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SENSUOUS POLITICS: SALSA AS CULTURE CRITIQUE

by

Mary-Lee Mulholland

A thesis submitted to
the faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

August 8, 1998

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Sensuous Politics: Salsa as Culture Critique

submitted by Mary-Lee Mulholland, B.A. (Hon.)
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Valda Blundell, Thesis Supervisor

Chair, Department of Sociology and Anthropology

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September 15, 1998

Abstract

Salsa is one of the most popular Latin American dance and music styles in the world. This thesis will examine the shifting meanings, dwellings, travels and "claims of ownership" of salsa that are engaged in a dialogue of identity politics at the local, national, ethnic, and transnational levels. Although salsa has important implications in the (re)production of several identities, to contain the analysis to one of identity politics would not only be partial but misleading. To understand the complexity of salsa, and perhaps this could be extended to culture, we must understand its "sensuous" nature. More to the point, what allows salsa to travel so intensely and what makes the politic so powerful is that salsa is emotive, embodied and sensual. *Salsa is a sensuous politic.*

En la memoria de
Profesor Herman Konrad,
que me enseñó como conocer y amar el México verdadero.
Muchas gracias.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Salsa no tiene fronteras.

- Orquesta de la luz

Singing in Spanish, the Japanese salsa band *Orquesta de la Luz* claims that "Salsa has no borders."¹ The international success and popularity of salsa, like many other "world music" forms, seems to support this claim. Salsa slips through the borders of nations, cultures, religions and classes to find places of belonging in a multiplicity of locations. This popularity has sparked debates between critics who, on the one hand, argue that this diffusion of salsa is another example of post-colonialism, cultural appropriation, or the Americanization of indigenous cultural forms. On the other hand, there are critics who argue that this is an example of cultural survival, sharing culture, or a celebration of cultural diversity.

¹ "Sin Fronteras" (1991), *Orquesta de la Luz*.

In this thesis I will examine the shifting meanings, dwellings, travels and "claims of ownership" of salsa that are engaged in a dialogue of identity politics at the local, national, ethnic, and transnational levels. I will illustrate how salsa is part of the (re)production of these identities while it simultaneously transcends and blurs categories because *it has no boundaries nor can it be contained by boundaries*. Rather, salsa travels and is constituted by a procession of travelers, trespassers, and guests that engage in a dialogue that (re)produces and challenges particular identity formations. In other words, the fluidity and "messiness" of salsa can in itself be understood as a form of cultural critique.

Although salsa has important implications in the (re)production of several identities, to contain the analysis to one of identity politics would not only be partial, as most are, but misleading. To understand the complexity of salsa, and perhaps this could be extended to culture, we must understand its "sensuous" nature. There is a small and growing literature in anthropology that speaks to, or as Paul Stoller might say "remembers" the senses (Stoller 1997). This literature is related to the more substantial schools that attempt to insert both experience and the body into the ethnographic text. Scholars, such as

Stoller, argue that omitting the senses privileges a certain understanding or worldview in that what someone says is privileged over what someone may smell or feel (Stoller 1997, Feld 1990, Shepherd 1991).

However, the danger of focusing on the phenomenological or the senses is that it, in turn, omits the political. Similarly, by focusing on the political omits the sensual. Salsa is both emotive and political however, these two characteristics are not mutually exclusive but mutually affective. More to the point, what allows salsa to travel so intensely and what makes its politic so powerful is that salsa is emotive, embodied and sensual. *Salsa is a sensuous politic.*

Culture Critique

Since the 1980s, the discipline of anthropology has been involved in a sustained self-critique of its use of the concept of "culture." Cultures, as understood in classic anthropology, were typically colonized, non-western, small-scale societies located in far-away lands. These cultures were often represented in ethnographic texts as static, bounded, categorizable entities (Clifford 1988, Fabian 1983, Wolf 1982, Marcus and Fischer 1986).

With increased global migration, the blurring of national boundaries, and the increase in pluralism and syncretism, anthropology and other disciplines concerned with cultures, such as cultural studies and post-colonial studies, have sought to revise their concepts of "culture." Cultures and their ties to time and space have been re-conceptualized as fragmented, dynamic, and fluid. As Eric Wolf points out:

"Societies" emerge as changing alignments of social groups, segments, and classes, without either fixed boundaries or stable internal constitutions. Each mode, in the compass of its influence, generates conjunctions of groups and classes that serve its requirements under given historical and geographical circumstances. These requirements change, as do the resulting alignments (Wolf 1982: 387)

In sum, "culture," as understood by most anthropologists, is now in motion and the focus has shifted to process rather than containment.

