

# Enframing 'Peruvianness'?: Notes on the Poetics and Pragmatics of Public Performance among Peruvian migrants in New Jersey

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## ABSTRACT

This paper will examine the yearly 'Peruvian Parade' (*Fiestas Patrias*) organized by Peruvian migrants in Paterson (NJ) as a site of cultural and political mediation. By analyzing issues regarding the social organization, sponsorship, framing, and wider context of the event, the paper will explore how this particular spectacle mediates not only links between subjectivity and nations (Peru and USA), but also between a series of other instances of national and transnational politics. The paper argues that rather than just enacting a 'collective identity', Peruvians in New Jersey use such occasions to reinterpret social relationships, draw social boundaries, contest relations of inequality, and establish new localized hegemonies within the diasporic community. The material presented in this paper stems from preliminary findings from a pilot-study carried out in Paterson in the summer of 2002 and is part of my dissertation project on transnational migration, social memory, and media practices between Peru and the US.

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Public ritualized events in immigrant or diasporic communities have often been seen as mimetic spectacles appropriating, copying, or recontextualizing cultural practices which are seen to be original in other contexts and which are then altered but somehow reproduced through the mimetic reenactments in the diasporic communities. *Fiestas Patrias* - a national holiday commemorating the Peruvian Independence Day of 1821 - has been celebrated in Peru as a military and civic event since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, it is only in the past two decades that it has emerged as an important public event in the Peruvian diaspora (especially in the US).<sup>2</sup> Whereas *Fiestas Patrias* in Peru is predominantly a military and civic event where the President addresses the nation (Degregori 2000:281), the Peruvian Parade in Paterson, organized by Peruvian immigrants in New Jersey, adopts the framing of ethnic parades used by multiple immigrant groups in the US to claim 'pride' and cultural citizenship.<sup>3</sup>

This paper will discuss the yearly Peruvian Parade, Inc. in Paterson, New Jersey as a site of cultural and political mediation. What happens when an event historically associated with a specific state (the Peruvian) and a specific historical moment (Independence) gets launched into transnational circulation? How is the meaning of this cultural and civic event maintained or altered when it gets re-signified in a new social and national context? What are the larger transnational politics that characterize this community at this particular historical moment? I will consider both the saliency of Peruvian and US nationalism and of US Latino cultural politics involving the celebration. I wish to turn away from seeing culture as 'ethnicity' only (e.g. 'Peruvianness' or 'Peruvian Identity') to looking at the wider social fields and sites in which 'Culture' is produced and gets circulated for consumption (See Appadurai 1996; Dávila 2001; Miller 1995; Myers 2001). Through a detailed ethnography of the Parade and the activities surrounding it, the paper asks: In what ways, does this kind of event mediate what it means to be Peruvian in global, multicultural settings like the New York tri-state area? What processes of national and transnational policies and politics are at work here? To what extent does the event as a public spectacle animating the urban landscape provide an arena for the cultural construction and contestation over the parameters of citizenship and of national cultural politics in the United States?

## PERUVIAN MIGRATION THE NORTHEASTERN UNITED STATES

Teófilo Altamirano traces the beginnings of Peruvian migration to the New York tri-state area to the 1910s and 1920s when the textile industry was blooming in Northeastern United

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<sup>1</sup> I thank Arlene Dávila for helping me think and work out some initial problems in the framing of my argument and Tobias Reu and Alex Huerta-Mercado for insightful comments on the first draft of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> See the link [http://www.peru.com/otros\\_especiales/fiestas\\_patrias\\_2002/noticias/](http://www.peru.com/otros_especiales/fiestas_patrias_2002/noticias/) for a summary of President Toledo's address to the Peruvian nation on July 28, 2002 and for photos of the military parade in Lima.

<sup>3</sup> The Puerto Rican Day Parade on Fifth Avenue in New York City (together with St. Patrick's Day Parade) is probably the most well-known of these ethnic parades and is a model to which the Peruvians of Paterson makes reference when narrating the organizational history of the Peruvian Parade in Paterson. The immediate historical antecedent for the Puerto Rican Day Parade in New York City was the Hispanic Day Parade, founded in 1956, by the Federación de Sociedades Hispanas – a pan-Hispanic constituency. However, this pan-Hispanic Unity only lasted two years until the Puerto Rican Parade formed its own independent constituency in 1958 (Kasinitz and Freidenberg-Herbstein 1987).

States (Altamirano 1998, 1999). Peruvians established themselves in the industrial economy as workers in the textile industry among other immigrant groups (mostly European), often in low-waged, manual, and unskilled jobs (Altamirano 1990).<sup>4</sup> Peruvian migration to the US continued throughout the post WWII period and increased from the early 1980s and onwards in the face of growing economic and political instability in Peru (Mahler 1995:49). The 1990 US Census reported a total of 175,035 Peruvians in the US whereas in the 2000 Census figures this number had increased to 233,926. Of this total, the 2000 Census reports 37,672 Peruvians in the State of New Jersey, being Paterson, Clifton and Passaic the strongest Peruvian communities.<sup>5</sup> Altamirano estimates a total of 500,000 Peruvians in the US by the end of the 1990s (1999:28), of which 30,000 are estimated to live in the New Jersey area (Altamirano 1998:12). Estimates, however, are always difficult because migrants are often undocumented and do not often register at their local consulates or at any US government agencies.

