

Cumbia villera: Argentine culture or cheap trash?

*Cumbia villera as a marker of the Argentine situation at the end
of the 1990s and in the new millennium.*



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“La vida podrá ser un infierno, pero al menos nos queda el baile y sus fantasías de destinos más llevadores, más despreocupados” (Pujol 2006).

“La cumbia villera está presente y no la podemos negar” (Gobello and Oliveri 2003).

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1. Introduction

When talking about music in Argentina, it is the *tango* that is most famous. Besides the *tango*, music genres like *rock nacional* and *folk* music are also relatively well-known. However, these are not the only music types in Argentina. In addition to these popular genres, since the 1990's there is another important cultural marker of the Argentine society called *cumbia villera*. The music type *cumbia* originated in Colombia in the 1960s, and spread out to other Latin American countries like Mexico and Peru. The Buenos Aires based variety *cumbia villera* came into existence in the poor neighbourhoods of the city at the end of the 1990s as a reaction to the social situation in Argentina. The lyrics of the songs are mostly focused on poverty and marginality, as they tell stories about the daily life in the slums. The popularity of the music spread outside of the slums as a result of the economic crisis of 2001, when the wealth of the middle class diminished, and many became poor.

The reason to choose this subject as a master's thesis is a result of the desire to travel to Argentina, and an even stronger desire to focus on a culturally focused topic pertaining to music. I chose *cumbia villera* as my topic because it is a recent development in the Argentine culture, and not much research has been carried out yet on this topic. Embarking on the subject was initially difficult since the opportunity to get access to the bands and surrounding subculture about the genre were unclear. In fact, it was quite difficult to imagine what the research would be like since in the Netherlands literature on the subject was almost nonexistent. When I started my research, to my surprise, I noticed that in fact I was a little too late. The genre was most popular between 2001 and 2005, and slowly moved back into the slums, with some indicating that it nearly became extinct after 2006. However, I decided to stick to my subject, and luckily with good results. After struggling for a few weeks, several bands were contacted along with some journalists and sociologists who provided me with interesting information about how the genre developed, flourished, and changed over the years since the end of the 1990s.

In this thesis, the main goal is to provide a view on the phenomenon of *cumbia villera* in the Argentine society. In this, I will mostly focus on *cumbia villera* in Greater Buenos Aires, that is to say, the city and its province, as this is the place where the music genre originates and is most popular. As the research progressed, it was of particular interest to discover that most people say that *cumbia villera* is not Argentine. Most people feel that as a cultural phenomenon it does not fit into the Argentine culture, which is in many ways very

European. Most Argentines despise the music genre, and see it as a cheap, black and alienating phenomenon. Nevertheless, when one takes a look at music history in Argentina, we can see that *cumbia villera* in fact is not that new and different from other origins of music styles in this country. Moreover, in many ways it fits perfectly well into other music and societal developments since the beginning of the twentieth century. Showing how *cumbia villera* fits well in the Argentine music culture in accordance with societal developments is therefore an important part of this paper. Another focus will be the construction of the subculture around the music genre, and what this entails. A third focus will be explaining the place *cumbia villera* has in the Argentine society, and how this position has developed and changed over the years since its existence.

The thesis will begin with a short introduction to Argentine contemporary history, along with some theoretical information about the ties between music and society. This is crucial information to be able to place and understand *cumbia villera* as a reflection of the Argentine social situation. The thesis will proceed to a short discussion about music in general in Argentina with a focus on the *tango*, *folk music*, and the *rock nacional*. These music genres have in some way or another several influences on and parallels with *cumbia villera*, and therefore help to see this music genre in the right perspective. This is followed by an introduction to the origins of *cumbia* and *cumbia villera*. After this the thesis will continue with a description of the subculture around the music genre. The next part consists of an analysis of both the lyrics and the themes of the *cumbia villera* songs. Finally, the developments and changes in *cumbia villera* and society over the years will be discussed, along with the influences the music had on society and vice versa. This all will be followed by a conclusion.

2. The context of the research

Prior to looking at the research involved in this thesis, it is necessary to provide some historical and theoretical aspects of the topic in order to set the foundation for both the research and the paper as a whole.

2.1 The theoretical context

“When the social, political and economical environment is given, unchangeable and experienced by all in much the same way, there is no need to spell it out and explicitly discuss it. One simply reproduces it, and communicates personally and intuitively within it. The communication is from within the person, and is in continual tension with the superimposed abstract framework, whether social or musical” (Sheperd 1982: 159).

Music nowadays seems to do little more than fill a silence left by something else, as Stokes says in the introduction of his book. Listening to a CD or the radio, going to a bar, all those examples add up to the notion of music as a sound in the background (Stokes 1994: 2). However, music can also have social importance. The social and cultural worlds that have been shaped by modernity would not be what they are without music: “music is very much a part of modern life and our understanding of it, articulating our knowledge of other peoples, places, times and things, and ourselves in relation to them” (Stokes 1994: 3). Furthermore, “people’s personalities and perceptions of reality are socially constructed, in interaction with other people” (Sheperd 1982: 149).

In addition, cultural productions like music, theatre or film for example, can tell us directly or indirectly many things about a society. They can represent a certain group in society, or give a view of a certain period in history or contemporary life. As Hudson says, there are “strong links between music and senses of places and identities” (Hudson 2006: 626). Furthermore music can represent the condition of a society at any particular point in time. Directly or indirectly songs tell us about sentiments that live among the people. Moreover, when doing research on music, it is not only the meaning which is interesting, but also “what people believe it to mean, as it are these meanings that will influence their responses to it” (Martin 1995: 30). It is worth looking at how people interpret music and why they interpret it in this way; it tells us about their visions on life and their social condition.

“Musical taste and the collective sense of identity to which such taste often gives rise may grow out of a shared sense of experience or the aesthetic and political values that members attach to a particular popular music genre resulting from circumstances encountered in specific localities” (Bennett 2000: 50).

Everyone listens to music, but one’s interpretation of the music is dependent on several factors. “Socialisation leads us to interpret the music we hear in particular ways, and the ways that we invest it with meaning reflect our cultural conventions rather than intuition or the decoding of its inherent message” (Martin 1995: 64). It is the purpose of this thesis to look at *cumbia villera* as a phenomenon in the Argentine society. Among other things, it is interesting to look at why and how a music type comes into existence. Often there is an obvious link between the nature of music, how it came into being, and the condition the society is in at the time. Certain patterns of culture “are both consistent with and ultimately derived from fundamental characteristics of the society as a whole” (Martin 1995: 76), as is also the case with *cumbia villera*. For this reason, the message of the music is usually rife with information about the contemporary society and its inhabitants.

It is possible to approach music in several ways when it comes to theoretics. In the post-structuralist view of Derrida and Foucault, in which music is seen as a discourse, music has “its lyrics, its music and its performance to interpellate; each of which offers ways of being and behaving and modes of psychic and emotional satisfaction” (Vila 1991: 111). In the approach by Gramsci, music is about concepts and ideas. Various authors, like Stuart Hall, have linked both these theoretical approaches in their work. According to Simon Frith an important trap in sociological approaches to music is that “there is a temptation to analyze the words at the expense of the music: words can be reproduced for comment with comparative ease, rhymes are better understood than chords; [and thus] sociologists of popular music have always fallen for the comparatively easy terms of lyrical-content analysis” (Frith 1978: 176). However, coming back to the theme of this thesis, *cumbia villera*, it is safe to say that the contents of the lyrics of this genre are the most important aspect of the music.

Musical events provide collective memories and present experiences of place with an intensity, power and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity. Music symbolizes social boundaries (Stokes 1994: 3-4). Seeing performance as simply reflecting underlying cultural patterns and social structures, as is the case according to the structuralist view, is nowadays often considered as too short sighted. Performance is rather seen as a process in which meanings are generated and manipulated within certain limitations. It is rather a means

to transcend the limitations of our own place in the world; “constructing trajectories rather than boundaries” (Stokes 1994: 4). Music is socially meaningful because it provides the means by which people recognize identities and places, and the boundaries which separate them. It provides people with means to construct and mobilize ethnicities and identities (Stokes 1994: 5).

In most music genres, including *cumbia villera*, the notion of subculture plays an important role. The concept of subculture is seen as a symbolic response to the conditions of class. They are part of an on-going working-class struggle against the socio-economic circumstances of their existence (Bennett 2000: 19-20). In general “subcultures borrow from the dominant culture, inflecting and inverting its signs to create a bricolage in which the signs of the dominant culture are ‘there’ and just recognizable as such, but constituting a quite different, subversive whole” (Stokes 1994: 20). As we see in *cumbia villera* the signs of Argentine culture and society are present. The language used in the genre is familiar to almost all Argentines, but it is molded in a form that provides the concerning marginal group with a unique identity. As an alternative to the subcultural theory, life style is being used as a theoretical model in order to research and interpret the cultural sensibilities of contemporary youth. The objective is to examine the relationship between social class and patterns in taste in forms of popular entertainment as music (Bennett 2000: 25-26).

Music, subculture and life style all play an important role in the identity construction of groups. As Stokes says “a sense of identity can be put into play through music by performing it, dancing to it, listening to it or even thinking about it” (Stokes 1994: 24). In this process identity and authenticity are linked, as what one is cannot be inauthentic (Stokes 1994: 6). Cultural and social boundaries create the feeling of “us” and “them,” and produce maintenance of distinctions, although identity is not a fixed notion. For instance with the recreation of rural identities in urban migrant communities, where also Argentine folk played an important role in identity construction, one sees the complex relationship of ethnicities and class identities. Ethnicity and class identity in the case of migrant communities can be hard to distinguish” (Stokes 1994: 19).

The notions of ethnicity and class, and how they are related, are thus worth taking into account when considering music, especially when looking at marginal genres. Ethnicities are rather like classes in this respect; “frequently they are defined or excluded in terms of the classificatory systems of the dominant group whose guiding motive is the control and cooption of potentially problematic ‘others’” (Stokes 1994: 20). The expressions of identity of

such groups are usually not acknowledged by the dominant group. The boundaries are capable of shifting quickly, which makes redefinition possible (Stokes 1994: 20). In *cumbia villera* it is in the first place about class, as it is the music for and by the marginal classes in society. However, ethnicity plays an important role too; a role that in *cumbia villera* is complicated, as the importance of ethnicity in this genre has been changing from important to less important, and back again, as the popularity of the music has shifted forth and back to other social groups with the economic crisis of 2001. As we can see, music is seldom a stable factor in contexts of social change (Stokes 1994: 17). This shows the flexibility of culture, and that culture is constructed and mobile; it points out that its meaning depends on interpretation (Lull 1995: 160). Moreover, it states that it is too simplistic to say that musical style equates class, as the relationship between the two is often more complicated. Genres usually carry characteristics of the society as a whole (Stokes 1994: 19).

Furthermore it is interesting to look at the relationship between popular music, identity and locality. Globalisation is often seen as a negative influence to local cultures, and even as a destroying phenomenon. Globalization would destroy the local differences between regional and national cultures (Bennett 2000: 54). However, that this is not always the case argues Lull, who uses the term ‘cultural reterritorialisation’ to describe how global commodities and resources are copied and adjusted by local communities in order to make their meanings become applicable to their everyday lives and experiences. (Lull 1995: 160). We can see this phenomenon in *cumbia villera*, which is originally dance music from Colombia. In Buenos Aires the *cumbia* rhythm and beat have remained the same, while the contents of the music have become inextricably linked to the everyday lives of the marginal groups in society within which the music is produced and played.

With this short theoretical overview in mind we will now shift focus to the music genre *cumbia villera* as a cultural and social phenomenon in the Argentine society, starting with the historical context of Argentina.

2.2 The historical context of Argentina

As the *cumbia villera* songs mostly deal with poverty and marginality, it is important to have a good understanding of the social condition of Argentina around the time the genre came in to existence. In 1983, Raúl Alfonsín was the first post-dictatorship president, and expectations were that life was going to improve for most people in the country. However, when he took

office, the country was in a huge foreign debt. Alfonsín took several measures in order to stabilise the economy, but he failed. His failure became clear when in 1989 an economic collapse took place, which had as a result high inflation rates.

In 1989 Alfonsín was replaced by Carlos Menem. The government of Menem tried to improve the economy, and stop the hyperinflation by structural reforms, including the privatisation of state (public) companies, and by decentralising the public sector. Unfortunately, his measures did not go as planned, and he also failed with rumours of corruption during his term. For those who were part of the working class, life became insecure because of Menem's measures. Consequently, severe protests resounded in the country; soon after 1998 the seriousness of the economic recession became visible.

In 1999 it was Fernando de la Rúa's turn to take office, and to improve the lives of all Argentines. Argentina had been in a negative spiral for years now, and an economic crisis seemed inevitable. This deep crisis ultimately became reality in 2001. The value of the peso decreased significantly, and people started to withdraw all their savings to convert it in to U.S. dollars, as the peso remained loosing value. In desperation, the government froze all bank accounts for twelve months. Not surprisingly, these measures provoked social unrest and massive protests.

Besides social unrest, the economic crisis also brought about increasing crime rates and the emergence of criminal networks. The position and life standards for many middle and lower class citizens worsened severely. In this national crisis, poverty and crime were not the only problems. For instance, corruption existed at every level in society. Furthermore the police could not maintain law and order, and failed several times in its attempts to reform the police system. Many of these issues still exist today. Especially the lack of security on the streets is a serious problem, as the police force is, for the most part, still ineffective. In addition, since the end of the 1990s, police violence has been on the rise, and as a result the integrity of the entire police force is in question. The reason for this is the so-called *gatillo fácil*, or "trigger happy," and repression, of which the youth is often victim (Svampa 2005: 178). This increase in police violence is also visible in the *cumbia villera* songs, as we will see later on.

In general, in the 1990s, it was the youth that was the most vulnerable to all the social and economic changes in the Argentine society. Unemployment was increasingly on the rise, and the younger generation ended up suffering crisis situations in the family. Their environment had become insecure and in chaos. Declining educational opportunities made the

youth incapable of bettering their own lives; in their eyes they did not have a future, as, in essence, they had no way out of their precarious situation. The music genre *cumbia villera* “jumped” into this poor life without possibilities; a slum life that became a daily reality for many in 2001. According to Svampa, the music and its subculture is one of the most important expressions of urban culture in the *villas*, the slums, of Buenos Aires, as it is an expression of the “excluido” sectors (Svampa 2005: 180). As a music genre with a corresponding subculture it provided the poor and future-less youth with a particular identity. After 2001 the music was not only an expression of the slum youth anymore; it had become an expression of the suddenly became poor youth in the centre of Buenos Aires as well.

In the next section we will look at music in Argentina.

3. Music and night life in Argentina

“*La noche es una fiesta larga y sola*” (Jorge Lu s Borges)

Night life and music are inseparable in Argentina. Buenos Aires really is the city that never sleeps, and *boliches*, or, that is to say clubs, are an indispensable feature of the Argentine capital. The music type Argentina is most famous for is undoubtedly the *tango*. This type of music, and its associated dance, has its origins in the 19th century, but opinions differ about exactly when. It was the music of the immigrant working class in Buenos Aires. However, the *tango* is not the only music played and danced in Argentina. In fact, there are several music genres that play an important role in the cultural life of the country. *Rock nacional* came into being in the 1960s and has since then gained fame all over Latin America. Next to *rock nacional*, *folk music* from the provinces is very popular as well. Also *cumbia* already existed in Argentina for several decades before the variety *cumbia villera* came into existence at the end of the 1990s.

Many *cumbia villera* songs are about drinking and dancing all night long. This is something that fits perfectly well in the night life culture of Buenos Aires. It is the most common weekend activity for the youth: drinking and going out with friends, until the sun rises. Usually clubs in Buenos Aires do not fill up before 3 o'clock in the morning. Also *cumbia villera* concerts and parties have the reputation to start late, and not to end before sunrise.

In this section, a few important music genres in Argentina will be discussed; those are the *tango*, *folk music* and the *rock nacional*. These genres possess several interesting similarities and differences with *cumbia villera*. They will be put into perspective with a discussion about the night life culture in Buenos Aires, in which we will discuss in particular the phenomenon of the *bailantas*, as this is important to get a better understanding of the scene where *cumbia villera* originates and lives.

3.1 Marginal identity and music in Argentina: the *tango* and *folk music*

Cumbia villera is not the only music genre that has its origins in the slums. Many popular music genres world wide originate in the marginality of society, like *jazz* from the United States for example. In Argentina both the *tango* and *folk music* have their origins in the

margins of society. The *tango* resembles *cumbia villera* in that they both originate in the marginal neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires, and thus in the big city. *Folk music*, on the other hand has its origins in the Argentine provinces, and goes back centuries. This music type came to Buenos Aires with the flow of internal migrants around the 1940s. In Buenos Aires *folk music* soon was baptised “negro” music, referring to the indigenous roots of the musicians and their listeners. This is an important similarity with *cumbia villera*, which is also called the music of the blacks, for the same reason.