In order to destabilize the deterministic relationship between culture and time and space, metaphors of movement, motion, and travel have become popular tools in the exercise of culture critique. James Clifford (1988, 1992, and 1997) has been one of the most vocal academics involved in the use of travel metaphor as culture critique. Clifford argues that dwelling is privileged over travel in the modernist discourse (public and academic), and that to

understand the dynamic process involved in culture we shift our focus from the dwellings of culture to the travels of culture.

Part of this approach to the study of culture is the increasing focus on migrant communities, borderlands and diasporas (Andulúza 1987, Appadurai 1991, Bhabha 1994, Clifford 1992). Conceptualizing global travel as diaspora or diasporic has become increasingly popular. The term diaspora is no longer limited to describe the phenomenon of Jewish travel and displacement, but now includes a wide variety of travelers, travel, and cultural pluralism to take into account migrant communities, contact zones or peoples that no longer reside in their "place of origin." The term "diaspora" is increasing in popularity not only in the academic discourse, but also within the public discourse constructed by the media, community groups, government and policy makers. The term's lack of specificity, as compared to some of the negative connotations attached to "foreigners" or "immigrants," allows it to better describe the complexity of "transnational identity formations" (Clifford 1997: 247).

However, there are some problems with using the concept of diaspora. First, it implies a sense that all peoples of the diaspora are able to locate a singular

"place of origin," whether it is Africa for the Black Diaspora, Israel for the Jewish Diaspora or Latin America for the Latin America Diaspora. Thus, while culture is put into flux, the "original dwelling" is still privileged. Second, it erases the fact that many individuals relegated (through a complex process of identity politics) to a diaspora have not, in fact, traveled. For example, some individuals have never traveled outside of their "host" country while other diasporic communities are located in their "place of origin," it is the boundaries that have changed.² Third, it implies that different diasporas are mutually exclusive, reinscribing the modernist understanding of culture. For example, Afro-Cubans living in Miami can be understood to be part of both the African diaspora as well as the Latin American Diaspora. In an attempt to reflect this inherent pluralism and multiplicity many academics have created new concepts such as "borderlands/fronteras", "ethnoscapes" or "third spaces" (Andulúza 1987, Appadurai 1991, Bhabha 1994).

Regardless of which concept is used, these emergent metaphors of travel, diaspora, and borderlands challenge

²This is best illustrated by the Mexican Americans whose families have been dwelling in the southwestern United States since before the Mexican-American war.

the modernist concept of culture by putting culture into motion and blurring its boundaries. Thus, throughout this thesis I will rely on the concepts of diaspora, syncretism, hybridization, as well as metaphors of travel to attempt to capture the fluidity of culture. More precisely, I will examine how expressive cultural forms, specifically music and dance, are used within a dialogue that (re)produce particular identity politics in a context of increased migration and increased identity fragmentation.

Dance and Music Travels

The influence of critical theory as cultural critique in anthropology, cultural studies, and postcolonial studies has also had an immense impact in the study of expressive cultural forms and "popular culture" (Blundell 1992). As a result, there is an increasing focus on music and dance that are produced in, or associated with, diasporas. That is, the metaphor of travel is becoming more common in the study of music and dance (Frith 1988, Lipsitz 1994, Taylor 1997, Browning 1998)

Notably, George Lipsitz's Dangerous Crossroads (1994) critically surveys different music styles, particularly those associated with subaltern, migrant cultures. He argues that:

Popular music has a peculiar relationship to the poetics of place. Recorded music travels from place to place, transcending physical and temporal barriers. It alters our understanding of the local and the immediate, making it possible for us to experience close contact with cultures from far away. Yet precisely because music travels it augments our appreciation of place (Lipsitz 1994: 3)

The fluid nature of dance and music, its ability to transcend spatial and temporal boundaries is central to the understanding of the popularity of "world music," "world beat," "global groove" and salsa (Taylor 1997, Feld and Keil 1994). Those musical forms that are considered mixed or syncretic products of migration, colonization and of diasporas become sites where resistance, appropriation, hegemony and commercialism are (re)produced. In the case of salsa its "authentic" Cuban sound or its degree of "Latinness" have become sites of contention in the public, academic, and national discourses. In other words, this "appreciation of place" has become an *appreciation of place of origin* that is articulated in a struggle for ownership and legitimacy. These struggles work to contain culture, dance or music by (re)producing boundaries and boundedness.

The Travels of Salsa

Recently, there has been an increase in the popularity of Latin American dances and musics. In fact, it has been observed that they have not enjoyed such popularity since the *mambo*, *rumba*, *chachachá* and *tango* dance crazes of the 1950's. In particular, the popularity of such movies as *Mambo Kings* (1992), *Strictly Ballroom* (1992), *Evita* (1996), *Shall We Dance* (1997), and *The Tango Lesson* (1997), have been credited with an increase in enrollment in social dance classes.³ Moreover, the international success of albums such as Paul Simon's "Rhythm of the Saints" (1989), Ry Cooder's "The Buena Vista Social Club" (1997), and cross-over hits by Los Rio Del Mar ("Macarena") and Selena have all sparked a new and growing interest in Latin American dance and music.

