

Chapter 15

The European Salsa Congress *Music and Dance in Transnational Circuits*

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“Oye DJ, tírame la música” (Hey, DJ, throw me some music) sings Cuban-born New York resident Cucu Diamantes on her first album, *Cuculand* (Wrasse Records, 2010). As the song, “Still in Love,” reveals, “este Moreno me miró que yo no pude contener” (the way this dark-haired man was looking at me, I just couldn’t control myself). The tale of attraction between the Hispanic “I” and her Moreno unfolds within a recognizably Latin soundscape – until about halfway through the song, when another beat begins pushing its way through the polyrhythmic template. Faint at first, it reveals itself to the South Asian listening ear as the sounds of the *dhol* beating out a Punjabi *bhangra* rhythm (the eight-beat *kaharwa taal*). In confirmation, the song’s coda has Diamantes repeating, till fade-out, in Hindi, “tu mera pyara hai” (you are my beloved one). The song’s significance mutates from a transnational Cuban’s electronic-accented experiment on traditional salsa to a broader experimentation with other global dance sounds originating in diaspora; the Moreno this Morena seeks seems to be a South Asian rather than a fellow Latin lover. The all-powerful DJ is both muse and conduit for the coming together of these diverse beats, and peoples, on a dance floor replete with possibilities of unpredictable, even transgressive cultural encounters. Music and dance are multiply transnationalized, although without losing the global significance of a Cuban singer in New York interpreting her musical heritage, which now goes by the universally acknowledged name of “salsa.”

In their song “Arroz con salsa” (rice with salsa), Japan’s Orquesta de la Luz (*La Aventura*, RTL International, 1994) declare that “salsa no tiene fronteras” (salsa has no frontiers). Salsa’s lack of frontiers sheds light on transactions, dialogues, and

encounters between people and their practices that we would deem “transnational.” As Diamantes’ “Still in Love” suggests, salsa also helps us move away from modes of individuated analysis formulated largely through engagements with textuality, by asking us to use dance – a somatic, collective, activity – to calibrate an understanding of intercultural, transnational encounters. Formed through multiple ruptures and conjunctions – slavery, Spanish colonialism, and pan-Hispano-American movement of music and people – salsa today is transnationalized through unpredictable circuits linking global north and south. People disconnected from salsa’s New World foundations and unable to understand its Spanish lyrics dance it; around its core, other non-European social dance forms from the Caribbean, Brazil, and West Africa have accrued. Anglophone, Francophone, Hispanophone, and Lusophone traditions collide on the salsa floor: Jamaican dancehall, Dominican merengue and bachata, French Caribbean zouk, Brazilian samba de gafieira, and Angolan kizomba (Sloat 2005). This eclecticism is exemplified in international “salsa congresses”: intense weekends of workshops, shows, and social dancing for amateur and professional dancers.

This chapter examines the transnationalism of contemporary salsa by focusing on the Tenth Berlin Salsa Congress, October 1–4, 2010,¹ an event which drew hundreds of *salseros* (salsa aficionados) from around the world for three days of Latin dance, music, and merchandizing in the heart of Europe. As an “observing participant” (as distinct from a “participant observer”; see Skinner 2007: 3), I made empirical observations, participated in workshops, danced, and conversed with delegates. My experiences will be placed within a wider European context to present contemporary salsa as a subject highly congenial to scholarship on transnationalism. Salsa helps us reconsider the “transnational” as it intersects with the kinetic and somatic dimensions of knowledge production and social interaction. In thus interrupting textualized discourse (Sklar 2000; Frank 1991; Hower and Hamilton 2009), I have been inspired by work on embodied knowledge in the Caribbean and the Americas (Taylor 2003; Benítez-Rojo 1996; Glissant 1997). Yet such scholarship emphasizes *intra*-cultural preservation. I, in contrast, investigate *intercultural* communication through salsa, including that which involves my own, transnational Indian, dancing/analyzing self. “People dance salsa because they can’t afford to go to the shrink,” asseverates DJ Willy (Wilfrid Vertueux), one of Europe’s premier Latin music DJs (personal interview, Berlin, October 2, 2010); his equally celebrated colleague DJ Mauri (Maurizio Gonzalez) adds, “from the pilot to the plumber, everyone is dancing salsa” (personal interview, Berlin, October 2, 2010). Salsa dancers mobilize a “kinesthetic empathy” (Sklar 1991: 7) to enter a complex embodied history of traumatic yet life-affirming postcolonial modernity. Bringing together hundreds of dancing bodies for the pure pleasure of dance, the congress does more than confirm that “globalization has led to the global export of salsa as a leisure pursuit” (Skinner 2007: 11): it is the site par excellence for this dance that “is outsider/insider music because it is owned by none and all” (Wilson 2009: 6). Through the congress, we can recast analyses of subjectivity and agency under conditions of transnationalism in terms of the Caribbean’s contribution to *la alegría en el mundo* (joy in the world; Quintero Rivera 1998: 10).