The tango came up at the end of the nineteenth century in the outskirts of Buenos Aires. It was the music of the urban poor, native and immigrant, and was generally linked to crime and prostitution (Vila 1991: 111). The music represented the social struggle between the criollos, the new European immigrants and the factory workers in the middle of a process of modernisation. The evolution of the *tango* is as follows: the dance started in the slums and the brothels near the port (1865-1895), then moved towards the neighbourhood Palermo (around 1900), and from there to the neighbourhood La Boca where it became very popular (1907). From then on the dance became more common, also in the down town café's (1910). Eventually the dance moved to Europe, where it became most popular in Paris (1912). This was the turning point in the *tango*'s reputation: it now changed from a sinful dance into an accepted one (Vila 1991: 111-112).

It is interesting to note that in the lyrics of the *tango*, which were absent before the 1920s, there are references to sex, drugs and alcohol, too, and sometimes even as explicit as in the *cumbia villera* lyrics. For example in the song “Griseta” there is talk about “una noche de champán y de cocó,” or in the song “Gotorro Azul:” “Tengo allí mi elixir, la cocó que ha de hacer disipar todo mal.” The tango lyrics also dealt with sex and prostitution as the following part shows: “¿Qué bueno es hacer franela y estar sentado en las sillas mientras que al otario adentro se le plantan las ladillas!//No hay más arrastrada que la vida de las putas: los lunes cobran las latas y los martes andan fallutas” (Gobello y Oliveri 2003: 86). One significant difference is, however, that in the *tango* lyrics sex is the consequence of passionate love, whereas in the *cumbia villera* texts sex is described as something violent (Gobello and Oliveri 2003: 86-87). In addition, it is usually resentment which is the perception and the feeling one gets from the *cumbia villera* songs, passionate love is not the theme as is the case in the *tango*.

The *tango* in Argentina was for a long time seen by the upper class of Buenos Aires as a vulgar dance. They identified the dance with the slums and the brothels. In the 1920s however, the middle class started to embrace the *tango* as the national music and dance. In

this period lyrics were added to the music, whereas before it was about the music and the dance only. Once the music had lyrics as well, it became a music genre perfectly capable of expressing people's pain. A pain which was mostly about the clash of two cultures that many people experienced, the natives as well as the immigrants. For this reason, most people saw the *tango* as the perfect expression of the mixed heritage of Buenos Aires (Vila 1991: 112). The *tango* was very important for the poorer classes in the way that it recognised their identity and culture. Furthermore, the symbolic expressions and lyrics of the songs criticized the behaviour of the ruling classes (Vila 1991: 113). This same type of criticism is also present in the *cumbia villera* lyrics. Despite some resemblances, the *tango* and *cumbia villera* signify different things: "Si el tango y sus coetáneos irían de la oscuridad de los orígenes a la consagración nacional, la cumbia acompañaría significativamente el proceso de pauperización social de América Latina" (Pujol 2006).

During the Peronist period, starting in 1946, the popularity of the *tango* began to decrease. The *tango* had been the music of the mixture of the criollo and the foreign immigrant, with lyrics that dealt with their problems. A shift occurred when it became mostly internal migrants who were coming to the city. These migrants were mainly factory workers and became large supporters of the Peronist Party. They were more fond of *folk music*; the music originating in the provinces. The reason was that the *tango* failed to take part in the construction of the internal migrant worker's identity (Vila 1991: 121).

The idealized image of the gaucho from the Buenos Aires province started to disappear, as migrants from other provinces, called "cabecitas negras," also arrived in the city of Buenos Aires in the 1940s. As Vila says: "Buenos Aires' middle and upper classes suffered a clash between their idealized image of the gaucho and the real ones arriving in the city, the *cabecitas negras* who came from the northwest, and were closer in appearance to the Bolivians than to the imagined gauchos" (Vila 1991: 122). The Buenos Aires middle and upper class started to feel that their European-like city was invaded by the blacks, the *cabecitas negras* as they were referred to, and as a consequence racism started to reign, especially from the moment on that Peronism gave political power to the new inhabitants of the city in order to emancipate them.

One can conclude that in the 1940s the most important music genre, the *tango*, started to lose popularity due to the inflow of rural migrants from the country side to cities, mainly Buenos Aires, and the process of import substitution. It provoked a radical change in the daily lives of the *porteños* who were mostly from European descent (Vila 1991: 107). The cultural

clash that took place went hand in hand with the division provoked by Peronism. On the one side were the Peronists, internal migrants and working class, and on the other side the middle and upper class, and the descendants of the European migrants (Vila 1991: 108). This division of social groups has, until today even, never completely disappeared in Argentina.

In this context of social division, music was (and is) an important marker of identity. The middle and upper class had always supported the *tango*, and disliked the newly brought in *folk music*, which was called “the music of the poor” or even “música de negros” by the privileged classes. Simultaneously, the internal migrants also started to dislike the *tango*, as it was music from the “enemies,” and as a consequence, they began to rely even more on their own musical heritages from the provinces (Vila 1991: 114). In short, this is how *folk music* became more important as a marker of identity than the *tango* in the city of Buenos Aires. As a result, *folk music* became a feature of worker identity. In this context, it shows that music helps to construct a hegemonic process, and not merely reflects it (Vila 1991: 109).

The music genre for and by the poor classes thus switched from *tango* to *folk music*: “As happened in tango lyrics in the twenties regarding the European immigrants, the lyrics of folk songs also allowed the internal migrants to process the social, cultural and political relationships that permeated their every day life in the new environment” (Vila 1991: 114). Vila argues that with their songs the *cabecitas negras* tried to achieve social and cultural recognition and acceptance from the white upper class of the city. According to him, the most important message was that they, the internal migrants, are also rightful Argentines (Vila 1991: 115). However, this is something that is debatable. It is more solid to say that the songs were mostly a form of protest, and that the songs were used as a device to make the voices of the marginal classes heard. In this manner, Argentine *folk music* and *cumbia villera* do not differ much, as *cumbia villera* also aims at making the voices of the slums heard.

3.2 Rock nacional

Another important music genre in Argentina is the *rock nacional*, which since the 1960s, has provided Argentina with a national youth culture. Just like in the United States, where *rock* became a popular genre a decade earlier, in the 1950s, *rock nacional* was made by and for the youth. It was an important marker of youth culture and identity (Margulis et al 2005: 31). *Rock nacional* is, strictly speaking, not *rock music*. It is actually a blend of *rock*, *blues*, *pop*, *symphonic rock*, *punk*, *jazz*, *jazz-rock*, *American country*, *American folk*, *heavy metal*, *new*

wave, reggae, ska, rockabilly, classical music, protest music, bossa nova, samba, tango, and Argentine folk music (Vila 1989: 3). The influences to this genre are dependent upon the artist and the time of production. *Rock nacional* does not have a clear ideology either. The main themes are opposition against the establishment, pacifism and ecology, but for the rest it goes from the left to the right, and bends towards anarchism as well sometimes (Vila 1989: 7). The genre *rock nacional* is thus used to name music with a certain intention and effect rather than to describe a clearly defined music style (Frith 1982: 11).

Rock music knows several phases. The first one is called *Rock 'n Roll* (1954-1959) and started in the United States with famous artists as Elvis Presley, Bill Haley and Chuck Berry. The second phase is the *pop-one* (1963-1966). This period did not limit itself to the United States. In fact, groups from the United Kingdom, like The Beatles and The Rolling Stones, are even most famous. In the United States it was *folk rock* with musicians like Bob Dylan and The Byrds that gained fame in this period. The third period is the *psychedelia* (1967-1973) with groups as The Doors, The Who and Led Zeppelin. Then in 1976 the *punk* age started in Great Britain, and spread out to the United States. Famous groups of this time are The Clash, the Sex Pistols and Siouxsie, and The Ramones. Since the beginning of the 1980s *rock music* is mostly characterized by eclecticism.

Rock nacional in Argentina has its origins around 1965-1966 (Margulis et al 2005: 39). The *rock nacional* pioneers in Argentina were Litto Nebbia, Taguito, Moris and Javier Martínez. Nebbia was the leader of the first *rock* band, Los Gatos, who sang in Spanish. Before them there were several *rock* stars who copied American or English bands and musicians. For instance, the Argentine Sandro was obviously derived from Elvis Presley, and The Beatniks from The Beatles. Moreover, they sang in English. With Los Gatos, besides singing in Spanish now, the novelty was that the band included street language, and used “vos” in the lyrics (Margulis et al 2005: 39).

Rock nacional was a sign of opposition against the establishment, a way to communicate with the youth, and a form of creation. The similarities with the international *rock* scene and its message were the notion of the big city, and being young and free. The genre *rock nacional* started out as a new and strong movement against the commercial music industry. It was against all the things in society that were opposed to freedom of the individual. Furthermore the bands tried new techniques in the area of music. Along with this went a specific dress code and a specific language. The subculture around *rock* from

Argentina had a clear resemblance with the global hippie lifestyle of that time (Margulis et al 2005: 39-40).

The glory days of the *rock nacional* came to an end at the beginning of the 1970s, when groups like Los Gatos, Manal, and Alemdra fell apart. From then on *rock nacional* began to change from merely a form of cultural expression into a more social phenomenon (Margulis et al 2005: 40). The military dictatorship had a strong influence on *rock nacional*, as it became dangerous to express one's (critical) thoughts. However, at first there was a rise in the amount of big scale concerts, as *rock music* served as a tool to bond the youth in a social movement and as a collective actor (Margulis et al 2005: 41). At this point, constructing a collective identity among the youth became more important than the music itself. The label "rock" was not discussed, because now the question of youth identity had become more important (Vila 1989: 16)

Towards the end of 1977 the government started with repressive measures to prevent the big cultural events from happening. They saw those events as a form of subversive action. As a result in 1978 and 1979 *rock nacional* disappeared from the public stage. Nevertheless, it remained existing in a clandestine way, as an underground movement. Not only the music genre disappeared from the public stage: many of the *desaparecidos* were in the age range between 20 and 35, the youth, they were the people who listened to *rock nacional*. As Charly García illustrates in one of his songs of that time:

"Los Dinosaurios" (1983) by Charly García

Los amigos del barrio pueden desaparecer

Los cantores de radio pueden desaparecer

Los que están en los diarios pueden desaparecer

La persona que amas puede desaparecer

Los que están en el aire pueden desaparecer en el aire

Los que están en la calle pueden desaparecer en la calle

Los amigos del barrio pueden desaparecer

Pero los dinosaurios van a desaparecer

With the decreasing popularity of the dictatorship, there soon came more space again for music, and towards 1980 the big scale concerts were resumed. The Falklands War in 1982

with Great Britain meant an enormous boost for the *rock nacional*, because music in English was banned now, and music in the Spanish language was preferred (Margulis et al 2005: 42). What happened though, was that the *rock* music became more *pop* music in the 1980s; the lyrics were not as profound anymore, nor critical. Furthermore *rock nacional* lost its task to bond the youth in a movement, as this task was now accomplished by the emerging human rights organisations, political parties for the youth and trade unions (Vila 1989: 22). However, the genre did not lose all of its significance. From 1986 on, *rock nacional* was marked by expressions of disappointment in the government led by Alfonsín, a period which is called “el desencanto.”

Especially noticeable in the 1990s, is that *rock* music in Argentina has become more commercial (Margulis et al 2005: 47). However, *rock nacional* has through the years remained a social phenomenon. This was something that was very obvious during the years of the Proceso. Although *rock nacional* became a bit weaker in the years after, it has kept its social base. The most important resemblance *rock nacional* has with *cumbia villera* is the social aspect attached to both music genres.

3.3 Nightlife culture and *bailantas* in Buenos Aires

Buenos Aires is famous for its night life, and as soon as one gets to know it, it is perfectly clear why: the city lives at night. Especially during the weekends the nights appear to be even busier than the days. Restaurants do not open before 8.30 p.m., and usually do not fill up until after 10 p.m. After dinner there are plenty of bars to go to on almost every corner in the centre neighbourhoods, and it is most of the time not until 3 a.m. that *boliches* fill up with the Buenos Aires youth.

The youth has no notion of time, and often their night out does not end before nine in the morning. The Buenos Aires night life belongs to the adolescents, and excludes the adults according to Margulis. Important are the contrasts between day and night, light and darkness. In addition, the city belongs to the youth while the adults sleep: the city at night is the territory of the youth (Margulis et al 2005: 12). “La noche aparece para los jóvenes como ilusión liberadora” (Margulis et al 2005: 15). While the people, the adults, who are in charge, are asleep, the youth is free at night to do what they want without any supervision. Undoubtedly, this youth culture is an important feature of the Buenos Aires night life, and it has been for a long time already.

The culture of *los jóvenes* today in Argentina is characterised by the aftermath of repression and the difficult transition to democratic life. The present youth is sceptical about politics and faces difficulties with finding a job, getting a proper university education, to ascend socially and get out of poverty and obtaining social security. Often they are not even interested in politics and the world around them, and they just want to drink and have fun in the *boliches* (Margulis et al 2005: 27). This characteristic applies to the Argentine youth in general, but in the subculture of *cumbia villera* it is possibly most visible, as also several interviewees claimed (Hoog Antink 2008a,b,g).

For a long time the night life in Buenos Aires was concentrated along Avenida Corrientes. Today, the Buenos Aires night life is concentrated in a few neighbourhoods in the centre. However, beside these night life hotspots, several suburban places have become an important marker of “la noche porteña” as well (Margulis et al 2005: 12). It is exactly in those places where *cumbia villera* came into existence and where it was, and is, most popular.

Within the night life culture of Buenos Aires there are many subcultures that coexist. These subcultures show that the night might be famous for the youth for being free, in reality it is not that simple; there are many restrictions and limitations for all social groups. For instance, the social situation prohibits access to posh places for people from the suburbs, who usually have a skin that is a little bit darker than that of the youth living in the centre of the city. The night life of Buenos Aires is ethnocentric, depending on class, and we could even say it is racist (Margulis et al 2005: 17). Social exclusion plays an important part in this culture. According to Margulis there are four main categories in the Buenos Aires night life of the youth: *la discoteca*, *la bailanta*, *el rock* and *los modernos* (Margulis et al 2005: 18). They all have their own area in the city, as in this night life culture the territory often determines the identity of a group. Moreover, the place where one goes out defines who one is, for the places are considered a marker of a shared identity (Margulis et al 2005: 23).

The first category, *la discoteca*, is mainly for the middle and upper class. The people who go here are young, and sometimes even under aged. The most common places are situated in Belgrano and Barrio Norte, the neighbourhoods where these adolescents often come from. The second category is the *bailanta*. This is without a doubt the place for the popular, and the poorer, classes. The *bailantas* are often situated in suburban areas, and furthermore along the big train stations of Once and Constitución. These are the places where *cumbia villera* is played, next to other types of music of the later on explained tropical movement. The *bailanta* differs from the other three categories in that here people of all ages

are allowed; that is to say that theoretically not only the youth goes here, but adults as well. However, personally, I saw most of the time only the youth at the *bailantas*. The third category is *el rock*, a genre that is hard to place. There are some *rock* “temples,” but they differ a lot from each other. What connects those places is their rebellious attitude and political bonding. The last category, *los modernos*, is mostly an artistic underground movement which is situated in the neighbourhoods of Palermo Viejo, San Telmo and Barrio Norte. Within the four categories the *discoteca* and the *bailanta* are most common and popular; hence I will focus on those two categories in this section.

The *boliche* is the place where inequality and the notion of class or social group become apparent: “La disco es un sistema de significaciones que reproduce en el mundo simbólico las desigualdades sociales” (Margulis et al 2005: 111). In the 1960s and 1970s *la disco* was only for the middle and upper class. Starting in the 1980s, however, it seemed that *la disco* in general tended to become more heterogeneous, but this trend has not persisted. The fact that this trend did not endure became very clear in the 1990s, as segregation even increased in club life; the traditional *disco* in the 1990s in the centre had the usual prestige and excluding character it had always had. “La disco es un signo de exclusividad que tiene el poder de ofrecer su prestigio a todos por igual y hacerle saber a cada uno si puede o no gozar de ella. La homogeneidad es un valor sagrado e incuestionable” (Margulis et al 2005: 127). An invitation is often indispensable, which shows the exclusive character of most clubs and parties.

Because most places in the centre have this exclusive character, and are only accessible to the middle and upper class, new places came into existence. Since the beginning of the 1990s “boliches bailanteros,” *las bailantas*, have multiplied and increased in popularity among the people living in the poorer neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires. In the *bailanta* tropical music is played. This is a music type that has its origins in the mixture of genres like *cumbia*, *merenque*, *chamamé*, *la ranchera* and *la polca*. In the *bailantas* all those genres are played, and live performances are usually an important part of the night (Margulis et al 2005: 181). The term *bailanta* has a negative connotation for most middle and upper class people, and the saying that someone is *bailantero* is generally considered insulting (Margulis et al 2005: 181). Most of the artists that perform in the *bailantas* are from the provinces, and not from the centre of the city. Often they have learned to play the music by hearing it, instead of learning to read the music. The most important *bailantas* in Buenos Aires are placed around the train stations Once, Constitución, Liniers and Pacífico.