Salsa is one of the most popular Latin American dance and music styles in the world. As a music, salsa has the sound of a fast tempo, jazz-influenced *mambo*, and the dance has the feel and look of a sweaty, high energy, hip-swaying, improvised *rumba*. According to the Rough Guide to World Music (1994):

³ "Tango Forever." Alison MacGregor, Ottawa Citizen Saturday May 2, 1998.

Salsa was born out of the encounter of Cuban and Puerto Rican music with big-band jazz in the Latin barrios of New York. Today it is a global music, massively popular across the Caribbean, Latin and North America, and with established outposts, too, in Europe and Japan. (485)

The number and strength of these "outposts" is constantly growing and expanding all over the world, including such diverse locations as Africa, Japan, Romania, Italy, and Canada. Constituent elements of these "outposts" include salsa nightclubs, dance studios, web sites, and music stores. In addition, the growing popularity of salsa is marked by the increase in the number, and the growing success, of Latin music record labels⁴, salsa music festivals, and images (visual and audio) of salsa in popular culture.

In particular, salsa nightclubs are flourishing and are becoming fixtures in the nightlife of major urban centres around the world. In Canada, for example, there are a growing number of salsa nightclubs in the larger cities, such as Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver. Montréal is considered by many to be the most active salsa scene and is host to as many as fifteen salsa nightclubs as well as a monthly salsa "fiesta" called "Oye!" The clientele found

⁴ For example, the growing success of Ralph Mercado's company RMM Records & Video Corporation.

at these nightclubs is diverse: including men and woman from different ethnic and national origins, race, culture, class, and age⁵. Although the overwhelming majority of this clientele has origins in Latin America, there are many non-Latinos.

For the past six years I have been one of these non-Latinas who frequent salsa nightclubs on a regular basis. I was introduced to Latin American music and dance while attending an anthropological field school in Tlaxcala, Mexico. Like most cross-cultural experiences, the trip had an immense impact in my life. My introduction to the dance and music of Mexico and Latin America was particularly transforming. Upon my return to Calgary, missing the sounds, smells and tastes of Mexico I searched out places and spaces where I could get a fix: Latino restaurants and bars. Eventually, I would discover a small, diverse community brought together in these places for a host of different reasons, among them, a dose of dance and music.

In time, the dancing became part of my life. My music collection transformed and I became part of a regular, predictable crowd that would spend every weekend dancing in a downtown Mexican restaurant. On the weekends, the

⁵These nightclubs tend to not be open to diversity in sexual orientation. However, there are gay Latin clubs in Toronto.

restaurant was transformed into a dance bar, tables were moved aside and a live band was ushered in to play a mélange of salsa, *cumbia*, and *merengue*.

At first I was unable to differentiate the sounds and movements of these different dances, but eventually, my friends and dance partners taught me how to make the distinctions, and, more importantly, they taught me how to dance them. My dance partners, or perhaps more aptly my dance teachers, were from a variety of backgrounds. They included Colombians, Peruvians, Guatemalans, Salvadorians, Costa Ricans, Iraqis, a Croatian and not to mention a wide variety of ages, classes, and religions. Although the *cumbia*, *merengue* and later the *bacháta*⁶ were all important parts of this experience, it was the salsa⁷ that captivated me. It was on this dance floor that I got my weekly fix and where I became a salsa junkie.

My life as a salsa junkie, or *salsera*⁷, has taken me on adventures and explorations to seek out different salsa

⁶ The *merengue* and *salsa* seem to be constants in many of the nightclubs that I have attended. The degree that *cumbia* or *bacháta* are played depends on the club and the city. For example, while the *cumbia* is very popular in Calgary, it is rarely played in Ottawa clubs. Conversely, I did not hear the *bacháta* at all in Calgary where as it is very popular in Ottawa and Montreal. These differences would be an interesting area to investigate.

⁷ *Salsero* or *salsera* is used to describe a musician, dancer, or fan of salsa.

"outposts" in Latin American and across Canada. Here in Canada I have gone to salsa nightclubs in Vancouver, Calgary, Montreal, Toronto, and Ottawa. In these nightclubs I have met *salsero/as* from all over Latin America, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Asia, Africa and North America. As a student of anthropology, this seemingly universal appeal of salsa has continued to intrigue me: What is it about salsa that makes it so appealing and *so contagious*?

