, certain themes have emerged to give contemporary popular merengue a distinct flavour of Dominican ‘locality’. The study has analysed a variety of merengues by popular Dominican artists that illustrate the following ‘local’ themes: an emphasis on geography, orientation towards a specifically Dominican audience, nostalgia and belonging to a homeland. Music that puts stress on the locales of Dominican places reflects a strong connection to the homeland in the migrants that create the music as well as those who buy it and identify with it.

The major aim of this study was to explain the conspicuous presence of Dominican nationalism and other local themes in merengue that exist despite the (descriptively) transnational realities of its creators and consumers. I conclude that these themes are heavily influenced by factors related to the migratory situation and continue to enforce merengue’s role as a national music. The contrast found in the emergence of locality as a dominant theme in the music of a transnational people is the result of factors related to intense population movement. The study takes into account other factors such

as an entrenched Dominican nationalism in the music as well as other historical factors that endure in the musical structure and thematic orientation of merengue. The influences of foreign music genres, North American rock and roll, and a world music industry that markets 'local' musics are also important.

The Dominican case calls attention to the importance of *non*-transnational meanings in their cultural modes of expression. This finding is supported by a growing corpus of work that identifies 'local', homeland-based orientations as a manifestation of transnational situations. In the Dominican case, these contributing factors include (1) the enduring historical connection of merengue to Dominican national ideals, made possible through the financial support of government and corporate elites, (2) the continued support of Dominicans in the Republic who rely on migrant remittances, and therefore, the maintenance of homeland loyalties promoted through merengue, (3) the reification of identity in migrant situations, (4) the need to decrease ambiguity in identity or be reminded of home for those migrants 'stuck' where they have moved to, and (5) the marketability to migrant consumers of simplistic versions of Dominican identity, including nostalgia and traditional gender roles. These factors are related to the need to 'ground' identifications to geographical places, expressed by Quezada in her merengue, 'Vuelve a tu tierra que te vio nacer' (Come back to your land where you were born).

While the present study does not include data on peoples' interpretations of the music and can therefore say little about merengue and identity through primary resources, it lays the groundwork for such an empirical study, which would profit from looking at how social actors interpret and negotiate the musical perspectives that may contrast with lived realities at home and abroad. Taking into consideration historical and commercial factors that affect music, transnational frameworks used critically (i.e. transnational theories that incorporate the local and geographic orientations of expressive cultural products rather than notions of deterritoriality) may be explored further in an intensive empirical investigation as the next step in an anthropological enquiry into Dominican migration and music. Such an empirical study would also profit from an investigation of other expressive cultural products of Dominican migrants, which include visual art, other musical genres, and literature.

This study has attempted to show how music is highly relevant to the migrant experience, and can therefore be used as an alternative lens for looking at Dominican migration. In a field that often focuses primarily on the economic dimensions of migration, the study of expressive cultural articulations in migration research clarify motivations from an emic point of view, a perspective of paramount importance to an anthropological understanding. Such a focus on artistic expressions also elucidates how certain migrant discourses become created in a stylised genre and are then distributed to millions, potentially informing decisions regarding migration. Similarly, filling the migrant imagination with visions of a utopic homeland that fuel a diasporic mentality (discussed earlier in the paper) may potentially affect integration into the new society, which becomes an important issue when considering that migrants who do not speak English will rarely live above the poverty line in the United States.

This expressive cultural dimension of migration, which incorporates an anthropology of music, consumption, gender, and media, forces the researcher to take a critical look at theoretical structures of analysis in the ever-developing field of transnationalism. Such a critical approach questions whether anthropology and the social sciences are ready to dispose of discourses on nationalism when the *patria* remains a structural reality as well as a significant presence in expatriate imaginations.

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ⁱ In 1991, the Balaguer government, successor to Trujillo, deported over 50,000 Haitian immigrants and their descendants to Haiti, many of which were naturalized Dominican citizens (Torres Saillant 1991).

ⁱⁱ The use of 'essentialised' refers to the belief that a 'culture' has a particular 'essence'; a primordial or natural trait makes a social actor behave in a particular way or have certain beliefs. 'Essence' is commonly evoked in formations of ethnicity.

ⁱⁱⁱ Many Caribbean music genres, such as reggae, are defined by their open challenge to ‘oppressive’ states, and have been highly influential in shaping rap music in urban U.S. contexts.

^{iv} My reference here to transnational migration practices includes all Dominican migrants in the United States, including those migrants who do not have the means to physically travel, but who may nevertheless engage in transnational practices of communication and remittances.

^v Itzigsohn et al. question whether transnationalism should be considered a social field that encompasses all aspects of Dominican migrant practices, or if it should be limited to only certain aspects, such as economics (1999: 317).