The first generation of Peruvian migrants arrived, some with work permits other without, to work in the textile industry. Of the Peruvians who arrived to Paterson in the early 1980s, the majority arrived crossing the US-Mexican border (Avila 2002b, see also Oboler 1995). Many of them are now residents or citizens, some due to the 1986 Amnesty Law IRCA.<sup>6</sup> In recent years, an increasingly common strategy is to arrive by plane to Miami with a tourist visa, which will later be overstayed, and from there continue to Newark or JFK on domestic flights. This specific entry strategy requires a lot of preparation in Peru before departure in order to approximate a certain Peruvian middle class profile of someone who could truly be a potential tourist to the US. These requisites include having a bank account and a stable job with a stable pay check for more than six months to show at the US Embassy when applying for visa (Berg 2002). Potential migrants link up to certain networks or so-called 'travel agencies' to which they pay a large amount of money and in return get a tourist visa (sometimes in altered passports), a temporary deposit in their bank accounts before the credit check at the US Embassy and a plane ticket.<sup>7</sup> However, several of recent arrived Peruvians that I have talked to in both Paterson and New York City mentioned that even this strategy had become increasingly difficult after the general crack-down on immigrants in the US after September 11, 2001.

Peruvians migrants in New Jersey come from a series of social and geographical backgrounds in Peru. The majority of people I interviewed during my pilot study in Paterson, New Jersey (Passaic County) in the summer of 2002 had migrated to Paterson from Lima, especially from the neighborhoods of Surquillo, La Victoria, Barrios Altos, and Callao. Some were born and have grown up in these neighborhoods whereas others lived there for longer or shorter periods and then traveled to Paterson as a continuation of rural-urban migration from places like Ayacucho, Cajamarca, Trujillo, and Piura. As one woman from Piura stated, commenting on the geographical and ethnic backgrounds of her co-nationals in Paterson:

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<sup>4</sup> See Joseph Gowaskie's study *Workers in New Jersey History* (1997) for a historical analysis of the contributions of New Jersey workers' to the development of the New Jersey state economy and the nation's industry.

<sup>5</sup> Other states with high concentrations of Peruvians, according to Census 2000 figures, are New York (37.340), Florida (44.026), and California (44.200).

<sup>6</sup> Legalization, however, is never straightforward and requires all kinds of proof in order to qualify as legible for amnesty.

<sup>7</sup> These strategies have been documented extensively and discussed for the case of transnational migration between Peru and Italy by Carla Tamagno in her forthcoming dissertation (Wageningen University, The Netherlands). See also Tamagno (2002)

"The majority of people who come to Paterson are people who comes from *outside* [e.g. the provinces], but who have lived in Lima before coming here". The general picture of Peruvians in New Jersey is quite clearly divided in zones: The Counties of Hudson (for example Union City) and North Bergen have large concentrations of migrants from Lima and other minor coastal cities such as Huacho and Barranca, whereas the county of Morris has a larger concentration of migrants from the Central and Southern Highlands (Junin and Ayacucho primarily).<sup>8</sup>

## **PUBLIC EVENTS AS AN ANALYTICAL LENS ON NATIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL CULTURAL POLITICS**

Public events have long been of interest to anthropology - often under terms as diverse as ritual, spectacle, processions, parades, carnivals, festivals, etc. Early studies of public rituals were influenced by the Durkheimian tradition of looking at rituals as collective representation and by Levi-Straussian structuralism, which interpreted these practices as reflections of an underlying normative and universal structure (Handelman 1998:9-10). Others highlighted that ritual and public events address, display and often contest and rework social discontinuities embedded in wider social contexts and relationships (for example the works of Gluckman, Mitchell, Turner, Leech).<sup>9</sup> Poststructuralist and materialist critiques later dismantled the premises of the studies which gave myth and belief systems analytical primacy over ritual as practice, arguing that these studies were a-historical and inaccurately saw ritual as just simple reproduction of a pre-existing social pattern without room for social change and renewal.<sup>10</sup> The study of ritualized social and cultural practices has in recent years experienced a revival in anthropology with a renewed interest in public spheres and mediated spectacles. In spite of competing theoretical perspectives, the idea that public events can work as an analytical lens to look at larger social formations which goes beyond the events themselves is now generally accepted and can be seen articulated in a series of recent works from anthropologists and LA scholars (See for example the works of Thomas Abercrombie 2001, David Guss 2000; Marisol de la Cadena 2000; Gisela Cánepa Koch 2001

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<sup>8</sup> The diversity of regional backgrounds is reflected in the presence of hometown/regional associations in Paterson and the surrounding cities. A number of them have registered at the Peruvian Consulate in Paterson: Asociación Paterson-Surquillo, Club Social San Antonio de Cocha Ayacucho, Club Cajamarca, Asociación Barranca USA, Inc and Sport Social Club Chalacos Perú (Callao). See Avila (2002b:57) and Altamirano (2000) for a longer list of Peruvian Associations in New Jersey and in the US more generally.