Beyond this widespread appeal, the fact that salsa was not consistently associated with any one particular place, people or nation in Latin America intrigued me further. When I asked my fellow *salsero/as* about the origins of salsa the replies I received were rarely consistent; Cuba, Puerto Rico, New York, Venezuela, Colombia, or Latin America. On the other hand, the *merengue* and the *bacháta* were consistently associated with the Dominican Republic, and the *cumbia* with Colombia. While most dances are associated with a nation, curiously, the salsa is not. Instead, salsa is often claimed by many nations and is even referred to as a pan-ethnic Latin music and dance (Gerard 1989, Calvo Ospina 1995, Aparicio 1997, Duany 1992).

Similar to the inconsistency in the reported origins of salsa is the inconsistency in the kind of music that is

reported to belong to the genre of salsa. On the one hand, salsa is an emergent label for jazz-influenced Cuban rhythms such as *rumba*, *mambo*, and *el son*. On the other hand, salsa has become the catchall category for all variations of Latin American music and dance, including *merengue*, *mambo*, and *cumbia* (Gerard 1989, Calvo Ospina 1995). Thus, the term "salsa" is used to describe a specific Afro-Cuban inspired rhythm as well as being synonymous with *musica latina*.

In short, I believe that salsa's universal appeal and its inconsistent associations make it an interesting and worthy area of anthropological investigation. Salsa is a global phenomenon or a world music with an Afro-Cuban beat that travels and dwells in Havana, New York, Montréal, Bogota, Tokyo, and my living room. *Salsero/as* are a multitude of insiders, travelers, trespassers and guests. However, the more salsa seems to travel the more it seems there are attempts to locate it, claim it, categorize it and bind it. Salsa is multivocal, fragmented, "messy," or "entangled" (Stewart 1991). Salsa has become a sensuous site at which notions of nation, ethnicity, culture, class, self/other, mind/body are (re)produced and contested.

CHAPTER 2

Claiming Salsa: Rhythms as Identity Narratives

Granddaughter of the African slave drums, daughter of Cuban son rhythms, about twenty years ago salsa became the expression of a whole continent...

- Hernando Calvo Ospina

Latin American music and dance styles are commonly used as markers of national identity and are considered national treasures, symbols, and "traditions." For example, in the Rough Guide to World Music (1994) there are the following statements: "Merengue is synonymous with the Dominican Republic" (495); whereas the *cumbia* is the "national music" or "national dance" of Colombia (549), and tango is the other "national anthem" of Argentina (577). Whether it is the Brazilian *samba* or the *merengue* from the Dominican Republic each rhythm conjures up images of a nation and each nation conjures up images of the rhythm. However, salsa is commonly associated with several nations, as well as emergent local identities, such as

Nuyorican,⁸ and transnational or diasporic cultural identities such as *latinismo*.⁹ Therefore, national or cultural images conjured up by salsa are rarely consistent and always multiple and contested.

I aim to illustrate that the multiple claims on salsa by different nations and cultural groups are important processes in the re(production) of identities on the one hand while simultaneously placing those same identities in flux¹⁰. More specifically salsa, and the multiple claims on it, are all forms of culture critique in that they explicitly and implicitly challenge notions of culture as bounded, static, and located in space. Through its travels salsa has been reproduced in multiple "outposts," producing multiple meanings and multiple identities. It is claimed by the African and Latin American diaspora, it is involved in the reproduction of a pan-ethnic Latin identity as well as the smaller more localized *Nuyorican* identity. The travel of salsa makes it a form of culture critique.

⁸ *Nuyorican* is an emergent ethnic label used to describe individuals living in New York of Puerto Rican descent.

⁹ *Latinismo* or *latinidad* are emerging pan-ethnic identity labels that reflect a sense of a growing Latin culture or community c.f. Padilla (1985) and Oboler (1995).

¹⁰ For a thorough examination of the (re)production of gender identities in salsa c.f. Aparicio (1988), Fraser Delgado and Estéban Muñoz (1997) and Boggs (1992).

Rhythm of a Nation

The importance of rhythms in Latin America extend beyond a signifier of nation or ethnicity. In fact, in her article "Of Rhythms and Borders" Ana Lopez (1997) argues that Latin American dances and musics are not only important symbols of national identity but are used to produce and maintain national boundaries. That is, rhythms create that which they represent; a "national essence." The performance, participation, production and consumption of Latin American dance and music is a process through which the self/nation is constituted. Furthermore, she argues that these rhythms are "fought over" and "crossed" as regularly as nation-state boundaries are (1997: 310-312).

Dance and music are powerful symbols in the (re)production of the "national essence" in primarily two ways. First, the historical narrative of dance and music is similar to the historical narrative of the nation. These rhythms are symbols or identity markers of a nation in what is often a metonymic relationship; the rhythm is the part taken to represent the whole nation. Therefore, to produce this "national essence" the history of the rhythm is necessarily the history of the nation. In order to accomplish this, certain narratives within the history (of

rhythm and nation) are privileged. Lopez argues that "...Latin American rhythms have complicated histories that have tried to erase/inscribe ethnic, racial, class and gender differences in the service of the idea of nationness" (Lopez 1997: 311). It is through this process of erasing and inscribing that a sense of ownership over the rhythm by a nation is normalized, and the manner in which the part becomes the whole.