The *bailanta* culture is seen as a social phenomenon. It is the tropical music that identifies the people who listen and dance to it (Margulis et al 2005: 182). The music belongs to the social class of people who are not part of the middle and upper class. It are the sounds they listen to in their homes and out on the streets. In addition, it defines their *villa* identity, since they do not share these rhythms and sounds with the higher classes of society, to whom the tropical music genres have a bad reputation and connotation.

The queues at the entrance of a *bailanta* usually start to form relatively early, around 11 or 12 at night. The reason is that most *bailantas* give a discount or even free entrance if one arrives before a certain time. This is especially true for women. As a result, knowing that small groups of women are waiting in front of the *bailantas* early, this subsequently attracts groups of men. Another feature of the *bailanta* is that groups of girls are often accompanied by family members, like brothers and cousins, or even uncles and parents. This is an important difference with the other night life activities of Buenos Aires. In *las discos*, for example, this is very uncommon. There the night belongs to the youth, and the youth only (Margulis et al 2005: 184). In addition, in *las discos* one's dress style and the use of language are very important. They serve as markers that show that you belong within this particular exclusive group. In the *bailantas* these identity codes are not of very high importance, or at least they are more flexible (Margulis et al 2005: 185).

Furthermore the differences between men and women are stressed in the world of the tropical music. The man has to protect and lead the woman. He has to ask her to dance, to take her hand to invite her, and not the other way around. The prettier and "más mujer" the woman on the man's hand is, the more status he has, and the more respect from the other men he gets (Margulis et al 2005: 197).

An important characteristic of the *bailanta* is police presence at the entrance, to make sure everyone hands in their weapons before going in, and on the dance floor in order to keep it a safe place for everyone to dance and have fun (Margulis et al 2005: 184). Personal experiences have shown that the police are indeed very visible in the *bailantas*. Security is everywhere on the dance floor, and before entering a *bailanta*, purses and pockets are thoroughly checked. The security seems to work, as far as my own experiences, the atmosphere inside the *bailanta* is hardly ever violent, nor tense. Nevertheless, the *bailantas* have a bad reputation to most Argentines. Middle and upper class Argentine friends never wanted to come along to a *bailanta*, and always indicated that it was crazy to go there. They were very concerned about going there, and constantly calling or sending text messages

wondering who was around, and if I were still alive. Of course, it was not safe to go to these places alone either. The solution was convincing other foreigners to come along for company by promising them some experience with the “other side” of Argentina. It was always clear that the small group I went with was foreign, but even with the stares, and being approached on several occasions, it was not done in a threatening way.

According to Margulis the police presence is due to the high level of alcoholism and violence in those places (Margulis et al 2005: 184). Indeed, alcohol is a big issue in the *bailantas*; everyone is drinking a lot. The beverages that are taken the most are beer, red wine and soft drinks. The soft drinks and beer are often mixed as well. From personal experience at the *bailantas*, beer in huge glasses is by far the most common drink for everyone. Even at high levels of publicized violence, in the *bailantas* one does not notice or experience it much. Outside the *bailanta*, however, is another case. Especially after the night is finished, it does not feel exactly safe to walk around outside. Groups of mostly boys are hanging around smoking, drinking, using drugs and being loud. In my view, the “violent episodes” the *bailantas* are marked by according to many people, take place outside, and not necessarily inside on the dance floor.

Altogether, the image of the *bailantas* is very different from the “normal” clubs in the centre. It is almost like being in another world. Dress style, dance style, language and mentality are different from the dancing clubs in the neighbourhoods of Palermo or Puerto Madero in the centre. Going to the *bailantas* in the suburbs and belonging to this group, means per definition that one does not belong to the middle and upper class in the centre. The people from the *villa* in general do not even want to go the *boliches* in Palermo or Recoleta, because they know that in the best case they are looked at, and in the worst case they are discriminated against and refused at the doors of the clubs (Hoog Antink 2008j). At their “own” clubs further out of the centre, the *bailantas*, they know they can comfortably be who they are without experiencing racism. “En la Capital este género es importante porque muchos sienten a la música tropical como propia por identificarse con ella en su origen o en su historia” (Margulis et al 2005: 205).

Around the economic crisis of 2001 *cumbia villera* was also very popular in the centre. This development, in general, did not transfer the *bailantas* to the centre, although there are two *bailantas* in Palermo now, namely Terremoto and Metrópolis. Instead, what sticks out is that the *cumbia villera* music became a popular music genre to play in “normal” *boliches*, too. Not all night long, and most of the time only towards the end of the night, but it was an

important difference with the previous years. The reason is that with the economic crisis the middle class became poor, and they suddenly also identified with the lyrics about the daily life of poor people. After 2005 *cumbia villera* started to move back to the slums and the provinces. Moreover, the genre as a whole has decreased in popularity. Instead Colombian and Peruvian *cumbia* are taking over in the *bailantas*, just like *reggeaton*. This is a trend that does not only take place in the *bailantas*, but also in the *boliches* in the centre these “new” types of music are played. However, still today, *cumbia villera* songs are now and then played in the *boliches* in the centre, usually towards the end of the night.

In the following paragraph the origins of *cumbia* and *cumbia villera* will be discussed.

4. *Cumbia* and *cumbia villera*: the origins

Cumbia villera has its origins in the slums of Buenos Aires. The music type itself is not new, nor typically from Argentina. Instead, it is originally Colombian dance music. In Colombia *cumbia* is used as an umbrella term, as there are several types. In older *cumbia* songs, for instance, one often hears the indigenous Gaita flute. In general the genre has African and indigenous elements (Pacini Hernandez 1992: 290). Most of the Colombian music genres have their origins along the Caribbean coast, and contain African influences. The Caribbean was the gateway to Latin America, and for this reason besides the African influences, the music from this region also contains European and Amerindian features (Pacini Hernandez 1992: 289). The most important music types which have their origins along the Colombian coast are *cumbia*, *vallenato*, *porro*, *gaita*, *mapalé*, *merengue*, *son*, *paseo*, *payo* and *fandango* (Pacini Hernandez 1992: 290). They are all referred to as *música tropical* and were most popular in Colombia between the 1950s and 1960s. Local musicians would play all the songs of the different genres; they did not stay with one particular type.

Between the 1960s and 1970s things changed as *salsa* from Cuba became more popular in Colombia, and, as a result, *cumbia*'s popularity decreased. *Cumbia* did not disappear however. Instead the genre gained fame in Mexico, Central America, and along the Pacific coast in Peru and Ecuador (Pacini Hernandez 1992: 292). In each country where *cumbia* became popular, the music was adapted to local tastes. For this reason nowadays there exist several varieties of *cumbia* all over Latin America. In the 1960s the most popular Colombian *cumbia* group, La Sonora Dinamita, extended its commercial success in several countries. However, the fact that the *cumbia* became adapted to local tastes and requirements produced strong rejection by the Colombian *costeños*, who no longer thought it was real *cumbia*. This, among other things, shows an important difference: whereas in Colombia *cumbia* is considered a music type with roots and a long history going back to the colonial period, in other countries it is more seen as a "dance craze" (Pacini Hernandez 1992: 292). In Argentina, *cumbia* in its traditional form exists since the 1970s, and is mostly influenced by the *folk music* of the Argentine provinces.

In the 1930s and 1940s many people from the countryside were drawn to the big city, in order to find work. This was a consequence of the process that is called the "economía industrial no integrada." The most important characteristic of this phenomenon was the coming into being of a large industry of manual labour, which attracted many workers from

the countryside. This was most visible in Buenos Aires, Córdoba, and Rosario. In this way the *música folklórica*, typically from the Argentine provinces, became an important feature of the big city as well. The music of these migrants were genres like *chamamé*, *cuartetos* and later on the genre *cumbia* (Margulis et al 2005: 214). The several genres influenced each other and even became mixed. During this period of internal migration also immigrants from overseas arrived in the Argentine capital. Most of those immigrants came from Europe (Margulis et al 2005: 215). The cities were thus inundated with workers where it did not have the capacity for. In this context the *villas miserias*, the slums, came into being. These are the neighbourhoods where the *música tropical* became massively popular, and still is today. Moreover, it are the *villas miserias* where the *cumbia villera* has its origins, too.

Cumbia villera is a quite recent Argentine music genre. Where traditional *cumbia* in Argentina used to be about the typical themes as love, happiness, jealousy, and dancing, *cumbia villera* is more famous for other themes. To the more traditional themes it has added the subjects of social unrest, crime, drugs, alcohol, police violence and social exclusion (Silba and Spataro 2005: 70). The new music genre came into existence at the end of the 1990s under influence of the country's social problems. Argentine *cumbia villera* is mainly influenced by the Colombian variety. Furthermore *cumbia villera* has parallels with American *gangsta rap*, Brazilian *favela music* (mostly from Rio de Janeiro), *punk rock* from the UK, *ska* and Jamaican *reggae*. By far the most important influence, however, is not a particular type of music, but the social circumstances since the latter half of the 1990s (Barragan Sandi 2004: 5). In Argentina *cumbia villera* is the first music type to sing in a direct way about the slums and everyday reality. Popular music types as *tango*, *pop* and *rock nacional* usually do not (Narodowski 2002).

According to the people from the *cumbia villera* scene, the real *cumbia villera* started in 1999 with the bands Flor de Piedra and Yerba Brava (Hoog Antink 2008a,b,g). The names both refer to drugs where “*pedra*” is used to describe cocaine, and “*yerba brava*” refers to weed. In this time the songs were mostly about drugs and alcohol. All this changed in 2001 with the economic crisis. Many people became poor almost overnight; the middle class practically disappeared. As a result criminality increased severely. This is the time in which the most important bands of the genre came into existence: Damas Gratis and Los Pibes Chorros, for example. Although drugs and alcohol remained an important theme, increasing criminality, police violence, and criticism on the government and society became the new, most important themes now. The genre rose in popularity because those subjects were now

very familiar and recognisable for a large part of the population. It was no longer music with lyrics only familiar to the people living in the slums, since many middle class people experienced poverty, too. As a consequence, a very large group of people was able to identify with the songs. Therefore, in this period (2001-2003), *cumbia villera* reached its peak in popularity (Hoog Antink 2008b).

Pablo Lescano is considered the most important person in *cumbia villera*. He is regarded the creator of the whole genre. Lescano started to play *cumbia villera* in 1998 with his band Flor de Piedra, which is generally seen as one of the first real *cumbia villera* bands. The music he made before, with his band Amar Azul, was music close to *cumbia villera*, but it was more romantic, traditional *cumbia*. Lescano was not the one who invented the name *cumbia villera*. He is from the north of Buenos Aires, near Tigre, and therefore he himself first called his music *cumbia norte*, which was (also) about reality and daily life. It were other people, mainly record labels and radio and TV producers, who started to call the music *cumbia villera*, as it was *cumbia* with lyrics that dealt with the daily life in the *villas* (Hoog Antink 2008g).

In the next part the focus will be the subculture of *cumbia villera*, which is an important element of the music genre.

5. The subculture of *cumbia villera*

A popular music genre often is accompanied by a corresponding dress and life style. This is also the case with *cumbia villera*. Around the music genre has come into existence a subculture with a particular life style, dress style and language. *Cumbia villera* is considered, like many popular music types in history, a form of political and cultural resistance. The fans of *cumbia villera* are mostly a homogenous group, and their resistance to the existing society is produced by their position in this society (Hoog Antink 2008a). In their perception they stand very far from the hegemonic class in Argentina. Stereotyping plays a big role in this, which makes the gap between the lower class and middle and upper class even bigger. One of the objectives of *cumbia villera* is providing the poor classes with an identity they can be proud of. The people from the slums distinguish themselves from the middle and upper class by their dress style and use of language (Hoog Antink 2008a).

The life in the slums differs in many ways from that in the centre of the city. The *villas* are, for instance, dominated by drug use (Hoog Antink 2008h). According to Cristian Alarcón, a journalist who wrote a book about the youth in slums of Zona Norte, drugs are the most important problem in these neighbourhoods, alcohol as well, but not as much as drugs (Hoog Antink 2008h). In his book *Cuando me muera, quiero que me toquen cumbia* Alarcón describes the daily life of the criminal youth living in the slums of the northern part of Buenos Aires. In order to obtain money to buy drugs young people start robbing from an early age on, something which is so apparent that it can be considered part of the life style as well (Hoog Antink 2008h). As a result children get into criminal circuits at a very young age, when they hardly realise what the risk of this is with a police system that is not exactly fair with poor, indigenous looking people. In this way a large part of the slum youth gets into a criminal, future-less life, where they have no way out of.

The founder of the whole genre, the earlier mentioned Pablo Lescano, is the *cumbia villera* hero. He is almost seen as a saint (Hoog Antink 2008a). Especially with his still existing band, Damas Gratis, he has gained the respect of many people, including both the middle and upper class. He is from the Zona Norte, the north of Buenos Aires, where *cumbia villera* originates. Here is also the *cumbia villera* “temple” located, a club which is called “El Tropicango.” The entire genre and notion of *cumbia villera* started here. Lescano started the first *cumbia villera* band Flor de Piedra, and since 2001 he is the leader of the band Damas Gratis. Lescano has made a fortune with his music, and because he is such an icon to the fans,

they want to copy him (Hoog Antink 2008h). For this reason, showing off what you have is very important in the subculture of *cumbia villera*.

The *cumbia villera* band Yerba Brava has criticised Lescano strongly for the rich appearance he has started to gain since the band Flor de Piedra. Yerba Brava even wrote a song about him, namely “Pibe cantina.” This is probably the most famous song in *cumbia villera*. One will still hear it everywhere, at every party, whether they are in the slums or in the centre. The song tells the story of an ordinary slum boy who won the lottery, and is now an arrogant and rich boy with a Rolex, who no longer is part of his former slum life anymore. The way in which Lescano is portrayed by this song is supported by an interview with Lescano in the music magazine Rolling Stone Latin America of July 2001. A large part of the text is spent on scene setting, which is mostly about the huge house of Lescano. In addition, how he lives nowadays is extensively described; a portrait of a poor boy turned rich, indeed. In a conflicting way, it is exactly this wealthy image that the slum youth tries to copy, when at the same time, this social group is not rich, and *cumbia villera* has as main message that one should be proud of their slum identity (Hoog Antink 2008m). Nevertheless, contradictory or not, Lescano’s influence remains considerable on the *villa* youth of nowadays.

The trend to show off what you have has thus been an important aspect of *cumbia villera* life for teenagers. As a result, according to Richard, one of the former band members of Lescano’s *cumbia villera* band Damas Gratis, the youth that listens to *cumbia villera* has become very materialistic over the past years (Hoog Antink 2008g). Also according to several other interviewees, Argentine teenagers, particularly from the slums but in general as well, are very superficial and ignorant about the world they live in nowadays. They do not know anything about their history, nor politics; their education is not important to them. Drugs, alcohol, and going out are the most important elements of the life of the youth. According to Richard, having the right shoes, a pretty cell phone and mp3 player, are more important to them than their studies. This is a way of life and a perspective on life that the *cumbia villera* music and scene seems to encourage and stimulate (Hoog Antink 2008g).

The *cumbia villera* dress style mostly resembles the American hip hop style (Silba y Spataro 2005: 85). The characteristics are baggy trousers, (foot ball) shirts, a cap, sunglasses, and sneakers (Silba and Spataro 2005: 85). Sometimes they add an indigenous accessory, like a special type of bracelet (Hoog Antink 2008e). The *cumbia villera* dress style is often called “negro.” Moreover, one dresses “negro” if they wear the clothes people wear in the slums, which is thus sporty: sneakers, caps, and football shirts (Hoog Antink 2008m). In this context,

Nike has as a brand become a significant feature of slum identity. Several of the interviewees claimed that this look is mainly derived from Lescano (Hoog Antink 2008g,h,k). At concerts, for example, you see almost everyone wearing Nike shoes and caps. He dresses like this since the start, and the people from the slums massively copy this look (Hoog Antink 2008g). However, undoubtedly, those teenagers also watch MTV, and, as said before, the *cumbia villera* look is in many ways a copy of the American hip hop look, which makes it solid to say that the youth might be influenced by Lescano in their way of dressing, but definitely also by the more globalised American hip hop look they see daily on MTV.

Also the women follow this sporty look. They usually wear tight jeans, tight tops, and Nike sneakers. This contradicts with the usual *bailanta*-look for women, which is normally very feminine: dresses and high heels. In their make-up and hair style, however, the *cumbia villera* women are usually very feminine.

Another important aspect of the subculture of *cumbia villera* is the language. In Argentina the general vision on the language they speak has always been that their use of words and their pronunciation is very particular and typical for Argentina. However, the Argentine Spanish is very much the same as the Spanish they speak in Uruguay for example. Although it is true that there are typical Argentine words, in other Latin American countries they often will understand the Argentine words, or even use those words, too. Examples of words that are considered typically Argentine are for instance *boliche*, which is a club, *pibe* and *piba*, respectively a boy and a girl.