From the Barrio to the Congress: Salsa in a Transnationalizing World

A salsa congress is a gathering place for salseros to hone their dancing skills, network with other dancers, purchase salsa shoes, clothes and DVDs, and experience a salsa-related “high” over an extended weekend. Organized at hotels or convention centers, the salsa congress is big business as well as big entertainment, combining tourism with the promise of focused dance practice and exposure to the latest in salsa dance and music. These congresses began in the late 1990s in the Spanish-speaking world, hence the direct translation into English as “congress” (rather than “conference” or “convention”) of the Spanish word *congreso* (Borland 2009: 467); today, another word that is used to name these events is “festival.” In the last decade, the number of congresses has increased to include every corner of the globe: from Singapore to Surinam, from Gothenburg to Bangalore, from St Gall to Cairo to Sydney, congresses are everywhere and there is no logic to the location chosen other than that of it being the domicile of a salsa entrepreneur who has both local and international connections, ambition, together with the advantage of selling the location in question as having some intrinsic attractions to tempt an international salsa crowd, as well as infrastructure for their board, lodging, and dancing. The proliferation of salsa congresses reflect a “salsa boom throughout the world, a global phenomenon of music, dancing, and merchandise, which has caught up millions of devotees who live and work for their dancing nights” (Skinner 2007: 4).

This observation, made several years ago, must now be supplemented by further developments in the transnationalizing process. The internet has become the prime tool for diffusing news and publicity about congresses beyond national boundaries. Each congress has a dedicated web site via which registration of delegates, payments of fees, and searches for dance partners take place (e.g., www.salsafestival-berlin.de). Moreover, the social networking site Facebook has virally deterritorialized these interactions. As with any business, the world of salsa has made quick use of Facebook’s potential for self-publicizing, especially the showcasing of photographs to multiple viewers. Typically, salsa entrepreneurs will engage a photographer to capture events; people who recognize themselves within the photographs “tag” themselves; in order to do so they will need to “friend” the site set up by the entrepreneur; on doing so, they immediately enter their circle of information, events, and publicity. This ripple effect is particularly suited to the salsa congress, which needs to engage people’s memories from one year of its occurrence to the next, and is able to do so by posting photographs and videos of past congresses as well as updates, reminders, and payment deadlines for upcoming ones. The Berlin Salsa Congress regularly messages its Facebook group members with bespoke information as well as posting updates on its “profile page”; the organizers have set up country-based groups to enhance the logistics of shared travel and accommodation; and regulars at the congress are messaged individually with requests to support the congress by “sharing” news flashes about promotional prices and deadlines on their individual walls.