Yvonne Daniel presents an excellent example in her study Rumba: Dance and Social Change in Contemporary Cuba (1995). She describes how the *rumba* transformed from a dance of "predominantly lower-class black Cubans in the nineteenth century [to a] focus of a two-week national festival after the Revolution and eventually was institutionalized" (Daniel 1995: 13). As a result of post-revolutionary Cuba's revival of its African heritage the status of the *rumba* was transformed from a rhythm only associated with a certain segment of Cuban society to a national rhythm. The *rumba*, like the lower-class Black Cubans, was understood as marginalized because of its Africanness before the revolution. Thus, the celebration of the *rumba* became synonymous with a celebration of Cuba's African origins and, therefore, a celebration of the imagined Cuban nation.

Second, dance and music are performed and lived experiences for the nation. Music and dance as symbols, or reflections, of particular national "essences" are especially powerful as a result of their performative nature. Lopez argues that the use of rhythms in the construction of national identities is a case of what Homi Bhabha "characterized as the temporal split between the pedagogical and the performative in discourses of nationness" (Lopez 1997:311). In other words, Latin American rhythms can exist in double-time: *a priori* in the (imagined) history of the nation as well as in the present in the form of performances. "In fact we could argue that in addition to being 'narrated' - a fictional or enunciated construct - the nation (and some more than others) is being insistently sung and danced" (Lopez 1997: 310).

In addition, dance and music as performance are powerful in the construction of the national identity when understood in terms of Victor Turner's (1969) concept of *communitas* (1969). Events where the national rhythm is performed and lived are *communitas* in that they are transformative, creative processes wherein individuals express notions of identity (Daniel 1995). The performance of national or cultural dances evokes this feeling of

"solidarity" or "belonging" with the nation or culture by minimizing differences among a heterogeneous group.

Returning to Daniel's (1995) example of the national status of the *rumba* in Cuba it becomes clear that this "feeling of belonging" is (re)produced by the performance of the rhythm. She argues that performances as well as participatory dance events of the *rumba* evoke a sense of ethnic and national identity that can be shared by all. This shared feeling of belonging is best understood as *communitas*. She states that:

...the consequence or resulting behavior indicates that *Rumba* speaks to and of feelings of *communitas*. Furthermore, the analysis shows that there is an earnest attempt by the Cuban ministry to generate such feelings by means of social and aesthetic behavior. The feelings imply, symbolize, and sustain ideas that Cubans have about themselves and want to inculcate from generation to generation... (Daniel 1995: 135)

The power of dance and music in performance to evoke national identities is so strong that the Cuban government utilizes the *rumba* to generate feelings of nationalism .

In short, the history of the *rumba* as the history of all Cubans in addition with the immediacy of the performance of the *rumba* (re)produce feelings of belonging that are best understood as *communitas*. That is, Cubans may differ in race, class, gender and culture, but the *rumba* "belongs" to them all in the present, as it did in

the past and, therefore, the history of the music tells the history of all Cubans. The rumba is understood as the national rhythm and despite the fact it was rejected and marginalized by the pre-Revolutionary elite. It becomes a unifying or centralizing force in the construction and maintenance of a national identity when the "nation" is invariably diverse.

Yet, the status of a rhythm as national symbol is necessarily tied to issues of whose version of nationness is privileged. For example, in the Dominican Republic (both nation-state and diaspora) the status of the *merengue* as the national symbol is more or less agreed upon. Indeed, the growing popularity of the *bacháta* in urban centres and in the diaspora is beginning to challenge the status of the *merengue*. Historically, the *bacháta* has been considered to be associated with the rural, lower class or the peasant class of the Dominican Republic. However, as more rural Dominicans move to urban centres and North America the *bacháta* is beginning to make its way into the national and international market and is frequently listed as one of the Dominican Republic's national symbols.¹¹

¹¹There is some discussion of the *bacháta* in the Rough Guide to World Music (1994).

Furthermore, the conceptualization of rhythms as symbols of nations can, and for the purpose of this thesis, needs to be extended to rhythms as symbols for cultural groups and diasporas. As stated earlier, cultures can no longer be bound to place or dwelling, including the boundaries of particular nations or states. However, the "nation" often represents the place or dwelling from which the rhythm is perceived to originate. The *rumba* remains a powerful symbol for Cubans living in Florida as the *merengue* does for Dominicans living in New York, although the specific meanings of the symbols are invariably diverse.