Most “typical” Argentine words have their origins in the working class neighbourhoods of Caballito and Once, the places where many immigrants settled around 1900 (Hoog Antink 2008b). Also the *tango* and its neighbourhood La Boca has always been an important source for many words. In the *cumbia villera* songs, many words come from the language that is used in the streets of the *villas*, but many common typically Argentine words are used too (Hoog Antink 2008b). Argentine people in general will not have many problems understanding the *cumbia villera* lyrics, but people from other Spanish speaking countries usually do have a few more problems understanding the Argentine slang (Hoog Antink 2008g). According to Gobello and Oliveri, *cumbia villera* language is one that is derived from several varieties of *lunfardo*, the language of the *tango*, consisting mostly of Italian dialects (Gobello and Oliveri 2003: 91-92). In the end Gobello and Oliveri consider the *cumbia villera* talk as a language in its own right; it is not entirely derived from the *tango lunfardo*, not from

the *rock nacional* language and not from the earlier Argentine *cumbia*, instead it is a language that has a little bit of everything (Gobello and Oliveri 2003: 91-92).

The *cumbia villera* language expresses and describes the daily reality for the people in the slums. In this, the social-political context is very important, and is linked to the music scene. Gobello and Oliveri call the *cumbia villera* language “almost tribal” (2003: 91). It provides the listeners with approval of their identity and their social situation (COMFER 2001: 2). Of high importance in the lyrics is the theme of the daily reality in the slums, and the life of the marginal groups in society. Most of the time the lyrics refer to crime, the corrupt police, women, alcohol, drugs use and drugs trafficking (COMFER 2001: 2-3). As Palladino says, the problem with *cumbia villera* is that the lyrics are very explicit (Palladino 2005: 6). During the dictatorship the lyrics of the *rock nacional*, for instance, were about drugs and critical of society as well, but they used metaphors to circumvent the strict censorship. As Palladino remarks: “Es decir, nuestros gobiernos militares o democráticos no pueden leer metáforas.” In other words, it does not matter what the lyrics say, as long as “el organismo regulador” does not understand it (Palladino 2005: 6).

The most notorious characteristic of *cumbia villera* language is the use of many “palabras agresivamente sucias,” i.e. aggressively dirty words, in the songs (Gobello and Oliveri 2003: 92). Here is a difference between the language of *cumbia villera* and the language of the *tango*: in *cumbia villera* language is seen as an expression of the shanty towns, while the *tango* language is seen as brought about entirely by the brothels (Gobello and Oliveri 2003: 93). Frequently used words in *cumbia villera* are *chupar*, *menear*, *cabecear*, *abrir* and *manotear*, maybe needless to say; those words are most often combined with women. An example is the song “Laura se te ve la tanga” by Damas Gratis. Instead of “tanga” is often sung “zanja,” which is slang for vagina. Another example is the song “Andrea” by Los Pibes Chorros: “Ay Andrea te gusta la pija, ay Andrea qué puta que sos.” Another song, also by Los Pibes Chorros, says: “Pamela tiene un problema, no la puede dejar de chupar.” As we can see, and as will be explained more extensively in the next part of the thesis about the lyrics and themes of the songs, women are most often victim of the aggressive and dirty language which is such an important mark of the music genre.

Appendix 1 consists of an extended list of *cumbia villera* slang, which will help to provide a better understanding of the songs that will be described in the next part of this thesis.

6. *Cumbia villera* lyrics: the themes of daily slum life

In the *cumbia villera* songs there are several recurring themes, which are: women, the police, drugs, alcohol, and politics. Every *cumbia villera* song contains one of those subjects. Those are the themes that make the songs both famous and notorious. What all those themes have in common is that they are all part of the daily life in the slums. It is exactly this theme, daily *villa* life, which is the summarising theme of all the sub-themes, and thus all songs. As Víctor, the singer of Los Pibes Chorros, says “I sing about the daily reality in the poor neighbourhoods, that is my inspiration. I sing about things I experienced myself, but also about the stories I hear from friends” (Hoog Antink 2008c). In the *cumbia villera* songs the slums are portrayed as an environment where all kinds of louche activities take place; the songs deal with robberies, portray alcoholics and drug addicts, tell love stories and describe police (mis)behaviour. Moreover, the environment where this all takes place in is depicted as a world in its own right, without ties to the centre of the city (Hoog Antink 2008b). Although the genre *cumbia villera* has developed itself, and has changed considerably over the years since its existence, the same themes are still used nowadays as at the start of the music genre.

The first song to be described in this thesis is the big *cumbia villera* hit that everyone knows; it is one of those songs that describes an ordinary boy living in the slums. We are talking about “Pibe cantina” by Yerba Brava. Although the song dates from the end of the 1990s, it is the song that is most widely played at middle and upper class parties and weddings, something that a Spanish teacher in Buenos Aires already conveyed to me, and which was personally experienced as well at Argentine parties. What is more, everyone knows the song by heart, regardless their background. It is not about drugs, not about racism; instead it is just a description of a normal day in the *villa*. The story is about an ordinary *villa* boy who suddenly won the lottery and became instantly rich. Now he behaves differently, has become arrogant, and he is judged for this by his environment.

“Pibe cantina” (1999) by Yerba Brava

*En los pasillos de la villa se comenta,
Que el pibe cantina se ganó la lotería.*

Ya no pasea con su bici despintada,

No usa su gorra, ni zapatillas desatadas.

*Y que viste elegante todos lo ven,
Luciendo su rolex, ese pibe anda bien.*

*Pibe cantina de que te la dás,
Si sos un laucha, borracho y haragán.
Las chicas del barrio te gritan al pasar,
"Dale guachín, sacanos a pasear."*

In the paragraphs that follow, an explanation will be provided of the origins of the separate themes of women and sexuality, drugs and alcohol, the police, and society and racism. In addition, an analysis will be provided of a few songs that deal with these subjects.

6.1 Women and sexuality in *cumbia villera* songs and culture

Cumbia villera is typically a music genre which is produced by men. Nevertheless, women play an important role as well. They are almost always present in the lyrics of the songs, especially in the last couple of years. The other part for women in *cumbia villera* is their presence as the “sexy babes” dancing in the background. This is not only the case with *cumbia villera*. In the entire scene of the *movida tropical*, the presence of scarcely dressed female dancers is an important characteristic. When looking at the texts of the songs, however, *cumbia villera* differs from the other tropical genres. Whereas in most tropical music types women are portrayed as beautiful, irresistible and sexy, in *cumbia villera* is often spoken in a negative way about women; they cheat, they are selfish and materialistic, and they only serve for lust and sex. As Svampa says “La mujer aparece constantemente denigrada y ridiculizada, sobre todo en el plano sexual” (Svampa 2005: 180). Sexism in the tropical music scene is not a novelty. However, what is new about it, is the excessive language that is used in *cumbia villera* (Alabarces et al 2006: 38).

The theme that women have become openly the object of lust, is illustrated in the following parts of some *cumbia villera* songs.

“Laura se te ve la tanga” (2001) by Damas Gratis

*Tu bailas de minifalda,
Qué risa que me da
Porque se te ve la tanga
Y no puedes esperar
Que te lleven de la mano,
Que te inviten a un hotel
No lo haces por dinero,
Sólo lo haces por placer.*

In “Laura se te ve la tanga” Laura is portrayed as an object, fulfilling male desire. This is her only goal and pleasure; pleasing men sexually. We see this even more clearly in the song “Pamela” by Los Pibes Chorros. In the song it is portrayed as if it is the only pleasure of the woman as well; it is her only objective in life:

“Pamela” (2004) by Los Pibes Chorros

*Pamela tiene un problema
No la puede dejar de chupar
Con todas las ganas
La agarra y le da*

Another example is the song “Las pibas quieren sexo” by Los Pibes Chorros, which does not entail a specific negative statement, but it does reduce women to superficial lust objects without a voice:

“Las pibas quieren sexo” (2007) by Los Pibes Chorros

*Las pibas quieren sexo toda la noche
Las pibas quieren sexo sin parar
Las pibas quieren sexo toda la noche
Las pibas quieren sexo y se lo vamos a dar.*

The recurring view in the songs about women is that they are mere sexual objects. In addition, they are “putas” and “easy,” or they cheat. They give a view of women being superficial and solely useful for sex. Words that are most likely to combine with women in the songs, as mentioned earlier, are: *chupar*, *menear*, *cabecear*, *abrir* and *manotear*. The way women are portrayed is almost always the same: “mujeres que abren las piernas, practican sexo oral y mueven la cola, hombres que las apoyan y se calientan” (Silba and Spataro 2005: 73-74). The woman becomes an object; an object to consume. What is more, women are portrayed as if it is how they want it to be:

“Andrea” by Los Pibes Chorros (2001)

Ay Andrea, vos si que sos ligera

Ay Andrea, qué puta que sos

Ay Andrea, te gusta la pija

Ah Andrea, qué puta que sos

(...)

Si pinta la guita, nunca decís que no

(...)

Y te mueves así, con las piernas abiertas

Moreover, the female voice is never present. It is always the men who talk and who decide. The only task of women is to comply with the man’s wishes. In addition, it is the man’s pleasure that is important, not the female desire (Silba and Spataro 2003: 74). Diego Horro, manager from Los Pibes Chorros, claims they do not see all women like this. Then why do they sing about women in this manner? Women who do only care about sex and cheat exist according to him, but not every woman is like the ones in their songs. He adds to this: “When we sing about women like they are only there to please the men, this is because the audience likes it, they love it” (Hoog Antink 2008b). Something which points out the commercialisation of the genre. He furthermore states that sometimes the band sings something completely different, but because the real lyrics rhyme with “puta,” the audience sings “puta,” instead of “astuta” for example (Hoog Antink 2008b). An assertion that sounds nice, but is not very plausible; at concerts it is always very clear that the band sings “puta” as

well, not only the audience. It was only Horro who gave those kind of explanations. Funny enough the band members interviewed became almost shy and did not really have an answer when asked why they sing about women in this manner. Moreover, they assured me that they love women.

Another explanation for why many songs are so aggressively derogatory about women, besides that “the audience loves it,” is that the roles of men and women are changing, and women are getting stronger in business and politics. Furthermore, women are more independent nowadays, and they are able to enjoy themselves on their own, without men. As a consequence the masculine universe is in a crisis, and therefore men try to downplay women’s intelligence by describing them in this way (Alabarces et al 2006: 39). In this context *cumbia villera* can be seen as an indirect demand for a return to the traditional patriarchal model (Alabarces et al 2006: 39). There are several indicators that point out that in Argentina *machismo* is an important feature of society. In the media in general, for instance, there is still a clear division between men and women. When it comes to the interests of both in the media, there are “specific feminine” sections like fashion, cooking, decoration, horoscope, gossip and “heart” counselling. They confirm the prejudice that states that those are the only interests of women, which reduces them to superficial beings (Villalpando et al 2005: 267).

What do women think of the music? In general they do not like the lyrics (Hoog Antink 2008i). However, it is one of the music types that is played in the *bailantas*, night after night, and they thus dance to it. According to Silba and Spataro, the influence of the industry is an important factor in this. Economic gain is a priority target, and this type of music sells, and that is the reason the language used in *cumbia villera* endures (Silba and Spataro 2005: 80).

Since the critique on the lyrics of the songs, there are also bands that have started to sing in a softer way about women. They went back to the more traditional *cumbia* and tropical music themes of love and broken hearts for example, as also Yerba Brava did in 2005:

“Ahora estoy solo” (2005) by Yerba Brava

Qué voy a hacer?

Porque ya sé que no me quieres

Qué puedo hacer?

Si mis sueños se fueron

*Pienso que no puede ser
Y que tienes que volver
No, no puede ser
No puedo amar
Y cuando menos lo pensaba
Todo fue a terminar entre los dos*

*Y ahora estoy solo, solo
Sin tu cariño no tengo nada
Recordarás tantas promesas
Que hicimos y vivirás pensando
Sólo en mi cariño*

As we can see, this song is about an ended love, it does not necessarily describe the girl in a negative way. Furthermore, as mentioned before, the song has more resemblance with the traditional *cumbia* or the other genres in the *movida tropical*, where the songs usually are about love and women. As a result, the bands who adjusted their lyrics are no longer considered real *cumbia villera* bands (Hoog Antink 2008g).

Another example of a “softer” *cumbia villera* song is “La chica indicada” by El Original of 2006:

“La chica indicada” (2006) by El Original

*Fuiste la chica indicada a ser mi mujer cuando te vi sonreír por primera vez
Y aunque se opongan, tus padres van a entender que tú serás para mí*

*Ya me decías no te pongas así
Déjame luchar por lo que siento por ti
Sí, es verdad que tú me amas como te quiero a ti
Entonces nuestro amor no lo podrán destruir*

As we can see, this is a romantic song about a boy in love with a girl whose parents disapprove of their relationship. As the protagonist says, he is willing to fight for their love as they belong to each other. This song gives, just like “Ahora estoy solo,” a different view on the relationship between men and women than the previous discussed songs in this section. However, the most famous *cumbia villera* groups today, like Los Pibes Chorros and Damas Gratis, still sing in their notorious way about women.

Another phenomenon in the *cumbia villera* songs is the theme of homo phobia, which is in general a problematic issue in the Argentine society. In the media, for example, homosexuals and travesties are normally linked to prostitution, drugs, violence and crimes of “passion.” In this, lesbians are most of the time invisible (Villalpando et al 2005: 267). As a research project on discrimination in Argentina in 2005 showed: “There is a strong homophobic climate both in TV and radio, and jokes and mockery are usually practiced against homosexuals, lesbians and travesties in a large number of shows” (Villalpando et al 2005: 267). Homosexuality and transexuality in the *cumbia villera* songs are mostly used as a means to discard someone’s masculinity. In other words, in general those sexual preferences are not literally disapproved of, but rather used as a way to establish someone’s weakness. Words that stand for (passive) homosexuality are “balín,” “auto,” “gato” and “raro,” a few words that are used to refer to transvestites are “travesaño” and “travestido” (Terrio). The following song by Yerba Brava is about detainees in a prison:

“Tumberos” (1999) by Yerba Brava

Tumbero

Ey, tumbero nueva

Estoy pegado, rejugado, hasta las manos

Ranchando con pibitos de mi palo

A los violines los hacemos nuestros gatos

“Gatos” are homosexuals and “violín” stands for violator. The phrase “A los violines los hacemos nuestros gatos,” is meant to describe the passive, weak character of the prison’s guards.

“El travesaño” is a song by La Piba, one of the very few feminine *cumbia villera* singers:

“El travesaño” (2001) by La Piba

*Iba para el baile cuando de repente me crucé a mi novio
Iba caminando el muy desgraciado muy acompañado
El pobre no sabía que era mi vecino y se llama Cacho
Qué linda sorpresa cuando la desnude va a ver el pedazo
Te comés un travesaño, hay que tarado
Ay ay que si se enoja te pone el pedazo*

In this song transexuality is not necessarily ridiculed, but it is used to denigrate the man. In the song, La Piba describes how she sees her boyfriend walk by with a “girl,” who is in fact a man. A matter she is aware of, but her boyfriend clearly not (yet). The same as with homosexual references, the notion of transexuality is used as a means to blemish the man’s masculinity.

6.2 Drugs and alcohol

As mentioned before, in the slums alcohol and drugs abuse are a major issue. This is also a major theme in the *cumbia villera* songs. It might even be the most important theme. Many songs are about drinking and dancing all night long until you fall down, because you are so drunk. The songs do not give a negative connotation to alcohol and drug use. Instead, alcohol and drugs are portrayed as a way to escape reality for a while and forget all the problems one has when living in the slums. In journalist Cristian Alarcón’s view drugs are the most important problem in the slums in Buenos Aires. What struck him the most when he did research in Zona Norte, was the drugs use among especially the youth here. Drug addiction is often a motive for stealing, as they need money to be able to afford the drugs. They get addicted at a young age, skip school or are expelled, and with this behaviour and its consequences they throw away their future (Hoog Antink 2008h).

The most notorious *cumbia villera* drink, the *jarra loca*, or “crazy jar,” fits perfectly well in how Alarcón portrays the slums. I heard about the *jarra loca* on my first night out in Buenos Aires. The Argentines I was with were middle class, and after hearing about my research they soon started to warn me about the *jarra loca*: wherever I would go, whoever I

was with, the message, which was more of a warning, was: “never ever take a sip from the *jarra loca* when someone is offering it to you.” The *jarra loca* appeared to be a mixture of several alcoholic beverages; it consists of whatever is available. On top of that, maybe the most important addition, are the pills, the drugs. Literally everything that is available is put in, which produces a drink that makes one very drunk and drugged at the same time. This drink is already a part of the *cumbia villera* scene since the beginning, as the following song by Flor de Piedra shows:

“La jarra loca” (2000) by Flor de Piedra

Estaba en el baile tomando fernet con coca

Sin darme cuenta una chica le metió

Una pastilla color rosa

La jarra seguía pasando de boca en boca

Mareados seguimos tomando de esta jarra loca

Empezamos a ver dibujitos animados

Y todo el baile quedó... ooooo... ¡descontrolado!