The salsa congress is thus part of a complex of activities that radiate outward from salsa's gradual professionalization during its movement from the *barrío* to the studio (Backstein 2001; Borland 2009). Little scholarly attention has been paid to it as a phenomenon, however. Its comparatively recent arrival means that it is only just attracting the notice of scholars, who "draw attention to the continuing emergence of a gamut of Salsa Congresses, Latin Dance clubs and classes springing up across the globe" in order to emphasize that "the salsa scene is worthy of investigation given its exponential growth over the last ten years" (Hewer and Hamilton 2009: 2), but who nevertheless fail to offer a detailed investigation of the congress as a manifestation of this scene. Existing monographs on salsa usually focus on salsa as a musical form rather than on salsa as dance (*pace* Waxer 2002), an emphasis which leads to the dance-oriented salsa congresses falling out of their purview. At the same time, those who do examine the development of salsa as dance concentrate on regional trends that take root in specific locations over a period of time (Borland 2009; Pietrobruno 2006; Skinner 2007), investigating the salsa club and/or salsa class as a hub for the creation of a local salsa scene. The salsa congress, in contrast, is ephemeral, itinerant, and non-local: qualities that seem of little relevance to those interested in exploring the global-local genealogies of salsa as a dance practice.

But there is much that those interested in transnationalism can learn from salsa congresses. These are sites of intercultural encounters which fuse actors and cultures from global northern and diverse southern regions otherwise separated through linguistic incomprehensibility. Their transnationalism exceeds the paradigms of postcolonial theory, which rarely considers evidence from parallel imperial-colonial histories, and which typically regards cultural innovation through north-south axes that either connect former imperial centers and decolonized metropolises or follow the colonial and postcolonial histories of slavery and diaspora. The salsa congress epitomizes how dance, in conjunction with music, can cross the boundaries laid down by imperial trajectories. In doing so, it does more than confirm the premises of transnationalism as a lens for analysing the fluid cultural and economic transactions of the contemporary world. The multiplicity of languages, cultures, affiliations, and dancing bodies that gather at salsa congresses to enjoy a participatory music tradition borne out of the specific colonial-imperial history of the Hispanic New World suggests that transnationalism cannot be explicated without thinking seriously about its relationship to modes of corporeal, collective pleasure. While challenging heuristic paradigms for thinking through postcolonialism and diaspora, the salsa congress offers transnational studies the opportunity to rethink its premises through the analysis of dance.

Surviving History through Dance: Deep Vectors of Transnationalism

Hybridity, dislocation, and reformation underlie salsa, as is suggested by its very name (Spanish for "sauce"). First used, reputedly, by a Venezuelan disc jockey, Phidias Danilo Escalona, to denote Latin dance music in the early 1960s (Rondón 1980: 3),

the term “salsa” had spread throughout Latin America by the 1970s (Waxer 2002: 4). The dance-music complex’s fluid label “reflects its shifting, transnational character” (Waxer 2002: 5), but a deep history of migration subtends its transnational vectors. Salsa was created through the movement of people and rhythm cultures across Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas. The fusion of European couple dances and lyrical styles with African rhythms and percussive traditions brought to the Caribbean through slavery created, in Cuba, the form of dance and music called *son* (Manuel 2006). The *son* fed into the dance culture of New York from the 1930s onwards, giving rise to dance crazes: mambo, cha-cha-cha; boogaloo. During the 1960s, these different traditions were redeveloped by Puerto Rican immigrants to New York to create a more codified and stylized dance form which began to be called salsa, after the new term for the music which was also rapidly getting slicker and more commercialized (Washburne 2008). By the 1990s, Pan-Latino migration to New York created “a second generation of salseros who co-opted the music of their parents, reinventing and transforming the salsa scene with sounds and expressions that better represented their own experiences as Latino youth growing up in New York City” (Washburne 2008: 6).

While the African roots of salsa can seem erased through many of these developments, the music remains fundamentally dependent on African polyrhythm and call-and-response structures. Its lyrics, too, celebrate the pull of Africa on the diasporic consciousness: as Afro-Cuban bandleader Arsénio Rodríguez, a key mover of Cuban musical traditions to New York in the 1940s, sang (Manuel 2006: 291): “yo nací de África, tal vez soy del Congo, tal vez soy del Ampanga” (I was born in Africa; perhaps I am of the Congo, perhaps of the Ampanga). These complexities of diaspora have made salsa a contested, severally claimed signifier of (Afro-)Latino identities. Salsa is widely understood “as an ‘inter-Latino’ and ‘trans-Caribbean’ music, regardless of the fact that it emerged from the cultural climate of New York City, owes much of its stylistic particularities to African American expressions (jazz and R’n’B in particular) and Cuban music practices as performed in New York in the 1940s and 1950s” (Washburne 2008: 9). There is intense inter-Caribbean competition around the claiming of salsa: the loosening of its connection with Cuba was already signified in its massive Puerto Rican investment, which was complemented by Cuba’s musical and cultural isolation precisely during the period salsa was being (re)formed in New York. Alongside Puerto Rico, Venezuela and Colombia are intertwined with salsa’s development; meanwhile, Cuban musicians and dancers continue to exit from or enter into “salsa” in keeping with their personal politics and predilections.