<sup>9</sup> Max Gluckman first proposed the idea of event analysis in 1940 in a paper titled 'An Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand'. Gluckman starts his analysis with a description of a ceremony opening a new bridge, performed by the Chief Native Commissioner under the British Colonial Empire. Through his description, he isolates the important elements in the event and then traces each of these back into the larger society, in order to explain their significance in a complex picture of what at that time was 'modern Zululand' (Mitchell 1956: 1). J. Clyde Mitchell develops the method further in his study of the Kalela Dance on the copper belt of Northern Rhodesia and later in his theoretical and methodological writings on what he termed 'the situational perspective'.

<sup>10</sup> Catherine Bell (1992) came up with the term *ritualization* which became very influential in ritual studies and in anthropological studies of ritual. Bell defines ritualization as practices or actions which differentiate themselves from other kinds of more mundane social actions. Bell's approach stresses the primacy of the social act in itself (ibid:67) and she argues that a focus on *ritualization* can show both the purpose of the ritual activity, it's social efficacy, and lastly the embodiment of ritual in complex situations, that is the interaction of the social body within a symbolically constituted spatial and temporal environment (ibid:93).

and n.d; Zoila Mendoza 2000; Stuart Rockefeller 1999; Mark Rogers 1999 and Thomas Turino 1993).

Works on Peruvian public performances outside the borders of the Peruvian nation-state have mainly been analyzed by looking at the compositions and motivations of the voluntary institutions that organize and stage these public events such as cultural associations, sport clubs, or religious brotherhoods (Altamirano 1998; Ruiz 1999). Such analysis often assume that Peruvians are reproducing a 'national identity' or even a specific 'Peruvianness' as a human necessity growing out of the sometimes inhumane experiences that they as migrants go through abroad. Others have chosen to "track down" social and cultural phenomena in global circulation by focusing on processes of de-territorialization (Avila 2002a) and expatriation of cultural practices and symbols as for example religious icons (Paerregaard 2001). These two latter studies, one about the cult to Señor de Qoyllur R'iti and the other about devotion to Señor de los Milagros, vary in the degree to which they attribute importance to horizontal transnational ties as shaping these social and cultural practices abroad. Common for all is a general conclusion that such public events can serve as a source of collective identity either when used to sustain transnational ties with parallel institutions at home or when responding to relations of inequalities that shape their identity as immigrants and ethnic minority in the host country.

Early scholarly work on ethnic parades in the US more specifically emphasized that such public events functioned as a staged presentation of an ethnic minority vis-à-vis a larger community. The performed or staged identities were seen as important moments of displaying symbolic unity across internal political and social differences of a given community – even when the minority groups in question were not always in control of their own representation (Kasinitz and Freidenberg-Herbststein 1987; Schneider 1990). Recent studies have emphasized how the different stakes at work in the staging of such events are influenced not only by the cultural politics and the nationalist vs. transnational strategies of different immigrant groups and activists but also by transnational neo-liberal policies and politics (both government and corporate), which ties local community struggles to larger economic and transnational processes. In her work on Puerto Rican and Mexican activists in El Barrio and their respective investment in El Barrio as a "Latino space", Arlene Dávila analyzes the ways in which culture and identity figure differently in the staking of claims to rights, visibility, and political recognition of these two immigrant groups (Dávila, forthcoming, p. 165). Although the political claims of these two Latino constituencies in terms of social and economic rights may run parallel, their nationalist or transnational strategies adopted are at times very different and may sometimes place these groups at odds with each other (ibid:193). As a historical constituency in El Barrio and because of their political status within the US, Puerto Ricans are more inclined to invest in the US-Latinidad whereas Mexicans as a new and largely undocumented immigrant group are still very much invested in a nationality-driven claims-making as they try to establish themselves and gain recognition as worthy and hardworking immigrants (ibid:167). The same can be true even within the same national constituency, as I hope to show later on, when discussing more in details the internal dynamics of the Peruvian Parade within the local community of Peruvians in Paterson. The various stakeholders who participate in one way or the other in constructing the public image of Peruvians in New Jersey have themselves very different views on what the parade can actually *do* for their constituency and what it can come to mean for the local and transnational Peruvian community.