While it is true that any nation, ethnic group, or diaspora appears to be "home" to many rhythms, it is also true that any rhythm, dance or music cannot be contained by the nation, culture group or diaspora from which it is believed to originate when the origins are always multiple, fragmented and "imagined." In fact, most of the rhythms mentioned above are syncretic forms of African, European and indigenous dance and music styles. There has been a great deal written on the syncretic nature of the music and dance of Latin America, especially the music and dance of the Caribbean (Manuel 1995, Lipsitz 1994, Daniel 1995). This syncretic nature of Latin American music and dance

illustrates how, like culture, music and dance cannot be spatially or temporally bound.

Claiming Salsa

The contestation of origin is even more profound for salsa than many other Latin American rhythms. That is, the "origin" of salsa seems much more disputed, multiple, fragmented, and imagined. Like most other Latin American rhythms, salsa is a mixture of African, European and, to a lesser extent, indigenous dance and music styles. What is interesting about salsa is that it is a fusion of other syncretic genres: Afro-Cuban rhythms, specifically the *el son* and the *rumba* (and its many variations) and jazz (and its many variations). Salsa is a multiplicity of cultural rhythms that converge(d) in New York, largely due to the efforts of Puerto Rican musicians. This makes salsa difficult to define and impossible to locate. As a result, salsa is often claimed to be Afro-American or Afro-Cuban, Latin American, Cuban, Puerto Rican, *Nuyorican* and, sometimes as urban or *barrio* music.

In short, in Latin America different rhythms are most often "systematically invoked as markers of specific nationalities and as sites for national identification" (Lopez 1997:323). However, considering the multiplicity

and syncretic nature of salsa it is difficult to state that it represents, signifies or "belongs" to one nation, culture or group. If rhythms are used to represent and recreate an "essence of nationness" (or a cultural or diasporic essence) as well as produce and maintain boundaries, as Lopez argues, what happens when rhythms stop reproducing boundaries of nation and ethnicity but are actively engaged in blurring them?

African Roots

We Speak African
- Dizzy Gillespie

Many of the dance and music styles of the Americas such as jazz, blues, reggae, calypso, soca, samba, *rumba*, son, and salsa all have roots, at least partially, in Africa. These roots in Africa create a sense of solidarity by way of an African diaspora that shares within it similar histories of slavery, oppression, and continued cultural resistance (Gilroy 1993, Lipsitz 1994). Afro-American rhythms have become powerful markers of the solidarity within this diaspora in that survival has come to symbolize the resilience and resistance of African cultures (Lipsitz 1994, Browning 1995, Calvo Ospina 1995). As a result, the "Africanness" of the music and dance becomes a signifier of

authenticity and empowerment (Lipsitz 1994, Salamone 1991). Salsa has become a powerful signifier of this African diaspora because it is a "fusion" of two of these Afro-American styles: Afro-Cuban rhythms and jazz.

In his examination of Caribbean popular music forms Peter Manuel argues that "much of Latin American music cannot be regarded simply as the offspring of European and African parents, but rather as the issue of complex processes of musical miscegenation and cross-fertilization" (Manuel 1988:24). Although all these music styles are the result of a multiplicity of influences, there is a privileging of the African roots by artists and fans (Salamone 1991).

In Cuba, most rhythms developed in rural/Black segments of society, specifically within the syncretic *Santería*¹² religion. Eventually these religious dance and music styles were transplanted into secular/urban societies and they began to mix with European styles of dance and music. Dance forms such as the *rumba* and *danzón* were part of Cuban popular culture by the 1930s when they began to diversify. New forms such as the *mambo*, *chachachá* and *el*

¹²A religion primarily found in Cuba and the Cuban diaspora that is a fusion of Yoruba and Spanish-Catholic traditions.

son grew in popularity in Latin America and the United States (Manuel 1995, Gerard 1989).

Roughly around the same time there was an identity struggle in Cuba to reclaim the African roots and heritage of Cuban culture. This "renaissance" or *negritude* became especially strong in post-revolution Cuba (Manuel 1995: 14-16). For example, famous Cuban ethnomusicologist Fernando Ortiz, who located himself within this struggle, demanded that the African roots of Cuban music and culture, be recognized and appreciated. In *La africanía de la música folklórica de Cuba* (1950), Ortiz detailed extensively the African roots in Cuban music, dance, and culture. This marked the beginning of a sentiment of pride in African roots that would be further institutionalized after the revolution (Manuel 1995, Daniel 1995).

Meanwhile, in the United States the emergence of jazz and blues had already taken place and its influence on American popular culture was beginning to emerge. The development of jazz is of particular interest because, similar to the Afro-Cuban music styles, jazz was a definite syncretic style combining African and European elements. Furthermore, like the Cuban experience, jazz emerged in the Black ghettos of the southeastern United States and was dominated by Black musicians and a Black audience. Then,

like Afro-Cuban rhythms, the popularity of jazz began to grow in the 1940s in mainstream or dominant U.S. culture (Salamone 1991, Lipsitz 1994, Manuel 1988).