These multiple claims on salsa have parallels in the realm of dance: diverse styles of salsa dancing are available for adoption by dancers through the world. The basic difference is between a linear “cross-body” dance style, where the couples interchange their positions while remaining in a straight line, and a circular style, recognized as “Cuban,” where the man and woman move around each other. Sometimes, to distinguish “Cuban” from “cross-body,” the term “Puerto Rican” is used for the latter. Puerto Rican or cross-body salsa is further differentiated into On1 (also called LA style) and On2 (also called New York, or Mambo style). The difference between On1

and On2 is one of musical accent, or where one places the emphasis within the rhythmic unit of eight counts: one-two-three/five-six-seven. In On1, movement begins on the “one” and the “five”; in On2, on the “two” and the “six” (following the *tumbao* rhythm of the conga drums). In Cuban salsa, movement also begins on the “one,” but most teachers of Cuban style salsa will disdain to count, preferring to use vocables (e.g., “pa-pa-PA”) to emphasize the African origins of this timeline. In addition to Cuban and cross-body styles, there exists the less transnational “Colombian” style. Moreover, the Cuban style, which was historically called “casino style” in Cuba, also includes the *rueda* (wheel), where couples, rotating around each other, move in a wheel formation in response to directions which a leader calls out. The *rueda* epitomizes the Cuban style’s communal, playful, and fluid feel, particularly in its idiosyncratic and imaginative calls, such as “dile que no” (Tell him “no”), “helicoptero” (helicopter), “sombbrero,” “Coca Cola,” “panque con yogurt” (cake with yogurt), “agua” (water). In contrast, the cross-body styles emphasize dexterity through spins, fast footwork, and sharp breaks controlled by stylized movements of hands and arms.

There is virtually no scholarship on how these divergences evolved, and what they mean for the transmission and ramification of embodied histories; yet it is precisely their evolution and variegated diffusion that archive salsa’s layered transnationalism. Salsa as a multiply transnational dance-music complex has been formed through intricate transactions, coded in and through its divergent dancing styles, which create a webbed connection of spaces within which the music and its embodied practices circulate. For salsa dancers of different styles, the basic grammar remains the same rhythm for the moving feet, interpreted by Puerto Rican dance styles accented numerically as “one-two-three/five-six-seven”; more immersed dancers and musicians can also recognize the hidden “clave” rhythm that structures salsa’s percussive architecture. This rhythmic continuum is a crisscrossing line of affection and competition connecting the diverse developments of a shared musical heritage: it is a connective tissue that survives diaspora and transnationalism to recreate continually modes of self-expression and enjoyment. At the same time, the proliferation of these styles beyond the Americas testifies to the shaping of salsa by transnational currents of demand and supply. Who can teach what kind of salsa, and where, and the consumers for each style, are all forces that act on and determine salsa’s transnationalism, even as the attitudes of non-Latino salseros towards these divergences reify and transmit stereotypes about the various Latin and Caribbean worlds with which the dance continues historically to be associated. I will now turn to the Berlin Salsa Congress to substantiate and amplify these claims.