## THE PERUVIAN PARADE

It was a warm summer morning when I met on 41<sup>st</sup> St. and 8<sup>th</sup> Av. in Manhattan with my friend Alex and Tom, my camera person for the day, to take one of the small Peruvian-owned busses out to Paterson. The bus was full of Peruvians, some of them *vendedores ambulantes* from Queens and other New York City neighborhoods with bags of flags, bracelets, baseball caps, and T-shirts with inscriptions such as “Te amo Peru”, “Soy Peruano carajo y que?”. All of us were headed for Paterson to witness, participate or make a living off the Peruvian Independence Day. As we arrived to Passaic early no-one was really around yet, but we got a glimpse of Maria Silva – the hard-working president of the Peruvian Parade for the year 2002 – giving instructions on how to distribute the space in the truck which was to be used as the stage for the invited authorities.<sup>11</sup> The beauty queens and some children dressed up as post-modern and somewhat eclectic versions of young Inca princesses were also around. *Música criolla* spilled out from the store fronts of several flag selling souvenir shops along Passaic Main Street. The truck-stage had been placed in front of a Payless ShoeSource® store and a random local pizza place announcing family size pizza and coke for only 9 dollars.

The Peruvian Parade was first organized in 1986 by a group of Peruvian residents in Paterson as a commemoration of *Fiestas Patrias* – the Peruvian Independence Day on July 28. According to Maria Silva, the objective of the Annual Parade is to “seguir prevaleciendo y mostrando al mundo exterior y a las otras comunidades la Cultura de nosotros los Peruanos, Nuestra Cultura, y también así mismo a la juventud peruana que vea que desde lejos acá en tierras lejanas nosotros seguimos manteniendo nuestra raza, nuestra raza India, nuestra lengua que es el español y dejándole saber a la comunidad peruana y latinoamericana que debemos preservar esa cultura que es el español que nos han dejado nuestros antepasados”.<sup>12</sup> Clearly, as we shall explore further later on, The Peruvian Parade is a site for contestation over representation of what is considered ‘Peruvianness’, both internally and externally to the Peruvian immigrant constituency. This is but one of the aspects I hope to address in the following. I will also look at the larger transnational politics that engages this particular community of Peruvians in New Jersey at this particular historical moment and consider the saliency of nationalist-driven claim-making strategies versus US Latino cultural politics.

A mix of organizations, companies, and institutions with or without floats participate in the Peruvian Parade accompanied by a general spectatorship. Every year the parade starts out on Main Street in Passaic, passes through the neighboring town of Clifton and finally ends in front of the Town Hall in Paterson. The total trajectory is more than five miles. Participants in the Parade come from Paterson and from other surrounding cities as Elizabeth, Union City, Irvington, Newark, and New York City. Other Latino communities of the area - Columbians, Ecuadorians, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Dominicans - are also present as spectators for the event. According to one New Jersey tourist guide more than 80.000 people usually participate in this event.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The board of the Peruvian Parade is elected for a period of two years. This year was Maria’s first event as President of the organization.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Maria Silva in July 2002.

<sup>13</sup> The Peruvian Parade appears under July cultural events in the guide *Latinos – Guía del Visitante* (New Jersey Commerce and Economic Growth Commission). This number, although echoed by Maria who in a later interview

Around 11am the Main Street, which had been blocked off for the occasion, was filled with people and attention was directed towards the stage. The toast master started to animate the crowd, welcome the Gran Mariscal of this year's Parade – *el caballero de la canción criolla* - Rafael Matallana<sup>14</sup>; the new consul in New Jersey Señora Embajadora Rosa Silva; the Democratic Member of Congress Bill Pascrell, the local journalist of the year, the woman of the year and other categories of honor and finally went on to thank Maria and her fellow board members for their efforts in organizing the event. Clearly this was a *live* display of Peruvians who had somewhat to some extent accomplished the Peruvian American Dream, earned important titles in both local and state governments and somehow 'made it' in spite of the difficulties of integration/assimilation into mainstream middle class America. What is at play here is maybe best illustrated through the words of Señor Felipe Reinoso, a leader of education and Member of the Assembly of the State of Connecticut. He addressed the Peruvian and Latino audience emphasizing that education is the most important input that immigrant parents can give to their children in order for the Peruvian American community to stop being merely observers in US national politics and instead transform themselves into active participants and agents in the political and historical processes of the American nation. Continuing on the track of national politics, democratic member of Congress Bill Pascrell offered the following salute to the Peruvians present: "This is our 17<sup>th</sup> Parade, celebrating 181 years of freedom. The relationship between Peru and the United States is very strong and will only get stronger. As a Member of Congress I salute the Parade, I salute Maria Silva, a great person and a great leader, and I salute the hardworking Peruvians and Peruvian Americans. God bless the United States and God bless Peru. Viva Peru". Meanwhile his assistants were mingling with the crowds handing out stickers and info on how to join the local party chapter. The grand Marshall of the parade Rafael Matallana made reference in his initial intervention to the Peruvian historian Jorge Basadre's famous phrase "El Peru es más grande que todos sus problemas" and added: "But that does not mean that we can not dance, sing, and show our joy". All the speakers were honored by the Peruvian Parade Inc. with ribbons of the Peruvian flags, which they wore throughout the Parade.