Salten todos y no sean caretas que esta noche no tiene bajón

Salten todos con Flor de Piedra, si pinta el roqui, pinta el descontrol

As the song illustrates it is not about whether the drink is good, and whether one enjoys drinking it. Instead the main goal is getting drunk, even when one feels sick: “mareados seguimos tomando.”

The songs describe the effects of the use of alcohol and drugs not only in a positive way, but also in a way which portrays getting drunk and drugged as the normal thing to do:

“Descontrolado” (2002) by Guachín

Ya llegó el fin de semana

Ese que tanto esperamos

Y juntamos las monedas para salir a bailar

Y junto con mis amigos nos juntamos en la esquina para emborracharnos

“Mi flor” (2001) by Damas Gratis

Yo tengo una flor

La tengo que cuidar

Y cuando sea grande

Me la voy a fumar

“Quiero vitamina” (2000) by Damas Gratis

Yo quiero tomar vitamina

Y compro una bolsa y estoy pila, pila

As we can see, it is not only the *jarra loca* providing the fans with a state of ecstasy to forget their worries in daily life. Drugs and alcohol, in whatever form, are recurring themes in slum life and therefore as well in most *cumbia villera* songs, regardless the year in which the song was written.

However, although most songs that are about going out mention alcohol and drugs, not all of them do. Some only describe the dancing and having fun, as for instance “Re piola” by El Original does:

“Re piola” (2003) by El Original

Vengo re piola para bailar

Vengo re piola para gozar

Todos los pibes cumbieros

Lo bailan sin parar

Nevertheless, all in all, drugs and alcohol remain very important themes in *cumbia villera*, and songs like “Re piola” are rather an exception.

6.3 The Police

In *cumbia villera* songs the police are often portrayed as the big enemy. According to the songs, they are unjust, corrupt, violent, and when one lives in a slum this is reason enough for them to arrest one. In Argentina state violence has been a problem for a long time already. With the transition to democracy in 1983 the form of state violence changed, but it did not disappear. Instead of the military, the daily threat now comes from the police. Most vulnerable are the people who live in the slums.

The expanding poverty, increasing income inequality, and growing unemployment numbers have led to social exclusion and increasing crime rates in Argentina. The group that is “better off” therefore made demands for strong social control by the state. As a result an “iron fist” policy was adopted. In Argentina “the police habitually acts as the dispensers of rough justice, assuming the function of punishment that properly belongs to the criminal courts and the penal institutions” (Stanley 2004: 98). This is not something of the 1990s. As said before, illegal state violence is not new in Argentina, and has persisted for the last three decades in the context of the dynamics of socioeconomic developments in Argentina. In this view it is not only a legacy of authoritarianism, cop culture or the corrupt policing institutions, but mainly the result of socioeconomic developments that go deeper and further back than those aspects (Stanley 2004: 99).

In Buenos Aires public security is the main objective of the police forces. However, since the police appear to be deficient, and not winning “the war on crime” there is a need for harsher measures towards criminals, and as a result an “iron fist” policy was thus adopted (Stanley 2004: 99). The consequences of this “iron fist” policy are that there is more police presence in the streets, and that there have been legal reforms to extend police powers and mandatory minimum sentences. People who are considered “police property,” which are those on the margins of society, are most likely to be victims of the extended police powers (Stanley 2004: 101). The rights of those victims are minimal, and extrajudicial killings are legitimized. Moreover, there is abuse of police authority: it is “them” (the police) and “us” (the people). “Us” are the people living in the slums, and therefore it is not startling that in *cumbia villera* songs the police is a recurring theme.

In the following song by Flor de Piedra, the so called practice “gatillo fácil,” or “trigger happy,” is being criticised. The “trigger happy” phenomenon entails the arresting or murdering of easy victims, which are, not surprisingly, often the inhabitants of the slums.

“Gatillo fácil” (2000) by Flor de Piedra

*Le dicen gatillo fácil, para mí lo asesinó a ese pibe de la calle que en su camino cruzó
El se daba la macho, con su chapa policial, lleva fierro bien polenta y permiso pá matar
Al él le dicen Federico, yo le digo polizón y como canta Flor de Piedra vos sólo sos un botón
Vos sos un botón, nunca vi un policía tan amargo como vos*

*Gatillo fácil te gritan al pasar
Gatillo fácil, nada más*

Gatillo fácil nunca vas a pagar porque sos cana, rati de la federal

Almost all the *cumbia villera* bands use the police as a source of inspiration, and almost all of them do this in the same manner. Usually they describe the practices of the police in a disparaging way.

“Poliguampa” (2001) by Los Pibes Chorros

*Todo el día estás patrullando la ciudad
Haciendo abuso de tu chapa policial
Pero no sabes lo guampudo que sos
Porque a tu mujer me la estoy comiendo yo*

*Policía, policía.
Qué amargado se te ve.
Cuando vos estás patrullando,
Me la como a tu mujer.*

In the song above, Los Pibes Chorros accuse the police openly of abusing their police outfits: “Haciendo abuso de tu chapa policial.” At the same time, this officer is punished by the notion that his wife is unfaithful, with him, the singer.

The next song by Damas Gratis is about being on the run for the police.

“Poli en acción” (2008) by Damas Gratis

Con un tiro en el tobillo

Voy corriendo hasta el pasillo

Con un tiro en el tobillo

Voy corriendo hasta el pasillo

La parca y la gorra me quieren llevar

La parca y la gorra me quieren matar

Voy llegando a la casilla rescato mi zapatilla

Rescato mi guacha el 38 que martilla y brilla

As the singer, Pablo Lescano, sings, the police are after him, and they want to bring him in or even kill him. It does not become clear in the song whether he stole something or did something illegal. What he did is of no consequence anyway, the police are after him because he lives in the slums.

Being a “negro” is already enough to attract the attention of the police. In Argentina there are hardly black people as in from African descent, but people who, how slightly it may be, have indigenous traces in their faces are considered black, and are in general called “negros.” In addition, being a “negro” automatically entails belonging to the slums, and as a consequence one is more vulnerable to police violence (Hoog Antink 2008m).

6.4 Politics and society: second class citizens and racism

As *cumbia villera* is a music type for and by the people on the margins of society, it is not surprising that criticising the society they live in is part of the genre as well. These are the same objective *rock nacional* has always had. Just as was the case with the *tango* in the

1920s, the lyrics of *cumbia villera* often see the elite in the centre and the government as the “villains” who make them and treat them as inferior citizens (Hoog Antink 2008k).

The media has an important share in how the Argentine society is constructed and seen by its citizens, since how they portray the society has a large influence on the people. As Villalpando says: “One of the most outstanding characteristics of contemporary societies is the importance of media in the shaping of practices and social representations” (Villalpando et al 2005: 258). In this view, we can state that in general in the Argentine media:

[...] indigenous, afrodescendants, gypsies and other ethnic populations of Argentina suffer from a noticeable lack of visibility that seems to be related to subtle forms of institutionalized racism, and focus in not eroding the social imaginary that understands Argentina as composed by a White/European/Christian supposedly majority (Villalpando et al 2005: 266).

According to the research led by Villalpando, the youth in general is the main victim of stereotyping in the media. The lower class youth is depicted as committing crimes or sitting at the street corner “doing nothing.” They are portrayed as belonging to violent groups, overcrowding police stations and jails, being addicted to videogames and TV, drinking in excess or using drugs, and being ever present at street riots, *bailantas* or *discos*. On the other hand, the teenagers belonging to the middle or upper class are seen as obsessed with their image, alcohol and drugs consumption, and are considered as permanent objects of marketing. The structural causes of those issues in society are rarely discussed in the media within a context of explanation and understanding (Villalpando et al 2005: 264-265).

Cumbia villera fits in this wider context of a society suffering from social and economical issues as a music genre that describes the social reality and makes it visible; the music makes the voices of the marginal youth heard. The songs may quite often confirm a part of the youth stereotypes, but in addition they also frequently refer to the causes and mention the context in which the issues originate. In their songs, the *cumbia villera* bands often direct themselves towards the elite or the government in the centre. Many of those songs are best described as a type of protest songs (Gobello and Oliveri 2003: 95). An example of a *cumbia villera* protest songs is “Ladrón de lo sacaste” by Flor de Piedra:

“Ladrón de lo sacaste” (2000) by Flor de Piedra

*Tengo que pedir mi libertad y me condenan porque salgo a robar
¿Por qué a mí? Si los que roban de verdad, tienen la libertad
Ellos son la mayoría de políticos y policías
(Cumbia cabeza, con cerveza)*

“Cabeza” in the last sentence refers to the earlier mentioned *cabecitas negras*, the people with indigenous roots in the slums. Another protest song is “Industria Argentina” by Damas Gratis. This song dates from 2001, and shows that the economic crisis of 2001 was an important source of inspiration for politically engaged songs.

“Industria argentina” (2001) by Damas Gratis

*Ay, ay, ay
Qué risa que me da
Te van a matar
Si la plata no está
Vendiste a la Argentina
Sos capaz de vender a tu mamá*

*Ay, ay, ay
Qué risa que me da
Tu casa van a quemar
Mataste hasta Norma Pla
Vendiste a la Argentina
Sos capaz de vender a tu mamá*

*Patacones, Quebracho, Lecop
La puta que te parió
Devolvé la plata
Que te llevaste al exterior
Al exterior*

Hay Caballo / Fernando
Qué rata que sos
La puta que te parió
Devolvé la plata
Que te llevaste al exterior
Al exterior

Políticos, de porquería
Se robaron
Lo poco que quedaba en la Argentina
Yo sabía, que no cabía
Yo sabía, que no cabía...

As we can see, former president Fernando de la Rúa, is strongly criticised in the song. He is blamed for “selling” Argentina and making a mess of the country.

Often *cumbia villera* and *hip hop* music from the United States are linked. This is not surprising, as there are indeed several similarities. *Hip hop* in the United States was an enterprise completely in black hands, until the emergence of white rapper Eminem. *Cumbia villera* is this as well: it is the music of the “negros.” This is true even considering the fact that the people from the slums are not *really* black. In fact, it does not seem to matter all that much. This confirms Diego Horro, manager of Los Pibes Chorros: “The “negros,” the people with Indian roots, are worst off in the Argentine society. Even if your skin is only slightly darker than that of most middle and upper class people you are considered black” (Hoog Antink 2008b).

The following song by Yerba Brava shows how much your skin colour in Buenos Aires determines your place in society, and your destiny.

“Discriminado” (1999) by Yerba Brava

Su suerte ya estaba escrita desde el momento en que nació
Hijo de padres villeros, con la cumbia se crió
Y ahora que está más grande y al baile quiere colar

El rati con bronca grita: negro villa, vos no entrás
Todos se hacen los giles, te dejan siempre tirado
Que por ser negro villero él estaba condenado

En el trabajo tampoco pega, de todos lados
El reboto, le buscan todos los peros, cansado el negro ya se rindió
La sociedad no le dió salida y el mal camino encaró
En una noche pesada, la muerte se lo llevó

All interviewees for this research project claimed that racism is one of the biggest problems in the Argentine society. Usually people with different roots do not hang around together, and everything is very separate. Peruvians have their own group; Jews do, Paraguayans, Italians, and so on. Besides this, they have a strong sense of suspicion towards each other. They do not trust each other and blame each other for anything (Hoog Antink 2008b,h,m). Richard from Damas Gratis said that it is a cliché to say that the indigenous looking people from the poor neighbourhoods are the criminals, the ones dealing drugs, but at the same time that it is a cliché that is true. They have the lowest possible jobs, and next to this, it is most of the time them who are dealing and selling drugs. This does not legitimate discrimination, but their bad reputation does not come out of nowhere, according to Richard (Hoog Antink 2008g).

The term “negro” was originally used by the middle and upper class of Buenos Aires to describe the poor classes in the slums (Iglesias 2001). What we see now is that those poor classes have reinvented the term and use it in a proud way to describe themselves: “¡A ver cómo cantan los negros!” is what Pablo Lescano of the band Damas Gratis shouts all the time, for instance, at their concerts. And not only Lescano does this, most bands do. Los Pibes Chorros, for example, even have a band member, Punga, who concentrates almost solely on this part of the concerts. Punga is a real *villero*, and the entertainer of the group. Here is another parallel with North American hip hop music: there the white elite used to call the black population “niggers,” with hip hop this has converted in a term that the black people use among each other as well (Iglesias 2001). In the same way the racist term “negro” has in the slums converted into a term to describe an identity to be proud of.

The message that you have to be proud of your roots, and above all, of being a “negro” is a recurring sentiment during the concerts. However, this aspect is most of the time not literally to trace in the lyrics of the songs, but rather at the start of the songs, in between, or at

the end. Either way, there is almost always a reference to being *villero* and the encouragement to be proud of it. It is in this manner that *cumbia villera* provides its listeners with an identity and culture to be proud of.

In appendix 2 of this thesis are the full texts of the songs analysed in this section. In the next part we will turn to the developments and changes in *cumbia villera* over about the last ten years.

7. The development of *cumbia villera*: changes in society, changes in *cumbia villera*

The reputation of the music genre of *cumbia villera* has gone through several phases over the years since its rise. In short, *cumbia villera* started out as a limited music genre in the slums with a corresponding subculture. In this period the music was practically ignored by as well the media, as the middle and upper class of Argentina. With the economic crisis of 2001 the genre spread from the slums to the centre, and the music developed itself towards a more general youth culture that appealed to a wide audience, as the middle class disappeared and identified with the *cumbia villera* lyrics about poverty too now. As *cumbia villera* became more and more popular, the Comité Federal de Radiodifusión started to take measures to limit *cumbia villera* on the radio and TV, for it would pose a bad influence to teenagers. At the same time, as *cumbia villera* was becoming an important part of the Argentine cultural life, also Argentine film directors started to use the music in their, usually socially engaged, movies. Ultimately, since around 2005 the genre transformed into a music style that has a very negative connotation to and reputation for most people. As a result the music has moved back to the slums, and has even started to diminish as a whole. How did the popularity of the genre shift from ignored, to popular, to disliked by most people?

According to Diego, the manager of Los Pibes Chorros, the real *cumbia villera* started in 1999 with the bands Flor de Piedra and Yerba Brava. Band titles which, as mentioned before, both refer to drugs, as “piedra” is used to describe cocaine and “yerba brava” to weed. As the names already indicate, in this time the songs were mostly about drugs and alcohol. All this changed in 2001 with the economic crisis, which brought about poverty for many and increasing numbers of criminality. Not surprisingly, the boom in *cumbia villera* took place around the economic crisis of 2001 (Hoog Antink 2008b). During this period the first, founding bands from the end of the 1990s had already started to disappear, and new bands came into being. The most famous examples are Los Pibes Chorros and Damas Gratis. With their songs about poverty and criminality they appealed to a large part of the Argentine population.

In this time the commercial success started to play an important role in the music genre, and many new bands were formed. There were several record labels that signed *cumbia villera* bands, but most of them signed in with the label Magenta, a record label that is specialised in the tropical music movement. In the commercialisation of *cumbia villera*, the record labels extended their power enormously to be able to influence the music the bands

produced. This is especially true for the record label Magenta, with several consequences for the music. The image of *cumbia villera* bands became very important; the singer now had to be less *villero* and more “cute” to be able to attract girls. As several interviewees claimed, Los Pibes Chorros, for example, is no longer what it used to be. Almost all current band members were chosen by Magenta to be able to appeal to a big audience and make a lot of money, mainly abroad (Hoog Antink 2008a,g,h). Only band member Punga has been there since the beginning; he is the only real *villero*. For this reason Pablo Lescano and Damas Gratis do not want to have anything to do with Magenta, and they thus release their albums on their own, without being attached to a record label (Hoog Antink 2008p). Most *cumbia villera* bands have, because of the pressure by record labels, thus become commercial enterprises with as main goal to make money. Talking to Magenta has unfortunately proved impossible, something that I had already been told by both Diego and Richard: “They are not exactly open about the way they work” (Hoog Antink 2008b,g).

As the “founding father” of *cumbia villera* Damas Gratis’ Pablo Lescano has never been happy with the continuing commercialisation process of the music genre. He sees himself and his current band Damas Gratis as the only real *cumbia villera* band left (Hoog Antink 2008p). According to him, Los Pibes Chorros was created as a copy of Damas Gratis from the start. This is the reason that Lescano dislikes Los Pibes Chorros. In his view, they stole part of his success, while “they are just a silly copy” (Hoog Antink 2008p). During the years 2001 to 2003 *cumbia villera* bands made an enormous amount of money, mainly under the supervision of the label Magenta. They signalled the success of Damas Gratis very quickly and started to sign and create as many *cumbia villera* bands as possible for their own gain. As a result the *cumbia villera* bands signed by Magenta are strongly criticised by all the members of Damas Gratis: “They have no soul, as long as the singer is cute enough to attract girls it is ok. The commercialisation of the genre has ruined a large part of the authenticity of *cumbia villera*.” (Hoog Antink 2008p,g). Attracting girls as main objective is something that is quite visible at the *bailantas*. Often the bands, especially the singers, wink and make comments towards the groups of, often very young, girls in the audience.