Neither *Latinidad* nor *Cubanidad*: Salsa and a New European Cosmopolitanism

On the second night of the 2010 Berlin Salsa Congress, from around 10 p.m. onwards, spectators seated in the main arena of the fabulous venue, the Tempo-

drome, were treated to a dazzling array of choreographed shows by professional salsa dancers and instructors from a range of locations: Antalya, Athens, Dubai, Karlsruhe, Krakow, London, Marseille, Milan, Paris, Stockholm, Rome, Sofia, Warsaw, Utrecht, and Israel. The most applauded duo was Los Diablos of Antalya, Turkey, dancing to “Quiereme Na Ma,” a song by Bogotá’s La 33. Katherine Wilson asks (2009: 4): “Is an Australian *salsera* dancing to the music of a Japanese Salsa band doing anything ‘Latin?’” We could apply her question to these Turkish dancers, interpreting a Colombian band at Berlin, for a highly international audience. Wilson’s question follows her assertion that “with enough dedication and hard work, one can truly become an authentic *salsero*” (p. 4); yet, as she also observes, “salsa does not become ‘less Latin’ as it spreads around the world, but its Latin identity becomes displaced” (p. 4). Instead of looking for authenticity, we should focus on the processes of displacement and fragmentation of *latinidad* through and in dance. The Berlin Salsa Congress was emphatically *not* about proclaiming affiliations to *latinidad*. During every showcase event, the spotlight was on the 45 countries from which the participants had come, accompanied by the conference organizer and Master of Ceremonies Franco Sparfeld’s reminders that this number made the Berlin Salsa Congress the most international congress in the world. There were country flags on sale and participants cheered and waved them whenever Sparfeld encouraged specific nationalities to announce their presence from the floor.

Despite this good-natured parochialism, the congress remained a resolutely transnational space. During the daytime workshops, participants conversed with each other in German, French, Dutch, Polish, Romanian, Greek, Latvian, and Italian. Teachers used mime to communicate instructions to an unpredictably multilingual mix of students. English functioned as a pidgin of sorts, with everyone speaking some form of it whenever they attempted cross-lingual communication; however, Spanish, the language of salsa lyrics, did not perform this same function. The only time it did so was at the few classes devoted to Cuban-derived dance. There were two classes on rumba, the Afro-Cuban style associated with the streets of Havana and Matanzas, which has a complex history of colonial repression, pre-Revolution stigmatization, post-Revolution fetishization, and, surviving it all, an embodied spirituality through dance repertoires associated with Afro-Cuban gods (Daniel 1991; Jottar 2009). The rumba’s Afro-Cuban movements encourage salseros to re-Africanize salsa through infusing their style with a loose-limbed earthiness. This reception of rumba as a necessary space of not merely Latin, but Cuban (indeed, Afro-Cuban) “authenticity” means that the instructors are often Cuban, and the duo in charge of the rumba classes at Berlin was no exception: a Cuban and an Argentine representing Tropical Gem, a highly regarded Milanese dance company. Their very successful classes were conducted through mime, Spanish, and broken English. Spanish reappeared in the only other Cuban offering in the Congress: a class devoted to Cuban salsa taught by German Elke Ballwieser. Trained at Havana and Santiago de Cuba, and of the school that valorizes the “natural and sensual” Cuban style, with its Afro-Cuban roots, as the wellspring of all salsa forms,² she proclaimed her own affiliation to *cubanidad* by speaking more Spanish than English during her class.

Although the classes by Ballwieser and Tropical Gem were very well attended, the space accorded to Cuban dance forms at Berlin was minimal. Cuba, decentered but not erased, functioned as a cipher for the absent presence of “Latinness” and “Caribbeaness.” It was not a contradiction that the centerpiece of the congress show-program was the premier of *El Tiempo de Maquina*, presented jointly by Tropical Gem and Flamboyant Dancers and based on the life and music of Cuban diva Celia Cruz. Born into the Afro-Cuban underclass of Havana, Cruz began her career within Havana’s pre-Revolution club culture but migrated to the United States after the Cuban Revolution. Her career, which became more and more spectacular in exile, encapsulates the tense relationship between Cuban music and dance and the development of salsa. Cruz herself exploited knowingly “the ambivalence between the discourse of Cubaness for and by the exiled subject, and the transnational audiences and musical styles that have emerged, ironically, out of her own political and geographical displacement” (Aparicio 1999: 228). This irony resurfaced at Berlin when New York’s Yamulee performed to Celia Cruz’s song, “Tumba la caña jibarito,” a lyrical sublimation of the rigors of plantation life, in impeccable New York style. These transactions between Cruz’s self-declared “Cuban accent” (Aparicio 1999: 228) and its diffusion through New York to the world at large exemplify how the emergence of a transnational salsa scene out of the vicissitudes of Cuban history is refracted worldwide in salsa congresses.