After all the speeches of the local politicians, community leaders, and invited 'celebrities', time had come to sing the national anthem. More flags were waived. The celebrities descended the stage and Rafael Matallana was invited to cut the ribbon and signal the official beginning of the 2002 Parade. A giant flag was carried in front of the local authorities as they started to march down Passaic Main Street. Cars had lined up after the authorities, and after a little pre-show by one Marinera dance group, the parade started moving. Someone in the audience shouted: "Y un huanito?"

The Parade had a total of around 30-35 floats, some with live bands, others with loud sound equipments. The large majority of these floats were sponsored by a variety of local (and

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claimed that 75.000 people participated in the event, is greatly overestimated to my eye. After the event local journalists estimated that around 5.000 people had participated in the event.

<sup>14</sup> A central task in the planning phase entails deciding who should be invited as the Grand Marshall of the Parade. Usually, the board makes a list of several people, who they think of as having done something important for Peru, and then they rank these according to preference. This year they had three top candidates: pop singer Gianmarco, TV star and talk-show hostess Laura Bozzo, and composer and musician Oscar Aviles. Gianmarco declined the invitation and Laura Bozzo, who was present in last year's Puerto Rican Day Parade as 'madrina internacional', excused herself with a scheduled commitment in Argentina (this was before she was arrested for multiple corruption charges for having supposedly received 3 million dollars and 'legal favors' from Montesinos for her NGO).

some transnational) private businesses, some offering everyday services such as realty and real estate offices, a private health center, several mortgage bankers (one with the slogan "Gateway to the American Dream"), the PNC bank, Inca Cola (now owned by the Coca Cola Company and marketed in the US as Golden Cola), the bus company Paterson-New York Express service providing transport between Paterson and New York City, several Peruvian Food Import companies, a Peruvian bakery, several local restaurants, the local postal workers union and finally a few companies offering services related to life-cycle events such as weddings (Pilar's Bridal shop) and funerals (Hispanic Funeral Services). Besides the businesses, a series of local media participated with floats, among them the local daily *El Especialito*, owned by a Cuban businessman; Radio Única, also Cuban owned; and finally the TV program *El show de Angelita y sus Muñecos*. Salsa and merengue – 'musica internacional' as some local commentators called it - were the two dominant musical genres for both live bands and sound equipments of the business floats.

Another constituency which had a minor presence in the parade was a number of cultural institutions although there were not that many of them. Club Cajamarca and Peruvian Parade, Inc. had their own floats which carried all the local beauty queens and princesses along with an enormous sound system with *música criolla* – a todo dar! Most other cultural groups did not have floats, but either marched or danced in between the cars such as the Asociación Latino Americana de Cultura (founded 1999) or the Escuela de Folklore Peruano. The marinera dancers and the Washington DC and Virginia-based section of the Bolivian group Caporales de San Simón danced all along for the five miles of duration of the parade. But who were actually dressed up in folkloric costumes were not the self-identified 'cultural institutions', but rather representatives from a few of the businesses, especially the mortgage firms and the banks, who had been persuaded to do so by the board members of the Parade. In one board meeting, Maria told me, it had been decided that the participants should be encouraged to "represent and show the traditional clothing from Peru, both from *sierra*, *costa*, and *selva*, so that other Latinos and other people in general could see the traditional clothing that represents Peruvian diversity".<sup>15</sup> Only a few civic organizations participated in the parade, among them were Mujeres Latinas en Acción NJ (a mixed Latina group), the Peruvian American Teachers Association, and finally, the Peruvian Advisory Committee (NJ).

What most called my attention was the participation of a local after-school program titled Military Scout Troop 9-11, who were probably the segment that most mimicked the *Fiestas Patrias* in Peru. Young boys from the age 11-17 and young girls from the age of 10-15 marched in military uniforms to the rhythm of military march music, carrying the flags of many nations. In the middle of their block was a very young boy seated, laid-back, driving a miniature tank as the Parade advanced forward. He certainly looked like a mini-put version of a stereotypical military dictator, although this was probably not the intention. Several people among the spectators commented upon his attitude and smiled – some of them, like us, a little uneasy.