In his article "Africa as a Metaphor of Authenticity in Jazz" (1991) Frank Salamone argues that the "tension of European and African elements is required for jazz to exist, for the trope of jazz is about just that: a culture that is neither 'this' or 'that' but somehow 'this and that'"(2). Despite this tension between European and African influences, the African elements are privileged because Africa symbolized freedom whereas Europe symbolized oppression and slavery. It is for that reason that Africa became an index of authenticity in jazz (Salamone 1991).

As early as the 1930s, but predominately in the 1940s and 1950s, jazz and Afro-Latin rhythms from Brazil, Mexico and Cuba began to mutually influence each other. The big-band style of swing was influencing Cuban dance and music and the *rumba*, *mambo* chachachá dance crazes went into full swing. At the same time, Afro-Latin styles began influencing jazz arrangements. New genres of Latin music and jazz began to emerge in the musical crossroad, New York. This included the big band *mambo* sound of Tito Puente, Tito Rodriguez, and Machito and His Orchestra; Dizzy Gillespie and Chano Pazo's Cub-bop; the lounge sound

of Stan Getz and Antonio Carlos Jobim; and later the emergence of bugalu and salsa (Roberts 1979, Werner 1992, Gerard 1989).

This genesis of new musical forms was considered political in that it was a (re)unification of African cultures. For example, one of the most famous encounters between jazz and Cuban music is that of Dizzy Gillespie with Cuban music and musicians, specifically congo player Chano Pazo. When Dizzy Gillespie and Chano Pazo began to play together the combination was magical, yet Gillespie did not speak Spanish and Pazo did not speak English. When asked how the two communicated Gillespie replied "We speak African" (Gillespie 1979).

At the same time, the big band *mambo* sound of the great *conjuntos*¹³ such as Tito Puente, Tito Rodriguez and, Machito and His Orchestra achieved popularity with both Latin and non-Latin audiences. Eventually, this "New York sound" began to be called Latin American dance music, and later salsa. The involvement of a variety of Latin Americans, specifically Puerto Ricans, as well as jazz musicians, in this very productive era of music coincided

¹³ Conjuntos are different styles or arrangements of Latin American music bands or "combos."

with the African "renaissance" in Cuba and the beginning of the civil rights movement in the United States.

In addition, salsa and other Latin-Jazz fusions were becoming very popular in Africa (Manuel 1988, 1995). Many musicians such as Dizzy Gillespie, Tito Puente and the Fania-All Stars found great success and popularity in Africa and would embark on several African tours. The popularity of salsa also led to the development of several salsa bands in Africa, such as Boncana Maiga, who toured with the Fania All-Stars, Papa Seck and Orchestra Baobab.

As a result of these processes (but not limited to them), salsa is often referred to as part of, or a product of, the African diaspora. Labeled as "Afro-Cuban" or "Afro-American" salsa is one of many African inspired/influenced popular cultural forms in the Americas. The "Africanness" of salsa is often measured by its call-and-response format (the montuno section), heavy reliance on the rhythm (la clave), improvisation and its association with dance (Calvo Ospina 1995, Gerard 1989). In musicology and ethnomusicology the call-and-response format, emphasis on rhythm and improvisation are all considered central components to musical forms such as jazz, rock and roll, and reggae that are associated with the African diaspora (Feld and Keil 1994).

The emphasis on the rhythm, or more specifically the clave¹⁴, has become an important signifier of "Africanness" or "authenticity" of the salsa. More significantly, many musicologists and historians who study Latin America have argued that African drum resilience in Cuban culture today is a result of the resistance of the slaves and it is a symbol of an "essence" that survived:

If we wish to find a symbol that embraces the cultural identity of the Africans brought to Cuba by the slave trade and which has been able to represent that identity throughout four centuries of resistance despite the most inhuman and alienation conditions known in history, that symbol would be the drum. (Leonardo Acosta as quoted by Calvo Ospina 1995: 7)

The claim that salsa is African, or part of the African diaspora, is essentially based on the notion that the "roots" or the "origins" of salsa are African. The most important signifier of these roots is the clave, the rhythm of salsa. As a result, the clave has become a signifier not only of Africa and the African heritage in the salsa, but also by extension, a signifier of resistance and resilience.

¹⁴Clave is both beat (characterized by a 2:3 or a 3:2 beat) as well the instrument that maintains the beat (two long sticks beat together). It is believed that the clave is a descendent of the sacred rhythms associated with *Santería*.

The Cuban Perspective: Salsa as Ketchup

The only salsa I know comes from a bottle. I play Cuban music.