At Berlin, hardly anyone was dancing Cuban style socially. Neither in the music, nor in the division of social dancing space, was there overt acknowledgment made of Cuban style as a dance form. The dance styles exhibited during social dancing were overwhelmingly cross-body – either On1 or On2, and when other rhythms were played, for example, cha-cha, they were interpreted in cross-body style. This marginalization of *cubanidad* was matched by the decisive emergence of other stakeholders marking ownership of the salsa scene. The biggest players were countries of New Europe, the Baltics and the East: with sizable contingents of Polish, Czech, Romanian, Bulgarian, Latvian, and Lithuanian dancers; as one Czech participant told me, Berlin was close enough to make annual pilgrimages to the congress possible, while a Romanian volunteer, keeping perfect clave time on a beer bottle, remarked, “we [i.e., Romanians] are Latin people.” In the meanwhile, Riga has emerged as the home of Berlin’s sister congress, with DJ Mauri expressing astonishment at the memory of hundreds of Latvians lip-syncing to lyrics in Spanish which they in all likelihood cannot understand (Gonzalez, personal interview, Berlin, October 2, 2010). Clearly, salsa has given post-communist European subjectivities an entry point into a hitherto denied world of expressivity, flamboyance, and fun: what is ironic, of course, is that dance and music in Cuba itself continues to respond to communism in startlingly creative ways (Moore 2006; Fairley 2006). All in all, the politics of diaspora and the histories of displacement and deracination that have ensured the dance’s transnationalism seem neither visible to nor the overt concern of its new European consumers, all of whom were engaging, in Berlin, in a cosmopolitan self-fashioning via an uncomplicated apprenticeship to Latin dance.

Evolving Transnationalism at the Berlin Salsa Congress

The decoupling of live music from dance at congresses is another marker of salsa's movement away from a Latino performative and participatory tradition which thrives on the spontaneous energies exchanged between a live band, able to improvise lyrics as well as intervening instrumental sections, and a knowing audience which is as happy to listen as it is to dance. The Berlin Salsa Congress, like several other international congresses, promotes itself not through bands but through the presence of star DJs, whose careers they have consolidated. However, the DJs themselves traced the effervescence of salsa dancing to an earlier period when the consumers of Latin music were world-music aficionados, people who wanted to listen rather than being able to dance, and who were patrons of live bands. The DJs to whom I spoke in Berlin, DJ Willy and DJ Mauri, acknowledged that, with the demise of the live band, there was an attrition of interest in "the philosophy of salsa" (Gonzalez and Vertueux, personal interviews, Berlin, October 2, 2010). With the commercialization of salsa through the congresses, there was the added concern that bringing bands over to Europe from Latin America or the Caribbean would cost far more than paying for a DJ to travel from one part of Europe to another. The DJ is thus the king of the salsa congress, and it is up to him to shape the tastes and energies of the crowd through his selection of tracks. The Latin music DJ must, like any other DJ, pick up signals from the crowd; but he must also know what music will make them dance rather than simply entrance the connoisseur-listener. If the home-grown, Latino/Caribbean *salsero's* immersion in the tradition means a unified ability to listen as well as move, the salsa congress demonstrates how transnationalism fractures that unity into dancers that don't know how to listen, and listeners who don't know how to dance.