Among the central activities in the production of the event is the coordination with local authorities. The parade has an assigned starting spot and a designated starting and ending time. The celebration is highly regulated and patrolled and the ending celebration restricted to one place within a certain time frame. In other words, participation in the parade requires 'decent' public appearance as 'good citizens' – echoed in the salute of Bill Pascrell to "the

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<sup>15</sup> Interview, July 2002.



hardworking Peruvians and Peruvian Americans". When Maria first became a president of the organization, she was surprised that they could actually be able to occupy and close down the streets for almost an entire day and that the local politicians demonstrated an interest and a positive attitude towards the Parade. She said in an interview recapitulating the experience of the Parade: "Cuando nos fuimos a Passaic no nos negaron nada, el alcalde Hamilton Torres muy amable nos dio toda la atención que como institución nos acreditaba. Lo mismo sucedió con Clifton, el alcalde James Ansaldi también muy amable nos dio lo mismo que nos dio Passaic y igual el Alcalde José Joey Torres de Paterson nos dio todo". According to Maria, the support that the Peruvian Parade receives of the local mayors (two of them are Puerto Ricans – Joey Torres is the first Latino mayor of Paterson) is due to the fact that they approve of the Latino visibility in the area. In her own words: "Que se esta logrando que el Latino sobresalga cada día, cada año".

The parade arrived at Paterson Town Hall in the early afternoon. The truck/scene was again lined up, this time in front of the Town Hall, facing the street where all subsequent floats would pass through and be honored for their participation. Celebrities and political leaders were again invited to step up on the scenario and the animator sang the lead of the National anthem of Peru for the second time this day followed by the anthem of the United States. Maria gave her final speech where she echoed the words of San Martín: "El 28 de Julio es la fecha de nuestra libertad, fecha en la cual, repitiendo las estrofas de nuestro himno, los Peruanos rompimos las cadenas de la esclavitud despues de muchos años de opresión. Somos libres, seámoslo siempre, palabras históricas pronunciadas aquella tarde del 1821 por todos los peruanos, haciendo eco al discurso del gran General Don José de San Martín. Mis queridos compatriotas, somos libres seámoslo siempre y vamos a ser orgullosos de nuestro querido Peru, de nuestra raza, aqui a miles y miles de kilometros de nuestra Patria, repitamos con emoción para que nos escuchen en el Peru y sabran lo orgullosos que nos sentimos de nuestra patria... Gracias pueblo pueruano, gracias Latino. Que viva el Peru!".

After Maria's speech all the participating floats and groups entered in parade in front of the Town Hall as their names and sponsors were announced by the toast master. The formal part of the Parade was now over and the last float had left the plaza in front of Paterson Town Hall. Everything had to be packed up and cleaned quickly. Maria extended an invitation to all the spectators to participate in the *Festival de la Cultura* organized on the corner of Market Street and Madison Avenue with music and food. She urged everyone not to drink in the streets and not to create any kind of disorder or public disturbance, in other words, behave as decent and docile American citizen-consumers.

## **PRODUCING & COMSUMING FIESTAS PATRIAS: THE LOGICS OF PUBLIC VISIBILITY**

When talking a closer look at the organizational process of the event, it becomes apparent that rather than just being the occasion to enact a national identity through a moment of 'collective effervescence', Peruvians in New Jersey use the event to reinterpret social relationships, draw social boundaries, and establish new localized hegemonies within the diasporic community. In the following I will discuss some of the different perceptions of the event which circulate in the local community of Paterson. In contrast to many other voluntary and religious institutions, the Peruvian Parade, Inc. does not have an equivalent in Lima or a sister organization in Peru. In this sense it is an entirely local US-based initiative.

This, however, does not mean that the event is isolated from the larger context of both transnational and national cultural politics and economics. The Peruvian Parade is part of a larger set of regularized cultural celebrations in the New Jersey area and figure as a yearly tourist attraction in tourist calendars such as *Latinos – Guía del Visitante*, sponsored by the State of New Jersey, The New Jersey Commerce and Economic Growth Commission, and the Oficina de Viajes y Turismo. In this sense Peruvians are part of the 'diversity inventory' of The New Jersey State Commerce and Economic Growth Commission's marketing strategy, which has as its goal to widen the scope of cultural consumption and make New Jersey a more attractive and 'diverse' itinerary for both Latino and non-Latino tourists. Scholars have recently noted how corporate America has taken note of and targeted the marketing power of the growing Latino population in the US (Dávila 2001; 2002). The events organized by/for Peruvian immigrant communities nationwide in the US to commemorate the Peruvian Independence Day are no exception to this general tendency. In Miami, for example, more than four thousand Peruvians came to the Hipódromo de Hialeah on July 28, 2002, to attend the highly corporate produced event of *Fiestas Patrias* in Miami. Here, Peruvian talk-show host Gisela Valcarcel, "la señito", appeared as the Madrina for this giant event which featured as its main attraction the classical Puerto Rican salsa orchestra La Sonora Ponceña. However, it has also been noted that this recognition of Latinos as 'ethnic consumers' has not been followed up with recognition of social claims and political enfranchisement (Dávila 2001, forthcoming). This is evident in places like Paterson when one in early morning hours drive to Home Depot and encounter several undocumented construction workers who – without any personal insurance – waiting outside to be picked up eventually by someone in need of an extra pair of low-wage hands for the day. Or across the street from the Town Hall of Paterson – in the exact same spot where Maria's words "somos libre seámoslo siempre" brought an end to the Peruvian Parade 2002 - workers line up in early mornings to be recruited for the day by any of the four Temporal Employment Agencies in any kind of unskilled labor to a miserable wage and without any insurance or protection of any kind. This is the everyday life of many of Paterson's most recent Peruvian immigrant population.