Not only record labels and commercialisation have influenced the music genre. Another very significant influence on *cumbia villera* has been indirect censorship, starting already towards the end of 2001. The reason for this censorship is that *cumbia villera* music is not exactly loved by the Argentine government. The lyrics that deal with drugs and alcohol, robberies, and violence would encourage the youth to act in a similar way (Hoog Antink

2008b). The bands however do not agree with this. They say they sing about the daily reality, and that their intention is not encouraging the youth to get addicted to drugs or to rob people and stores, but merely to describe the daily lives of the poor people. According to them it is the other way around: their music does not make bad things happen in society, instead it reflects what happens in society (Hoog Antink 2008c,p).

In 2001, the Comité Federal de Radiofusión wrote a report about *cumbia villera*: “Pautas de evaluación para los contenidos de cumbia villera.” COMFER is an independent organisation that is responsible for regulating, controlling and criticizing the functioning of the radio and televisión channels in Argentina (COMFER website). The *cumbia villera* report of 2001, discusses how *cumbia villera* music encourages the youth to use drugs. According to the committee it is important to take into consideration what effects the music has on the people who listen to it. It is mainly the youth that listens to *cumbia villera*, and they are vulnerable to those influences (COMFER 2001: 2). It is especially noted that the groups that are most vulnerable dwell in the marginal areas of Greater Buenos Aires, and mainly in the neighbourhoods of Tigre, San Fernando and Pacheco.

The vulnerability of the youth of the poor neighbourhoods is illustrated by examples of a research dating back to 1985. At the time Ana Lía Kornblit found out that when it comes to the knowledge of the language used in the drugs world, the youth from the shanty towns has a much more extended vocabulary than the youth from the middle and upper class (COMFER 2001: 3). With this knowledge in mind, as *cumbia villera* is most popular in the shanty towns among the poor youth, the concerns are not entirely surprising. It is the organisation’s objective to regulate television and radio, for they feel responsible to protect the youth from drugs and alcohol abuse (COMFER 2001: 4).

In the article “Música popular y resistencia: los significados del rock y la cumbia” the writers are critical of the COMFER report. The reason is that it neglects the sexist and homophobic *cumbia villera* lyrics, as it only focuses on drugs, alcohol, and criminality (Alabarces et al 2006: 37). The theme of female unfriendliness is thus ignored, which is remarkable, as the songs also set a bad example in this area. This is actually a theme which has brought up a new discussion. The development towards the theme of sex in the last few years has made the music less popular, especially with women (Hoog Antink 2008i,j). Women have massively dissociated themselves from the genre because of the aggressive and sexist contents of the songs. Nevertheless, from the COMFER report we learn that “para el Estado los jóvenes son vulnerables a las incitaciones a las drogas y al delito, pero la

subordinación de la mujer no es un tema que implique ningún tipo de riesgo” (Silba and Spataro 2003: 77). At the same time most women demand a return of the original and most common *cumbia* theme: romance (Alabarces et al 2006: 38).

In addition, another remarkable point in the COMFER report is that it appears that *cumbia villera* only became an issue since it has become popular among the middle class, when the fear existed that it would start to influence the middle and upper class youth in a negative way. “Ello es así pues el conocimiento de dichas expresiones, en la actualidad, ha trascendido los sectores en los cuales éstas se han generado para pasar a ser de dominio público” (COMFER 2001: 3).

Lo preocupante era que esta música circulara entre las clases medias y las alejara del consabido respeto por la propiedad; o, peor, aún, que los jóvenes de esas clases consumieran sustancias adictivas y se dedicaran al delito, obnubilados por los efectos alucinógenos. Si estos presuntos desvíos se limitaban a las clases populares, la preocupación no se hubiera extendido (Alabarces et al 2006: 37).

What Alabarces suggests here, is that if the music would have remained in the slums, it would not have become such an issue.

Thus, in the COMFER report in the list of points to take into consideration when deciding on to play or not to play *cumbia villera*, the most important remarks are that one should pay attention to the lyrics where the use of drugs and alcohol is portrayed in a positive way. Glorification of drugs and alcohol use is what is considered the most important negative aspect of the songs. Furthermore the notion of under aged people trafficking drugs is also considered a major issue (COMFER 2001: 4-6). The strange thing is, according to Richard from Damas Gratis, that *rock nacional* also often refers to drugs and this type of music is not banned (Hoog Antink 2008g). However, the obvious reason for this is that *rock nacional* uses many metaphors in its lyrics, and references to drugs thus are most of the time not very clear.

Although the COMFER report dates from 2001, according to personal interviewees they only really started to notice the hindrance of their music around 2004 (Hoog Antink 2008a,b,g,k). In 2004 the government declared that *cumbia villera* instigates crime and drugs consume (Alabarces et al 2006: 38). According to the bands interviewed for this thesis, there was no direct censorship by the government, but they did put a hold to cultural allowances for the *cumbia villera* groups (Hoog Antink a,b,p). As the music was also largely banned from

radio and TV due to the earlier COMFER report, it became rather difficult for the bands to continue with their music in the same way they had before. *Cumbia villera* started to become more of an underground type of music (Hoog Antink 2008g). The internet has been considerably important in this development, as it was the only place where the bands were free to express themselves and their music (Hoog Antink 2008g).

In the debate about *cumbia villera* the government has been rather divided. In August 2004 a Secretary of State, Alberto Fernández, declared in an interview that he thought that *cumbia villera* encourages crime and glorifies the corresponding life style. This would be an important cause in the increase in violence, crime and lack of safety in the streets in Buenos Aires:

Hace diez años, no existía una cultura muy difundida en esos sectores de la sociedad que, entre otras cosas, piensan que el delito puede ser un modus vivendi. Hace diez años no había un programa de televisión durante cinco horas difundiendo un tipo de música donde, en gran medida y por muchos momentos, se termina elogiando la acción delictiva, como es todo este fenómeno de la cumbia villera y este movimiento cultural, entre comillas (*Clarín* “Aguante de la cumbia villera” 05-08-2004).

The response to the remarks above was enormous. Not only bands and fans protested, even the country’s president at the time, Nestor Kirchner, dissociated himself from the Secretary of State’s statements: “A mí me gusta la cumbia villera. ¿Quién no vió *Pasión de Sábado*? La cumbia villera forma parte de la cultura. Lo mismo pasó con el tango, el rock y el folclore: dejemos que la gente se exprese” (*Clarín* “Aguante de la cumbia villera” 05-08-2004). In the opinion of sociologist Pablo Alabarces the Secretary of State’s statements at the time were full of ignorance (Hoog Antink 2008a). This incident showed the dividedness of the government when it comes to *cumbia villera*; at the time at least, there was no unanimous opinion on the issue.

The popular TV show where *cumbia villera* was temporarily banned, *Pasión de Sábado*, is a Saturday day-long program where all kinds of tropical movement music bands perform live. In a newspaper article the producer of *Pasión de Sábado* in 2004, Daniel “La Tota” Santillán, said that he thought that the accusations by the Secretary of State’s were ridiculous. According to him, it is, just like the bands interviewed said, the other way around:

“Esto emerge de este país, es al revés, la cumbia refleja lo que pasa,” and it is the government of Fernando de la Rúa who created the violent and insecure social situation existing in the country. It is by no means *cumbia villera* that has created the problems (*Clarín* “Si la cumbia es apología de la violencia, Pedro y Pablo también.” 07-08-2004). However, Richard of Damas Gratis told me he could imagine very well that the youth is influenced by the lyrics of the songs and he would not be surprised if it would encourage them to use drugs or start stealing (Hoog Antink 2008g). Probably the truth is somewhere in between, *cumbia villera* obviously did not start the country’s problems, but it is not illogical that people are influenced by the lyrics either.

The current producer of *Pasión de Sábado*, Leonardo Anolles, is once again allowed to invite *cumbia villera* bands to the show without any restrictions. However, *cumbia villera* has never become as popular again as it used to be in the program. Nowadays every Saturday there might be one or two *cumbia villera* bands, and the other bands are all other tropical music bands, like *cumbia colombiana* for example (Hoog Antink 2008l). *Cumbia villera* does not have the status it had a few years ago.

The indirect censorship, as most people involved in *cumbia villera* call it, brought about several changes in the genre. There still are some famous groups, but many groups also have ceased to exist or changed their music. They play other types of *cumbia* now. Peruvian and Colombian *cumbia* groups have started to become more popular than *cumbia villera*. However, the most popular music genre in the *bailantas* (and outside the *bailantas*) at the moment is *reggeaton*, a genre which is very popular all over Latin America now. Even in the still existing *cumbia villera* groups one notices the differences. Some songs are still about criminality, drugs, or discrimination, but there is a lot more attention for love and sex now in the songs. It seems that even the big *cumbia villera* groups also have been influenced by the measures (Hoog Antink 2008a,b,g,n,m). Although those songs about love and sex often ridicule women or talk about sex in an aggressive manner, as mentioned earlier, this appears to be fully accepted by the government. As a result, this development has persisted, and bands like Los Pibes Chorros carry on singing in 2007: “Mírala como ya baila sola la negra Lola.”

In 2004 and 2005 Damas Gratis did not appear anywhere on TV nor on the radio, the whole band fell completely silent because Pablo Lescano was fed up with the “indirect censorship” (Hoog Antink 2008p). Coming back towards the end of 2005, beginning of 2006, Damas Gratis started to sing more about love and sex, while many other groups have just disappeared (Hoog Antink 2008g). After 2004 almost the only way to let people hear *cumbia*

villera was through internet. Since 2006 there has been a bit more attention for *cumbia villera* again because of the themes changed towards love and sex. For this reason bands were allowed again on TV and radio. Nevertheless, it has never become again the way it was in 2001-2003. Today, in 2008 it even seems that *cumbia villera* will extinct, although the older *cumbia villera* songs are still quite popular. Also Damas Gratis does not play the real *cumbia villera* anymore, not the way it was meant when the genre started out in 1998 (Hoog Antink 2008g).

Cumbia villera artists have not accepted all the criticism on their music. In fact, it has been an ongoing struggle for them against the government and other powerful actors, like radio directors, who have tried to diminish the broadcasting of *cumbia villera* performances on TV and radio. On the website www.muevamueva.com, “el portal de cumbia movida tropical más visitado del mundo,” appeared on the 11th of April 2004 the Trust Gauge Report “Discriminación y racismo: organismos de cultura y empresas de Argentina” by the anonymous F.C. In this report, the way in which *cumbia villera* is dealt with by the media and the government is being criticised.

Ante diferentes versiones que están circulando en el ambiente *bailanero*, MuevaMueva.com aclara a toda la comunidad que mantiene (desde su creación) una absoluta independencia de Productoras de TV, Productoras de Grupos y Compañías Discográficas. No creemos oportuno realizar más aclaraciones. Trabajamos por la movida. Del conventillo ya hay quien se ocupe (www.muevamueva.com).

The report about *cumbia villera* in Argentina raises questions about why *cumbia villera* is dealt with the way it is in Argentina. It furthermore points out why the music genre is just as Argentine as the *tango* and *folk music* from the provinces.

The most important questions are: why does the tropical movement not participate in the official TV and radio channels? Why are there no support programmes as is the case for other music types in Argentina? Why is only *cumbia villera* criticised, when in *rock*, *hip hop* and *tango* there are also references to drugs? (Trust Gauge Report 2004). The most common answers are “This is not music,” and “This type of music is full of messages that form a threat to society.” Those are answers that the writer of the report calls “fascista,” and to which he adds:

En realidad, para ser más ‘justo,’ debería decir de gran parte de la población argentina es racista y es fascista. Sólo atacan a la movida porque es ‘música de negros. Y cuando dicen “negros” no se refieren a la gente de etnia africana... Se refieren a los hijos de esta Argentina, de esta América, nacidos de los vientres más ligados a esta tierra. Cuando dicen: “negros,” se refieren a una gran mayoría de la población argentina que fue excluída por ellos (políticos y empresarios) del acceso a niveles de educación y cultura dignos. Fueron y son ellos quienes les negaron y les niegan, día a día, el merecido reconocimiento a cambio de su esfuerzo y trabajo (con el cual hacen crecer sus empresas y el país en general) razón por la cual no pueden ocuparse por si mismos de su propia educación ni de la de sus hijos (Trust Gauge Report 2004).

Then the report turns to Argentine history, and as explained earlier on in this thesis too, it discusses the period of the internal migration in the 1940s and 1950s during the reign of Juan Perón. The internal migrants brought along with them their own rhythms and themes, and by the descendents of European immigrants they were not accepted and called the *cabecitas negras* with their black music. Altogether, it shows that racism is not only an important marker of the Argentine society today, but also that it is not a new phenomenon and rather a continuation of social relations as they have been for the past decades.

As is furthermore pointed out, and personally experienced in Buenos Aires: *cumbia villera* is everywhere. One hears it echoing out of shops along Avenida Santa Fe, around train stations and also in the *boliches* in the centre. Everyone, from poor to rich knows the big hits of the genre by heart. At the same time fairly no one will admit that they like this type of music (Hoog Antink 2008o). When it comes to the popularity and place of the genre, there are contrasting views. For instance, Richard from Damas Gratis said that *cumbia villera* in Argentina is nowadays more popular in the centre of Buenos Aires, while Diego, manager of Los Pibes Chorros, claimed that *cumbia villera* still mostly dominates the slums and provinces. (Hoog Antink 2008b,g). Either way, although *cumbia villera* clearly forms a part of Argentina, cultural officials continue to deny the proper place the music from the *bailantas* deserves, as the writer of the report states (Trust Gauge Report 2004). The effects of the treatment of *cumbia villera* are nowadays visible as in that the genre is a disappearing phenomenon (Hoog Antink 2008a).

Today, the music genre of *cumbia villera* is despised by practically every middle and upper class Argentine in the centre of Buenos Aires (Hoog Antink 2008o). When personally discussing the topic of my research with middle class Argentines in their mid-twenties, at first the responses were laughter. In fact, quite often middle class Argentines were totally downgrading the research as ridiculous. Friends were called (“Che! Esta chica hace una investigación a *cumbia villera* jajaja!!”) and more laughing and jokes would follow. Nevertheless, while most responses at first were funny, soon there were also more serious responses. Often, I was asked why I wanted to do research on such a vulgar topic as *cumbia villera*, a part of Argentina that one can hardly call Argentine culture, or even culture. In most middle and upper class views it is trash that has nothing to do with Argentina (Hoog Antink 2008o). Another issue for most people was whether I realized how dangerous the topic was, especially the going to the places where *cumbia villera* concerts take place. In my view, most Argentines are a little paranoid when it comes to *cumbia villera*. One has to be careful at *bailantas*, but those places are not as dangerous as their reputation portrays them. Something I found out myself, but was also told by journalist Alarcón and sociologists Alabarces and Sosa (Hoog Antink 2008a,h,k). Moreover, according to them, interviewing the famous groups would not pose a danger to my safety, while most Argentines I spoke to thought it would (Hoog Antink 2008i,o).

What is conflicting in these middle and upper class views and attitudes is that while they openly despise *cumbia villera*, they all know the big hits and the bands. In the clubs in Palermo or Puerto Madero where I accompanied them, towards the end of the night we always heard a few *cumbia villera* songs, and they loved it. When being confronted with that afterwards, they would admit they do like the music to dance to, especially when they are drunk. The music is seen in a different light then, and it “is just fun” (Hoog Antink 2008o). Also at the few private parties outside the centre in the “barrios cerrados,” which are fenced luxurious neighbourhoods, *cumbia villera* music was a considerable part of the play list, and everyone sang along. All this indicates that *cumbia villera* indeed was and still is popular among the youth, regardless their background. It is important to note, however, that the *cumbia villera* songs usually played here were older songs, from the time when those Argentines were teenagers, and experiencing an unsure childhood because of the economic crisis of 2001.

At those parties and nights going out with the middle and some upper class, I also discovered that Pablo Lescano is considered a hero by them. If in *cumbia villera* there is one

person they do respect, it is Pablo Lescano. The reason is that he, as a nobody from the slums, has climbed the social ladder and is a rich and successful man now (Hoog Antink 2008o). When Pablo Lescano started to gain fame, most of the middle and upper class Argentines I interviewed were in their teens and facing crises in the families they grew up in because of the economic crisis of 2001. Lescano was the example, also for them, that being poor is not the end of the world, and you can get out of poverty. For the middle class Argentines interviewed, the “negro” thing was not an issue, as they are not “black,” but the notion of becoming someone when you start out as nothing and being poor, was (Hoog Antink 2008o). The symbol of Lescano gave some kind of hope to vulnerable teenagers who were easy to influence (Hoog Antink 2008a).