Does the Berlin Salsa Congress then illustrate how salsa in Europe has become completely absorbed into an intra-European relational model, which displaces and consumes cultural production from the global south in the usual mode of north-south power relations? I would nuance this picture. Firstly dance destabilizes expected power relations through its facilitation of alternative transactions in fantasy, desire, and embodied exhilaration in a collective space. Secondly, Berlin also brought together actors from diverse southern locations. I will elaborate on this point by analyzing the presence of Kaytee Namgyal of Salsa India, who is based in Bombay but is at this moment working out of Rome. Namgyal and his partner in 2010, Vanessa Diaz, who is from France (and who has worked for a year in Bombay with him), offered two bachata classes on the Saturday and Sunday mornings respectively. Bachata, a dance originating from the Dominican Republic (Pacini Hernández 1995), is not a form of salsa but provides a more sensual alternative to it, as its protocol involves more body contact than the latter. It is very popular amongst those who dance salsa both in clubs and congresses, particularly as it changes the mood on the dance floor by shifting attention from the interpretation of polyrhythm to the body's elaboration of a linear timeline via strategic hip and

thigh movements. Neither as polyrhythmic nor as percussively rich as salsa, bachata's 4/4 rhythm accentuates the fourth beat, whose simplest interpretation in dance is a hip lift or twist in the opposite direction to the movement established in the three preceding beats. Although bachata is a dance from the Caribbean world, then, its rhythmic profile is distinguished by the absence of African markers.

This characteristic of bachata, together with its 4/4 rhythm and emphasis on the hip (rather than the pelvis) makes it more malleable for interpretation by non-Latino dancers, and particularly attractive to inheritors of Arabic and Indian rhythm cultures, where linear patterns divisible by four are very common (e.g., Indian *kaharwa* and *teental*; Arabic *elzaffa*). Kaytee is no exception, but his take on bachata is hardly Indianized.³ Rather, in his workshops, Kaytee focused on what he called K-style Bachata: a personalized, signature interpretation of the dance which de-emphasizes the hips and focuses on the connection between the torso and the thighs. There are some head movements reminiscent of the French-Lusophone zouk (Guilbault 1993), and the 3 + 1 rhythmic unit of bachata is interpreted in novel ways, with breaks often stretched to three counts followed by a quick movement on the fourth. This complex response to a simple timeline is underscored by footwork, body isolation, "popping," and body breaks imported from hip-hop, another dance styles he and Vanessa favor. In fact, the duo offered a third class on "salsa hip-hop" to intermediate dancers, where this mode of body movement was imported into the salsa beat. All classes were packed and received with considerable enthusiasm. Kaytee's second bachata class received an appreciative round of applause from the participants, who were charmed by his ability to engage the audience in English, clearly a strong enough common language for them to be able to understand the stylish wit with which he conducted his class.

My partner for this class was a Turkish man who may have been Turkish German, and there were several other Germans in the group. After the class, I asked a couple – he, black, she, white – what they thought of Kaytee as a teacher. The man was an Ecuadorian living in a small Swiss town and his companion was Swiss German (Secundo Valencia, personal interview, Berlin, October 2, 2010). We spoke in a mixture of Spanish and English. Namgyal, they both agreed, was "maravilloso" (marvellous). Sure, it was "un poco raro" (a bit bizarre) that he was from India, and that an Ecuadorian would end up in a bachata class taught by an Indian, but it did not matter, because Namgyal responded to the "sentimiento" (sentiment) of the music rather than focusing on showmanship and pure "movimiento" (movement). He recognized the sensuality of the bachata and urged his students to reconnect to that element. Later that day, the Ecuadorian came up to me while we were waiting for a coffee and re-engaged me in a long postscript to the discussion (Valencia, personal interview, Berlin, October 2, 2010). "Kaytee is great," he said, "but it would be even better if he knew Spanish and could respond to the lyrics of the bachata. We respond to bachata emotionally: we dance to it but we also cry to it." In this conversation, conducted fully in Spanish, emerged the full picture of a south-south encounter: that between the Indian salsa performer and an Ecuadorian, both based in Europe, and meeting in Europe. The European venue made their interaction

possible, but also brought to the notice of the “authentic” *salsero* the claims on Latin dance that were being made by non-Latin parties. Yet, the fact that this was not a European, “northern” claim confused his assessment of it. For the strongest critique of this self-declared indigenous *salsero* was directed towards the First World tourist consumer of salsa in Latin America and the Caribbean, whose desire for escape to tropical paradises, metonymically conveyed through dance, had led to the commodification of salsa “back home.” This critique can also be read as an *auto*-critique of the displaced Ecuadorian self, peddling salsa in a small town in Switzerland.