Describing the activities of the organization Peruvian Parade, Inc. Maria explains: "Hasta el momento Peruvian Parade es una organización que hace actividades para sacar los fondos para sacar el desfile. Ahorita Peruvian Parade hace lo que es el desfile, pero si ha participado en eventos como cuando han habido problemas en el Perú, cuando ha habido el terremoto desde hace ya dos años, las inundaciones, inclusive hace poco también participó junto a otras instituciones en un maratón para los quemados de la Mesa Redonda en Lima. Pero de por sí de tener un enfoque, no lo tiene Peruvian Parade. Sería de onuestra agrado hacerlo, ojala que se logre, tenemos todavía un periodo de un año, podemos dejar algo sembrado. No quiero decir que lo vamos a hacer por que en realidad no sabemos si se puede lograr. Cosas como estas se necesita de tiempo. Y el tiempo que tiene una directiva es corta".

For Maria, the magnitude and the apparent success of the *desfile* was as much a personal victory as a collective one. She felt that the initial skepticism of certain sectors of the local community toward her board was merely because she was the first female president of the organization. In an interview about the role of women in the organization of the event, she stated: "Había mucha expectativa y querían saber como salía el desfile por que al frente estaba una mujer. Parece que las expectativas eran de que no podíamos sacar el desfile de la magnitud que sacamos. Pero sí quiero dejarle saber al pueblo de afuera que sí, que las mujeres podemos sacar un desfile y llegar a la luna. Por que yo sé – yo creo que si la mujer se lo propone está capacitada para hacerlo. Yo sé de muchas mujeres ahorita en grandes profesiones y en grandes cargos, como tenemos también a una mexicana en el gobierno

americano, que es tesorera, no. Yo creo que podemos hacer eso y muchas cosas mas." For Maria, organizing the event became an issue of demonstrating that women can be excellent community leaders and organizers in Hispanic America.

Other local observers have different views on the organizational process and see the event from a different logic. José Fernandez is a journalist from Lima, who has lived in Paterson for almost three decades. He is the director of one of a local magazine devoted to profiling Peruvians who have progressed and prospered in the community and have them serve as examples to others. He is a tireless observer of community life and politics in Paterson. In an interview, which I will quote at length here, he gives his perspective on the workings of local politics of Peruvian Parade:

"Aquí debe haber como aunos 20 organizaciones, pero que no son nada mas que el producto de una voluntad cinitial entusiasta. Se congregan por ejemplo 5, 6 o 10 personas, se reúnen 10 veces durante un año, pero son los mismos, sin dinero, sin mayores causas, pasó el año, no hicieron nada, no incorporaban nada, quedó en nada, pero parece una organización. Son organizaciones sin cuerpo. Y E inclusive algunos sin espirito. No pueden empezar el desarrollo del proyecto que de algunas manera lo motivo a organizarse, es como un casco nada más. Sin embargo despues aparecen como supuestos líderes de la comunidad por que presiden tal organización, pero no lideran nada. Eso es la realidad de las instituciones. Son instituciones que tienen papel de nacimiento clandestino por que ni siquiera son organizaciones que se ha hecho dentro de lo que es el marco legal del sistema americano que les exige requisitos mínimos para calificar como non-profit. Se organizan y se fundan pero sin personeria jurídica. Pero así siguen existiendo. Un caso típico de esto es por ejemplo La Peruvian Parade. La Peruvian Parade es una institución que tiene 17 años, se fundó en 1986 y hizo su primer desfile de la comunidad peruana. Ninguna directiva ha cumplido con los requisitos mínimos de la ley de instituciones non-profit. No han cumplido con las exigencias de la ley, no registran anualmente sus miembros de la directiva. Ninguna directiva ha presentado balances legalmente aceptados. Ninguna directiva han llegado a registrar por ejemplo 500 miembros y es una organización que supuestamente tiene convocatoria para mucha gente....Sus asambleas no llegan a 100 personas, como mucho, o sea, cómo es que la institución más representativa es la menos representativa? Eso es la realidad...[...]...Talvez las organizaciones que de alguna manera son mas regulares en su desarrollo son las organizaciones religiosas.<sup>16</sup>...[...]...Si uno va al desfile se nota que hay como unos 5000 personas que van al desfile. Hay una respuesta de la comunidad de manera espontánea. Es la ley física de la inercia, es el momento que se da por que se da. Pero ellos alimentan una falsa estima. Son en el fondo instituciones fantasmas sin capacidad de convocatoria, sin proyectos reales de servicios a la comunidad. Son entes figurativos sin ningun merito. No disponen ni de membrecia, ni de directivos comprometidos. *En el fondo es una muestra o una hexibición de una imagen peruana, pero inútil. No es útil. Pero está allí. Es aun presencia steril. Por ejemplo un hombre que no tiene capacidad de procreación es un esteril, verdad. O una mujer esteril, puede tener presencia y belleza, pero es esteril entonces no esta sirviendo a ninguna causa...existe pero no produce.* Esas instituciones son figuras