All the above mentioned developments have brought about considerable changes in the music genre from the slums of Buenos Aires. Richard from Damas Gratis calls *cumbia villera* a disappearing phenomenon. According to him the best years were between 1998 and 2004, since then the genre has changed significantly and is not really *cumbia villera* anymore (Hoog Antink 2008g). Also at the Tropitango, the *boliche* in Zona Norte where Pablo Lescano started out, people say they love *cumbia villera*. It really is their music (Hoog Antink 2008q). However, most of the people also said that the *cumbia villera* produced nowadays is not real *cumbia villera* anymore, unfortunately. And that they prefer the old, “classic” *cumbia villera*, by which they mean the music until about 2004. Still, in general, they do think the music is part of Argentina, too, and therefore bands should be free to express themselves and perform at the *bailantas* or elsewhere, even now the lyrics are more superficial and not always nice about women (Hoog Antink 2008q). What sticks out is that in general both the poor classes and the middle class seem to prefer the older, more authentic *cumbia villera*, instead of the *cumbia villera* of nowadays. The latter is mostly favoured by the, often very young, teenagers of nowadays (Hoog Antink 2008k,j).

Another sign that *cumbia villera* is going to disappear soon, according to Richard, is that the *cumbia villera* “saint” Lescano is currently not doing so well anymore. He used a lot of drugs in his life, and the results are becoming clear now. Writing and composing songs is harder now, and he is not as proficient at it anymore. This is also part of the explanation of the rather superficial character of the (Damas Gratis) songs of today. Furthermore, he cannot give night-long concerts anymore, and not several times a week either. The drugs have caused a lot of damage, while he is only 31 years old (Hoog Antink 2008g). As Lescano is such an icon in

cumbia villera, this influences the whole genre. In the end, it seems that *cumbia villera* is disappearing phenomenon, indeed.

Nowadays only a few bands, like Los Pibes Chorros, Damas Gratis and Supermerca2 have been able to remain as popular as they were since 2001. This is for a large part due to their international success. Those bands are not only popular in Argentina, but also in other Latin American countries like Uruguay, Peru, Ecuador, Chile and Mexico, and even in some southern parts of the United States. In foreign countries they have fewer problems to distribute their music because the Argentine slang they use is mostly unknown there, and as a result its popularity is more dependent on the sounds of the music (Hoog Antink 2008b). When attending a concert by Los Pibes Chorros in Santiago de Chile, the capital of Chile, I noticed that the atmosphere was quite different than in Buenos Aires. In Buenos Aires the *cumbia villera* concerts are mainly ignored. One needs informants or needs to check some key websites to know where and when a *cumbia villera* concert will take place. In Santiago de Chile, on the other hand, throughout the city one could see some advertisement posters of the concert by Los Pibes Chorros. *Cumbia villera* is not underground or ignored here. Also the concert hall where the performance took place was bigger, in the centre, and it was a general concert hall, not a *bailanta* locked away in the neighbourhoods between the centre and the slums. What Diego had told me appeared to be true, to me at least: *cumbia villera* nowadays has more success abroad, while in Argentina it is a disappearing phenomenon (Hoog Antink 2008b).

Now we will turn to a conclusion of this thesis on *cumbia villera*.

8. Conclusion

Is *cumbia villera* typically Argentine culture or is it just cheap trash that has somehow mysteriously invaded Buenos Aires? Ask the marginal groups in the slums and the provinces and they will answer “this is Argentina, too.” When one asks the middle and upper class in the centre on the other hand, people will call *cumbia villera* a horrible music genre that has nothing to do with Argentina at all, and in the worst case even call it the music of criminal black people that do not even belong in Argentina. In the mean time, many sociologists call *cumbia villera* just another form of a cultural expression that deals with marginality and poverty, not any different from what the *tango* used to do or other forms of *folk music*. Then why has *cumbia villera* such a controversial reputation? Is it typical Argentine culture? And in what way has this musical phenomenon developed itself over the last ten years? Those are the most important questions I have tried to answer in this thesis.

Cumbia has its origins as a dance genre with African and indigenous elements in Colombia. Other popular Colombian genres that originate along the Colombian coast, just like *cumbia*, are *vallenato*, *porro*, *gaita*, *mapalé*, *merengue*, *son*, *paseo*, *payo* and *fandango*. They are all referred to as *música tropical* and were most popular in Colombia between the 1950s and 1960s. When *salsa* music from Cuba started to become a popular music genre in the 1960s and 1970s, the attention for *cumbia* diminished. The genre did not disappear however; instead the genre became very popular in Mexico, Central America and along the Pacific coast in Peru and Ecuador, where it was considered a dance craze rather than a music type with roots and a long history going back to the colonial period.

The Buenos Aires variety of *cumbia* came into existence during the 1970s and 1980s, and was mixed with other music genres from the provinces. In this period the music did not differ that much from the original *cumbia*, as the typical themes of love, happiness, jealousy and dancing were most common. At the end of the 1990s however, under influence of the weak economy, the aftermath of the dictatorships and soaring social insecurity, a new type of *cumbia* came into existence: *cumbia villera*. The traditional themes were replaced and/or added up with the subjects of social unrest, crime, drugs, alcohol, police violence and social exclusion. The texts of the songs tell the stories of the life in the *villas miserias* of the Argentine capital. At first, the music genre was only popular in those poor neighbourhoods, but extended its popularity with the economic crisis of 2001. The reason was that the middle class in Buenos Aires disappeared and became poor as well. As a result, the themes of the

cumbia villera songs became applicable to a large amount of people in the centre of the city as well. Many people now identified with the poor population living in the slums of Buenos Aires, as they were experiencing similar things.

Although critical sounds about the contents of the *cumbia villera* songs were there since the beginning, this only started to become tangible after the suddenly become poor middle class began to embrace the music. Articles and reports by the media as well as by the government show implicitly or explicitly that this is the key to why *cumbia villera* became such an important topic for discussion. As long as the genre stayed in the slums, only supposedly influencing “black” slum youth, it was not serious enough to make it a topic for debate. When in 2001 the music became popular among middle and upper class youth, it became an entirely different story, as it would now encourage the middle and upper class (white) youth to use drugs, too. As a result measures were taken to limit the broadcasting of *cumbia villera* performances on official TV and radio stations.

Strange enough it were only the references to drugs and alcohol abuse in the songs that made the government and TV and radio channels worry. This sticks out because other notorious features of the *cumbia villera* texts are the aggressive attitude towards sex and the ridiculizing manner in which women are often portrayed. Next to this, homo phobia is a dubious subject expressed in some *cumbia villera* songs as well, a topic that is not discussed in any manner either by the institutions that have given critical comments on the contents of the song texts. For the government those subjects, which set bad examples for the youth as well one would think, are not an issue. Recently, several scientists have said something about the female unfriendly and homo phobic contents. And when asked women, in general, they show their aversion against those lyrics. However, female unfriendliness, homo phobia and the aggressive attitude towards sex have never been such an issue as drugs and alcohol abuse. What is more, because the lack of resistance to the those issues, many bands have changed their lyrics even more towards sex and women, and reduced the references to drugs and alcohol.

It is needless to say that the attack on *cumbia villera* for its contents was followed by severe protest by the bands and their fans. Rightfully, several people reminded Argentina to the country’s musical history. Also the *tango*, *folk music* and *rock nacional* always have, in different ways and in different times, demanded attention for the country’s problems and often described in one way or another the lives of the people living on the margins of society. In this context *cumbia villera* differs not that much from other music types in Argentina.

Moreover, *cumbia villera* claims the same kind of recognition *folk music* claimed for the internal migrants, the *cabecitas negras*, since the 1940s, namely the notion that they also are rightful Argentine citizens. In this context *cumbia villera* and its subculture has provided the marginal groups in the slums with an own identity where they can be proud of.

While nowadays *cumbia villera* has a negative reputation, and in general is called trash, it has not always been this way. Between 2001 and 2004 *cumbia villera* was a popular music genre in general in Argentina. The inventor of *cumbia villera*, Pablo Lescano, was, and still is, considered a hero by many people, and not only in the slums. The reason is that he managed to climb the social ladder and got himself and his family out of poverty. *Cumbia villera*, and Pablo Lescano, appealed to the middle class youth between 2001 and 2004 because they faced crises within the family and had hardly any future perspectives due to the economic developments in Argentina. As a result they identified with the *cumbia villera* messages and stories. Nowadays most middle class Argentines will say they dislike *cumbia villera*, but at parties they will sing the songs, that are always played, happily along. It is important to note however, that the songs that are played there are almost always the older songs, the ones produced between 2001 and 2005, as those are the songs that have meaning to them.

Today, *cumbia villera* is a disappearing phenomenon. Several interviewees claimed the genre will go extinct soon. There are several reasons for this development. In the first place the economy is improving: *cumbia villera* is just not an issue anymore in the centre of Buenos Aires and has moved back to the poorer neighbourhoods and the provinces. In the second place the texts are not as sharp anymore because of the measures taken by the government and radio and TV institutions. *Cumbia villera* simply did not have the possibility to carry on in the same way it used to do. As a result the songs have become bland and cliché, mostly about “easy” and false women. The inventiveness that made the genre controversial but popular as well, has disappeared. Another development is that the more traditional *cumbia* from Colombia and Peru, and the genre *reggeaton* are increasing in popularity, and have pushed *cumbia villera* from its throne.

All in all, one should look at *cumbia villera* as a phenomenon that has signalled and expressed the social situation of Argentina at the end of the 1990s and at the beginning of the new millennium. Therefore it should, despite its sometimes vulgar lyrics, not be considered trash, but rather a music genre that has made the problems that the country faced, and still faces in some areas, visible. Something which is a continuation of the Argentine musical

history, as also the *tango* and *folk music* had those objectives. Moreover, *cumbia villera* provided the marginal youth in the slums with an own identity to be proud of; they are part of Argentina, too. To conclude, *cumbia villera* may not have directly solved anything with its raw messages and sometimes vulgar stories about life in the slums, but it has signalled important problems in the Argentine society, like racism, poverty and police corruption. In this way it has brought about a broad discussion about what Argentina is and where the country is heading. The music should thus be considered a part of Argentine culture, rather than “cheap trash.”

Appendix 1: *Cumbia villera* vocabulary, a glossary

As the language that is used in many *cumbia villera* songs consists mostly of Argentine slang, I have added a word list for a better understanding of the songs.

Acostar: to deceive, to damage

Afanar: to rob

Aguante: expression of solidarity and respect

Anestesiado: drugged

Arrebatar: to rob with violence

Atorrante: unreliable

Bajón: the feeling one gets after the effects of the drugs disappear

Bala: penis

Balín: homosexual, passive

Bancar: to finance

Baranda: bad smell

Barata: cheap prostitute

Bardear: to make a chaos

Bardo: chaos (in sound)

Barra: group of friends

Birra: beer

Blindado: blinded vehicle

Bobo: clock, heart

Bocha: large amount

Boliche: club

Bolsa: cocaine

Bombacha floja: horny woman

Botón: police officer or informer of the police

Bronca: envy, shrewdness

Buchón: squeaker, informer

Bufoso: revolver

Bulto: penis

Cabarute: cabaret
Cabeza (cabecita negra): inhabitant of the interior of the country
Cabeza de la: crazy
Cagadas: fraude, error
Cagador: circumventer, misleader
Cagón: coward
Campana: the thief's assistant (watcher)
Cana: police officer
Cantina: the place to get the drinks in the club
Caño: fire weapon
Caretá: person who says he does not do drugs, but actually does, very seriously
Carpetear: to observe
Cartón: glass
Celular: cell phone
Chabón: subject, undefined person
Chala: marihuana
Chamuyar: to flirt, to talk
Chapa: police identity badge
Chata: car
Cheto: young person who shows off his capacity of drinking or taking drugs
Chorro: thief
Churro verde: cigarette with marihuana
Colmear: to spoil
Cola, colita: the woman's behind
Cotorra: vagina
Cucaracha: vagina
Cuetazo: firing of a weapon
Cumbero: cumbia dancer
Cumbia cabeza: cumbia of the *cabecitas negras*
Curro: obtaining money in an illegal way
Drogón: frequent user of drugs
El 38: 38 revolver
En pedo: drunk

En pelotas: robbed from everything
Escabiar: to drink alcoholic drinks
Faso: cigarette
Fernet con coca: drink, coca-cola with Fernet (bitter liquor)
Fierro: fire weapon
Flor: the marihuana plant
Fumanchar: to smoke marihuana
Fumanchero: someone who smokes marihuana
Garca: swindler, fraud
Garpar: to pay
Gil: stupid
Gorra, gorro: police officer,
Guachín: young boy, adolescent
Guacho: young boy, derogatory
Guampudo: victim of infidelity by a woman
Guita: money
Hinchada: group of followers of something
Huevo: courage
Jeropa: masturbating man
Joda: refers to homo sexuality
Joder: to do harm, to attack
Junar: to look, to perceive
Ladrillo: where the drugs is packed
Laburar: to work
La 9: fire weapon
Las Ranas: the name of a *villa miseria*
La 32: fire weapon
Laucha: person with no future
Levantar: to be detained
Limado: physically or psychologically ruined
Llantas: heavy shoes
Lolas: breasts
Manyar: to understand, to get something

María Juana: marihuana
Marrón: anus
Masa: the best
Mina: woman, girl
Morfar: to eat
Mover: to have sex
Narquear: to consume and offer drugs
Ortiva: informer
Pachá: wealthy man
Papel: dosis of coke
Pasillo: small road in a *villa miseria*
Pasta: drugs with an anaesthetic function
Patota: group of aggressive people
Pedo: a drunk
Pendejo: young boy
Pibe: boy
Pibe cantina: a boy who spends all his money at a bar
Pija: lively
Pila, pila: very awake, active
Pintar: to arrive, to show up
Piola: smart, keen, bright
Polenta: strong, capable
Polizón: police officer
Puntero: drugs seller
Puterío: group of *hijos de puta*
Quilombo: chaos, mess
Rajar: to run, to flee
Rama: marihuana
Raro: homo sexual
Rata, ratón: someone without out a future
Rati: the police
Raviol: dosis of coke
Reduro: very hard, difficult

Repancho: very satisfying
Reprodrir: to complicate
Rescatarse: to get sober after intoxication by drugs
Ser de palo: belonging to the same group
Sport: sport pants by Nike or Reebok for example
Tablón: the seats in the football stadium
Tanga: thong
Tano: Napolitano, Italian
Tirado: abandoned
Tornillo: penis
Trabuco: tranvestite
Trapo: flag
Travesaño: tranvestite
Tropi tango: the *boliche* in Zona Norte where *cumbia villera* originates
Trucho: false, illegal
Viaje: trip (after drugs use)
Viejo de la bolsa: seller of drugs
Vigilante: informer
Villa: slum
Vitamina: coke
Voltear: to have sex
Yerberos: fans of Yerba Brava, or marihuana smokers
Yuta: the police in general
Zanja: vagina
Zarpar: to cross the line

Appendix 2: Full lyrics of the songs analysed

In this thesis most of the time only small parts of song lyrics are analysed. For a more complete view on the message of the texts that have been used, I have therefore put the entire lyrics of those songs below.

“Pibe cantina” (1999) by Yerba Brava

En los pasillos de la villa se comenta
Que el pibe cantina se ganó la lotería

Ya no pasea con su bici despintada
No usa su gorra, ni zapatillas desatadas

Y que viste elegante todos lo ven
Luciendo su rolex, ese pibe anda bien

Pibe cantina de que te la das
Si sos un laucha, borracho y haragán
Las chicas del barrio te gritan al pasar
“Dale guachín, sacanos a pasear”

Pibe cantina que andas con la coupe
Lentes oscuros, hay como te ves
Anillos de oro, cadenas también
Ya no sos el mismo, dejate de joder
Tomátela pibe cantina

“Laura se te ve la tanga” (2001) by Damas Gratis

Tu bailas de minifalda, qué risa que me da
Porque se te ve la tanga, y no pudes esperar

Que te lleven de la mano, que te inviten a un hotel
No lo haces por dinero, sólo lo haces por placer

Coro Lauraaaa... siempre cuando bailas a tí se te ve la tanga
Y con lo rápida que sos vos te sacas tu tanga o te sacas la pumpachita

Y le das para abajo, pa' bajo, pa' bajo, pa' bajo y pa' bajo
Y le das para atrás, pa' delante y pa atrás, pa' delante y pa' atrás
Pa' delante y pa' atrás, para delante y para atrás...

Y le das para abajo, pa' bajo, pa' bajo, pa' bajo y pa' bajo
Y le das para atrás, pa' delante y pa atrás, pa' delante y pa' atrás
Pa' delante y pa' atrás, para delante y para atrás...

Tu bailas de minifalda, qué risa que me da
Porque se te ve la tanga, y no pudes esperar
Que te lleven de la mano, que te inviten a un hotel
No lo haces por dinero, sólo lo haces por placer

Coro Lauraaaa... siempre cuando bailas a tí se te ve la tanga
Y con lo rápida que sos vos te sacas tu tanga o te sacar la pumpachita

Y le das para abajo, pa' bajo, pa' bajo, pa' bajo y pa' bajo
Y le das para atrás, pa' delante y pa atrás, pa' delante y pa' atrás
Pa' delante y pa' atrás, para delante y para atrás...