South–(North)–South Encounters in the Northern Congress

Nevertheless, the transnational vectors which determine these movements of salsa also allow for interactions to take place beyond those neocolonial circuits of commodification and fetishization. Even as the Ecuadorian Swiss *salsero* tried to organize his conflicting thoughts about Namgyal by reminding himself of the even more ambivalent relationship between himself and the European dancer of salsa, he and I were participating in a conversation which would have not been possible outside this space. The fact that I was willing, and able, to speak in Spanish opened up a channel of another kind of person-to-person dialogue, of actors self-identifying, and mutually identifying, as from southern rather than northern affiliations. This stance was marked linguistically by my Ecuadorian interlocutor’s frequent resort to the phrases *como tu sabes* (as you know) and *tu entiendes* (you understand). As I became part of his epistemological framework, as someone who is expected to share in his knowledge and his way of seeing the world, so did some other possibility, a recognition of the “Else” rather than the “Other,” open up between us. I would like to see that kind of splinter inserted in the hegemonies of imperial and post-imperial histories and epistemologies as emblematic of the unexpected solidarities and understandings that can be made possible through and in dance. The salsa congress functions as a space of alternative transnationalism and new postcolonialities, where the expressive body can pay homage to alien histories of survival through enjoyment even though the individual might not think consciously at all of those histories. The task of the scholar is to construct the balance sheet out of these small gains against the not-so-small losses caused by the decentering of *latinidad*, *cubanidad* and the “Afro” in all these formulations that occurs in a space such as the Berlin Salsa Congress.

At the end of the congress’ closing program on the Sunday, the London-based salsa performer and instructor Tamambo, whose Facebook page yields the name Tammam Shaibani (he is of Iraqi heritage), regaled the audience with an anecdote about his youth: “When I was a teenager, my father brought along a man with a long beard to preach to me about Islam – ok, I am of Muslim heritage – but I said, why do I need to listen to you?” Facing the audience, he cut his story to come to the point: “Look at us all here – Jews, Arabs, Turks, Cypriots, Christians, Muslims – we are all dancing, together. Our religion is salsa, not hatred.” This remarkable

sentiment echoed the message of the opening show by Tropical Gem, *Survivor*, which projected the dancer as the detritus and remainder of the horrors of the modern world, beginning from the Holocaust to the contemporary circulation of a mysterious virus that cannot be eradicated. If the dancer survives, it is because of the kinetic power and embodied memory transmitted through dance. Similarly, the salsa congress, with its glimpses into alternative possibilities, unexpected alignments and unspoken acts of homage, survives the often brutal, market-driven currents of transnationalism that proliferate mass consumption, standardization and hegemonic mediascapes, ethnoscapes, and financescapes (Appadurai 1990). Ironically, these very trends have ensured its emergence and continued efflorescence. As a site of south–north–south encounter, the salsa congress offers “a theoretical and performative open field of exchanges” (Lepecki 2004: 9), where dancing bodies perform kinetic rather than intellectual recollection of histories in order to bring forth momentary transnational utopias from the debris of modernity’s multiple and traumatic dislocations. Pleasure and resistance oscillate as two sides of the same coin, revealing how “dance critically reconstitutes social practices while at the same time proposes ever new theories of body and presence” (Lepecki 2004: 1). In the process, the congress, for the weekend of its duration, becomes a framework not for the globalization of creole creativity (Crichlow 2009), but for the potential creolization of the world.

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Notes

- 1 Information on the current congress can be found at www.salsafestival-berlin.de, accessed March 5, 2013.
- 2 Elke Ballwieser de Ferriols, “Die kubanische Salsa,” at <http://www.asi-se-baila.de/index.php?id=35>, accessed March 5, 2013.
- 3 For more on Kaytee, see http://www.salsa-india.com/index.php?option=com_portfolio&id=4&view=item&Itemid=100064, accessed March 5, 2013.

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