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<sup>16</sup> At the moment there are nine religious brotherhoods in Paterson and surrounding areas: Asociación de San martin de Porres, Asociación de San Martin de Porres de Weehawken, Asociación de la Santísima Virgen de Cocharcas, Hermandad de San martin de Porres de Paterson, Hermandad de San Martín de Porres de New Jersey, Hermandad de San Martín de Porres de Union City, Hermandad del Señor de Muruguay, Hermandad del Señor de los Milagros de Cathedral de St. Johns and finally Hermandad del Señor de los Milagros de la Iglesia de Lourdes (Avila 2002b; Ruíz 1999).

decorativas, que consuelan, dicen estuvimos allí, pero *no estan produciendo ni reproduciendo nada*".<sup>17</sup>

When Maria assumed the Presidency of the organization, a lot of irregularities from previous years made her task more difficult. She and her board decided that in order to avoid having to deal with the many past deficient reports, financial balances, etc., they would just re-incorporate the institution under a different name. And so they did. A few months after the Parade was over, they filed an application for recognition of a new non-profit organization called "Desfile Peruano". Maria who just thought of simplifying the paperwork of the institution had no idea of what was about to happen. When a group of regular members of the Peruvian Parade, including one of the founding members, heard about the name change, open conflict broke out between Maria's board and this other group who, claiming that with the birth of a new institution, the Peruvian Parade was left without a board, decided to call for a new general assembly. On November 3<sup>rd</sup> 2002, a supposed general assembly of the Peruvian Parade elected a new board in which Maria was not invited to participate. Both parts decided to go to the press and the local media community was divided in two. Maria published her claims in the weekly paper *Sin Fronteras* and the 'new board' of Peruvian Parade had support of the quincenal *El Amauta*.<sup>18</sup> At present, the conflict has escalated to a point where the two parts are going to court in the end of March to hopefully settle the matter, mediated by the American justice system.<sup>19</sup>

What we see in Maria and José' narrations about the Peruvian Parade, Inc. and the event itself are competing ideas of what it means to *do* something for the community. For Maria, visibility and representation have an effect in and of themselves. As a ritualized public event, the Parade in her view *does* something for the Peruvian community by placing them in a larger public sphere and on the larger map of US Latinidad (e.g. statements like "we are *demonstrating* that we can organize a desfile"). She does not see the event itself as a containment of Peruvians within a specific social hierarchy, but rather as transcendence of Peruvians to a Latino constituency through public visibility. However, her emphasis on visibility is not followed up by further claims to social justice and political enfranchisement for Peruvians in the US more generally. When the parade ended she urged the community to behave in accordance with laws of public behavior and not create any kind of public disturbance. The parade is also about maintaining a public image of Peruvians as hardworking, docile and assimilated citizen-consumers. For critics like José, the Parade does absolutely nothing to benefit the local Peruvian community. His analogy between a sterile person who can not procreate and therefore not engage in social reproduction of his or her own community is probably the clearest critique of the 'visibility, but containment' politics in which ideas of cultural citizenship is not followed up with concrete social and economic policies that benefit and empower the US Latino population in any real way. In a sense what José is arguing is that the Parade - and other massive public events like it - works almost as false consciousness in the sense that they create the illusion of progress and prosperity in the community, but without advancing any social or political claims. He is not interested in whether or not they send money to Peru as a long-distance charity gesture, but whether they provide services for the local community in Paterson and in this sense legitimize their claims on representing the community.

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<sup>17</sup> Interview José Fernandez, March 2003

<sup>18</sup> *El Amauta*, Año 10, No. 217

<sup>19</sup> Interview José Fernandez, March 2003.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Through my description and brief analysis of some of the central issues at stake in the production and consumption of the Peruvian Parade in Paterson, I have aimed to show that the significance of this public spectacle extends beyond the moment of 'collective effervescence' and can be used as an analytical lens to look at a larger set of questions concerning the lives of Peruvian migrants in New Jersey and in the US more generally. Although my conclusions are based on preliminary findings, I have tried to advance the argument that such public spectacles are interesting, not only as instances of collective representation, but also as fields of practical and situated engagements linked to the implications of both national (US and Peru) and transnational cultural politics which effects the lives of Peruvian migrants in the US in various ways. As illustrated through statements of stakeholders in the event like Maria and José, I have showed that Peruvian migrants in New Jersey do not only think about the event in terms of representing some kind of 'Peruvian essence', but that they bring other categories and considerations to bear on this event.

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