“Las pibas quieren sexo” (2007) by Los Pibes Chorros

El que quiere sexo, que levante las manos
El que quiere sexo, que se ponga agitar
El que quiere sexo que levante las manos
El que quiere sexo que se ponga agitar

Las pibas quieren sexo toda la noche
Las pibas quieren sexo sin parar
Las pibas quieren sexo toda la noche
Las pibas quieren sexo y se lo vamos a dar

Para que guarden
Para que archiven
Para que sepan que yo
Las quiero más
Para que guarden
Para que archiven
Para que sepan que yo
Las quiero más y más

Y las manos arriba haciendo palmas, palmas

El que quiere sexo que levante las manos
El que quiere sexo que se ponga a agitar
El que quiere sexo que levante las manos
El que quiere sexo que se ponga a agitar

“Pamela” (2004) by Los Pibes Chorros

Pamela tiene un problema
No la puede dejar de chupar
Con todas las ganas
La agarra y le da

Ay, Pamela te vas a enfermar
Sos una viciosa te vas a empachar

Pamela tiene un problema
Si se la saco se pone a llorar

Me pide con ganas
Pónemela ya

Ay Pamela deja de chupar
Sos una viciosa tenés que parar
Ay Pamela como chupas
Si ves una fija le das sin parar

Esa maldita costumbre que tenés
Deja de joder

No te das cuenta que tanto hace mal
Si seguís chupando te vas a enfermar
Todos los días chupas sin parar
Te vas a enfermar
Te vas a empechar..

“Andrea” by Los Pibes Chorros (2001)

Ay Andrea, vos si que sos ligera
Ay Andrea, qué puta que sos
Ay Andrea, te gusta la pija
Ah Andrea, qué puta que sos

Si pinta una cumbia revoleás tu cadera
Si pinta los tragos perdés el control
Si pintan los pibes revoleá tu cartera
Si pinta la guita, nunca decís que no

Y te mueves así, con las piernas abiertas
Y te mueves así con la colita para atrás
Y te mueves así con las manos para arriba
Y te mueves así con la colita para atrás

“Ahora estoy solo” (2005) by Yerba Brava

Qué voy a hacer?
Porque ya sé que no me quieres
Qué puedo hacer?
Si mis sueños se fueron

Pienso que no puede ser
Y que tienes que volver
No, no puede ser
No puedo amar
Y cuando menos lo pensaba
Todo fue a terminar entre los dos

Y ahora estoy solo, solo
Sin tu cariño no tengo nada
Recordarás tantas promesas
Que hicimos y vivirás pensando
Sólo en mi cariño

“La chica indicada” (2006) by El Original

Fuiste la chica indicada a ser mi mujer cuando te vi sonreír por primera vez
Y aunque se opongan, tus padres van a entender que tú serás para mí

Fuiste la chica indicada a ser mi mujer cuando te vi sonreír por primera vez
Y aunque se opongan tus padres van a entender que tú serás para mí

Ya me decías no te pongas así
Déjame luchar por lo que siento por ti
Sí, es verdad que tú me amas como te quiero a ti
Entonces nuestro amor no lo podrán destruir

Porque hay gente mala que el amor no comprende
Pensar que para el amar hay una edad suficiente
A ese sentimiento no deben oponerse entre la envidia
Y el rencor pueden llevarlo a la muerte

Hoy me gritas que me amas porque yo fui hoy el primero en tu cama
Y loco por ti te enseñe lo que es amar yo te convertí de una niña a una mujer

Soy un cachorrito cuando tengo tu amor
Así que tú me tienes con tu inmensa pasión
Pero si ellos quieren destruir nuestro amor
Yo puedo transformarme en un furioso León

Mami...

Fuiste la chica indicada a ser mi mujer cuando te vi sonreír por primera vez
Aunque se opongan tus padres van a entender que tú serás para mí

Fuiste la chica indicada a ser mi mujer cuando te vi sonreír por primera vez
Y aunque se opongan tus padres van a entender que tú serás para mí

Mientras yo viva nunca voy a olvidarte en tu rompecabezas soy la pieza importante
Todo termino y eso tú te lo buscaste pero si ya no tienes que regresar a mí

Fuiste la chica indicada a ser mi mujer cuando te vi sonreír por primera vez
Y aunque se opongan tus padres van a entender que tú serás para mí

Fuiste la chica indicada a ser mi mujer cuando te vi sonreír por primera vez
Y aunque se opongan tus padres van a entender que tú serás para mí

Soy un cachorrito cuando tengo tu amor
Así que tú me tienes con tu inmensa pasión
Pero si ellos quieren destruir nuestro amor

Yo puedo transformarme en un furioso León.

Mami...

Fuiste la chica indicada a ser mi mujer cuando te vi sonreír por primera vez
Y aunque se opongan tus padres van a entender que tú serás para mí

Mientras yo viva nunca voy a olvidarte en tu rompecabezas soy la pieza importante
Todo termino y eso tú te lo buscaste pero si ya no tienes que regresar a mí

Fuiste la chica indicada a ser mi mujer cuando te vi sonreír por primera vez
Y aunque se opongan tus padres van a entender que tú serás para mí

“Tumberos” (1999) by Yerba Brava

Estoy pegado re jugado hasta las manos
Ranchando con pibitos de mi palo
A los violines los hacemos nuestros gatos
Los del pabellos vip son refugiados
Ahora estos guardados no podemos zafar
La facaya está afilada asi que le vamos a dar

Tumbero yo soy, ya voy a salir
Tumbero yo soy, que se arme el botín
Tumbero yo soy, ya voy a salir
Cuando esté afuera... temas a morir

Estoy pegado re jugado hasta las manos
Ranchando con pibitos de mi palo
A los violines los hacemos nuestros gatos
Los del pabellos vip son refugiados
Ahora estos guardados no podemos zafar
La facaya está afilada asi que le vamos a dar

Tumbero yo soy, ya voy a salir
Tumbero yo soy, que se arme el botín
Tumbero yo soy, ya voy a salir
Cuando esté afuera... temas a morir

“El travesaño” (2001) by La Piba

Iba para el baile cuando de repente
Me crucé a mi novio
Iba caminando el muy desgraciado muy acompañado
El pobre no sabía que era mi vecino y se llama Cacho
Qué linda sorpresa cuando la desnude va a ver el pedazo
Te comés un travesaño, hay que tarado
Ay ay que si se enoja te pone el pedazo
(Che si te cayó una moneda, me la agarrás)
(Eso te pasa por jeropa)

“La jarra loca” (2000) by Flor de Piedra

Estaba en el baile tomando fernet con coca
Sin darme cuenta una chica le metió
Una pastilla color rosa

La jarra seguía pasando de boca en boca
Mareados seguimos tomando de esta jarra loca
Empezamos a ver dibujitos animados
Y todo el baile quedó... ooooo... ¡descontrolado!

Salten todos y no sean caretas que esta noche no tiene bajón
Salten todos con Flor de Piedra, si pinta el roquí, pinta el descontrol

Estaba en el baile tomando fernet con coca
Y de repente una chica le metió
Una pastilla color rosa

La jarra seguía pasando de boca en boca
Mareados seguimos tomando
De esta jarra loca

Empezamos a ver
Dibujitos animados
Y todo el baile quedó... oooooo... ¡descontrolado!

“Descontrolado” (2002) by Guachín

Ya llegó el fin de semana
Ese que tanto esperamos
Y juntamos las monedas para salir a bailar
Y junto con mis amigos nos juntamos en la esquina
Para emborracharnos todos y salir a descontrolar

Vamos al boliche todos medios locos pero las mujeres te cortan el rostro
Porque soy borracho y no soy careta como los demás

Descontrolado, yo soy un delirado
Un loco y un pirado y sé que no puedo cambiar
Descontrolado, yo soy un buen muchacho
Pero un poco borracho y no me puedo rescatar

“Mi flor” (2001) by Damas Gratis

Yo tengo una flor
La tengo que cuidar
Y cuando sea grande

Me la voy a fumar.
Todas las noches
La tengo que regar
Aunque sea ilegal
Para mí es medicinal
Porque ella todo me cura
Cuando me pinta la locura
Y me da tranquilidad
Tenés los ojos colorados
Tu vieja no sabe que fumás
Qué fumás?
Todos se tratan de drogado
Para mí que fumancheás
Fumancheros, dónde están?
Vamos a fumanchear
Yo quiero fumanchear
Fumancheando reggae
Está todo bien
Alta locura, Fidel
Venimos cantando
Con Pablo Lescano
Demostrando a toda la gente
Que somos hermanos
Fumancheros
Sí, sí, sí

“Quiero vitamina” (2000) by Damas Gratis

Yo quiero tomar vitamina
Yo quiero tomar vitamina
Me compro una bolsa y estoy pila, pila.
(Vamos los pibes)
Ay que pedo tengo

No puedo caminar
Estoy re cantina
Yo quiero tomar vitamina
Me compro una bolsa y estoy pila, pila.

“Re piola” (2003) by El Original

Vengo re piola para bailar
Vengo re piola para gozar
Todos los pibes cumbieros
Lo bailan sin parar

Vengo re piola para bailar
Vengo re piola para gozar
Con las manos para arriba
Todos lo bailan sin parar

Vamos todos a bailar
Porque esto recién comienza
Con este descontrol que te parte la cabeza
Vamos todos a bailar porque
Esto no se termina moviendo
Para abajo moviendo para arriba

Vengo re piola para bailar
Vengo re piola para gozar
Todos los pibes cumbieros
Lo bailan sin parar

Vengo re piola para bailar
Vengo re piola para gozar

Vengo re piola para bailar
Vengo re piola para gozar
Todos los pibes cumbieros
Lo bailan sin parar

“Gatillo fácil” (2000) by Flor de Piedra

Le dicen gatillo fácil, para mí lo asesinó a ese pibe de la calle que en su camino cruzó
El se daba la macho, con su chapa policial, lleva fierro bien polenta y permiso pá matar
A él le dicen Federico, yo le digo polizón y como canta Flor de Piedra vos sólo sos un botón
Vos sos un botón, nunca vi un policía tan amargo como vos.

Gatillo fácil te gritan al pasar
Gatillo fácil, nada más

Gatillo fácil nunca vas a pagar porque sos cana, rati de la federal
Porque sos cana, rati de la federal

No se olviden de Cabezas, de Bulacio y Bordón
Hoy la lista es tan larga que no puedo cantar hoy
Eso le pasa a cualquiera, cuidate de ese botón
Dios no quiere que en la fila el siguiente seas vos
Vos, sos un botón, nunca vi un policía tan amargo como vos
Gatillo fácil

“Poliguampa” (2001) by Los Pibes Chorros

Todo el día estás patrullando la ciudad
Haciendo abuso de tu chapa policial
Pero no sabes lo guampudo que sos
Porque a tu mujer me la estoy comiendo yo

Policía, policía qué amargado se te ve

Cuando vos estás patrullando
Me la como a tu mujer

Policía, policía qué amargado se te ve
Cuando vos estás patrullando
Me la como a tu mujer

“Poli en acción” (2008) by Damas Gratis

Con un tiro en el tobillo
Voy corriendo hasta el pasillo
Con un tiro en el tobillo
Voy vorriendo hasta el pasillo

La parca y la gorra me quieren llevar
La parca y la gorra me quieren matar
Voy llegando a la casilla rescato mi zapatilla
Rescato mi guacha el 38 que martilla y brilla

La parca y la gorra me quieren llevar
La parca y la gorra me quieren matar

Porque ahí viene ellos son
Los policías en acción
Hasta trajeron a la televisión
Y si me agarran voy a la prisión

Porque ahí viene ellos son
Los policías en acción
Hasta trajeron a la televisión
Y si me agarran voy a la prisión

Te quieren llevar

Te quieren matar
La parca y la gorra te quieren agarrar
Corre por el pasillo tÍrate al sanj3n
Porque buscan un pibe muy parecido a vos
Con esa visera y esa bermuda
CÁmbiate la ropa mejor por las dudas
Si la policÍa anda patrullando
Será que a vos te andan buscando

Con un tiro en el tobillo
Voy corriendo hasta el pasillo
Con un tiro en el tobillo
Voy corriendo hasta el pasillo

La parca y la gorra me quieren llevar
La parca y la gorra me quieren matar

Voy llegando a la casilla
Rescato mis zapatillas
Rescato mi guacho el 38
Que martilla y brilla

La parca y la gorra me quieren llevar
La parca y la gorra me quieren matar

Porque ahÍ viene ellos son
Los policÍas en acci3n
Hasta trajeron a la televisi3n
Y si me agarran voy a la prisi3n

Porque ahÍ viene ellos son
Los policÍas en acci3n
Hasta trajeron a la televisi3n

Y si me agarran voy a la prisión

Policías en acción!

“Ladrón de lo sacaste” (2000) by Flor de Piedra

Tengo que pedir mi libertad y me condenan porque salgo a robar,

¿Por qué a mí? Si los que roban de verdad, tienen la libertad.

Ellos son la mayoría de políticos y policías.

(Cumbia cabeza, con cerveza).

“Industria argentina” (2001) by Damas Gratis

Ay, ay, ay

Qué risa que me da

Te van a matar

Si la plata no está

Vendiste a la Argentina

Sos capaz de vender a tu mamá

Ay, ay, ay

Qué risa que me da

Tu casa van a quemar

Mataste hasta Norma Pla

Vendiste a la Argentina

Sos capaz de vender a tu mamá

Patacones, Quebracho, Lecop

La puta que te parió

Devolve la plata

Que te llevaste al exterior

Al exterior

Hay Caballo / Fernando
Qué rata que sos
La puta que te parió
Devolve la plata
Que te llevaste al exterior
Al exterior

Políticos, de porquería
Se robaron
Lo poco que quedaba en la Argentina
Yo sabía, que no cabía
Yo sabía, que no cabía

“Discriminado” (1999) by Yerba Brava

Su suerte ya estaba escrita desde el momento en que nació
Hijo de padres villeros, con la cumbia se crió
Y ahora que está más grande y al baile quiere colar

El rati con bronca grita: negro villa, vos no entrás
Todos se hacen los giles, te dejan siempre tirado
Que por ser negro villero él estaba condenado.

En el trabajo tampoco pega, de todos lados
El reboto, le buscan todos los peros, cansado el negor ya se rindió
La sociedad no le dió salida y el mal camino encaró
En una noche pesada, la muerte se lo llevó.

Appendix 3: Track list CD

For a better impression of the phenomenon of *cumbia villera* a CD is added with several *cumbia villera* songs.

1. “Pibe cantina” by Yerba Brava (1999)
2. “La jarra loca” by Flor de Piedra (2000)
3. “Industria argentina” by Damas Gratis (2001)
4. “Andrea” by Los Pibes Chorros (2001)
5. “Tumberos” Yerba Brava (1999)
6. “Laura se te ve la tanga” by Damas Gratis (2001)
7. “Tú sabes amar” by El Original (2007)
8. “Ahora estoy solo” by Yerba Brava (2005)
9. “Borracho soy” by Los Pibes Chorros (2002)
10. “Mi alto faso” by Damas Gratis (2004)
11. “Amor de colegio” by El Original (2007)
12. “Poli en acción” by Damas Gratis (2008)

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Interviews

- 2008a Interview with Pablo Alabarces, sociologist and professor at the University of Buenos Aires 19-02-2008.
- 2008b Interview with Diego Horro, manager of *cumbia villera* band Los Pibes Chorros 04-03-2008.
- 2008c Interview with Víctor, singer and writer of Los Pibes Chorros 04-03-2008.
- 2008d Interview with Ale, musician of Los Pibes Chorros 04-03-2008.
- 2008e Interview with Punga, entertainer and singer of Los Pibes Chorros 04-03-2008.
- 2008f Interview with Fernando, host of several TV and radio shows Fantástico Bailable 04-03-2008.
- 2008g Interview with Richard, webmaster official Damas Gratis website, former band member, and close friend Damas Gratis 19-03-2008.
- 2008h Interview with Cristian Alarcón, journalist El Diario Crítica and writer of the book *Cuando me muera quiero que me toquen cumbia* 18-03-2008.
- 2008i Focus group with five fans at (before) the Damas Gratis concert at Niceto Club 14-02-2008.
- 2008j Focus group with fans at a concert of Los Pibes Chorros and El Original 07-03-2008.
- 2008k Interview with Catalina Sosa, sociologist 27-03-2008.
- 2008l Interview with Leonardo Anolles, producer TV show Pasión de Sábado 05-04-2008.
- 2008m Interview with Ariel Salinas, singer of *cumbia villera* band El Traidor 05-04-2008.
- 2008n Interview with Román Sivori, singer of *cumbia villera* band El Original 07-03-2008.
- 2008o Focus group with middle class Argentines: Alejandro Massri, Martín Pasmanter, Fernando Iglesias, Emiliano Blanco, Demian Blanco. Several times between 10-02-2008 and 25-06-2008.
- 2008p Interview with Pablo Lescano, singer of Damas Gratis 13-06-2008.
- 2008q Focus group/interviews with visitors and manager of club El Tropicango, Zona Norte 12-04-2008.

General Internet Resources

<http://www.muevamueva.com>

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