- Tito Puente

Often quoted as describing salsa as ketchup or hot sauce, Tito Puente is perhaps the most outspoken proponent for Cuba's claim to salsa. A *Nuyorican*, he is one of the most prolific (over one-hundred albums recorded over 50 years) musician Latin American music, jazz, and of what is commonly called salsa. Although he is often associated with the Latin music scene in New York, including salsa, he finds the term "salsa" to be misleading. Puente objects to the term because he feels that it lumps together a variety of rhythms such as the son, *rumba*, *mambo*, *güagüanco*, and the *danzón*. Other criticisms of the use of the term "salsa" are that it erases the "politically inconvenient" Cuban origins (Manuel 1995) and that it is no more than a marketing tool developed by the influential record company Fania to sell what is essentially Cuban music (Gerard 1989, Calvo Ospina 1995).

Before the Cuban revolution in 1959, the music scenes of New York and Havana were closely related and influenced each other a great deal. However, after the revolution many Cuban musicians, such as Celia Cruz (the Queen of

Salsa/*Rumba*), and the famous Cuban band *Sonora Matancera* fled to New York. As a result, the connection between the musical scene in Cuba and New York was more or less severed. Although some Cubans were part of the development of salsa post-1959, it was mostly Puerto Ricans, or *Nuyoricans*, that came to dominate the scene as musicians and fans.

Some argued that these *Nuyorican* musicians were taking advantage of the blockade on Cuba and were, in fact, "stealing" Cuban rhythms. As a result, some "Cuban musicians even instituted lawsuits after they discovered their own compositions had been claimed by other groups, or simply published with the letters 'D.R.' (Derechos Reservados - Rights Reserved)" (Calvo Ospina 1995: 76). Furthermore, it was argued that non-Cubans could not properly express the music. For example, Cuban conga player Mongo Santamaria said that non-Cubans could try and copy the sounds of Cuban rhythms but that they could not copy the feeling because you "have to be from where it came from" (quoted by Gerard 1989: 6). That is, many Cubans and non-Cubans view salsa as an impure form of "traditional Cuban music" that has been predominantly tampered with by Puerto Ricans living in New York.

More importantly, many felt this term was a way to distance the musicians from the "politically inconvenient" origins in Cuba (Manuel 1995). That is, it was difficult to maintain the popularity of these rhythms (*mambo*, *chachachá*, etc.) during an era consumed by anti-communism, when they were the national rhythms of communist Cuba. Erasing the variations, and the names, was a way of erasing Cuba.

Lastly, many critics argued that the term salsa was nothing more than a marketing tool used by the influential recording company Fania Records to sell Cuban music. Fania Records was a company formed in the early 1960s in New York by businessman Jerry Mascucci and Dominican flute player Johnny Pacheco. With access to Cuba severed, New York musicians began to further develop this "New York sound" and Fania stepped in to provide the means to record and, more importantly, promote these artists. They began to use the term "salsa"¹⁵ to describe this new sound and preceded to sign the biggest stars in the New York scene such as Celia Cruz, Larry Harlow and Willie Colon.

¹⁵ The origin or first use of the word salsa used in conjunction with Cuban rhythms is unclear. Some argue that it was dancers and musicians who would often yell out "salsa" to get the band to "heat up" the music or a Venezuelan DJ c.f. Gerard (1989).

The conflict and division between the sound of Fania and the Cuban sound is best illustrated by results of a trip to Cuba by Jerry Masucci and his Fania All-Stars in 1977. The Fania All-Stars were the first group under the label of salsa to play in Cuba and the reaction was telling: the Cubans walked out. Later, Masucci would recount that he knew upon listening to the music that was being made by the Cubans such as Irakere, that the homogenized sound of Fania could not compete.¹⁶

Recently, there has been a "back to the roots" movement in salsa and other Latin music. Cuban bands such as Los Van Van and Irakere are gaining in international popularity. Although most Cubans reject the term, the word salsa has become a powerful marketing tool for Cuban music. As a result, some Cubans distinguish their sound from the New York sound by using the term *salsa cubana*¹⁷.

This "back to the roots" sentiment is best illustrated by the release and enormous success of Gloria Estefan's album "Mi Tierra" (My Homeland) (1993). Gloria Estefan and her songwriter/producer/musician husband Emilio Estefan are both part of the growing Cuban diaspora in Miami. Although

¹⁶ Liner notes to Willie Colon's "Tiempo Pa' Matar" (1990) and Gerard 1989

¹⁷ For example, see the compilation "Salsa Cubana" (1998).

this album is classified as salsa,¹⁸ the album itself does not refer to salsa and seems to resonate with the sounds of the music produced in the 1950s (including the music being performed in New York).

What is of interest is that several songs such as "Mi Tierra", "Tradición" and "Sí Señor," make several references to Cuba and employ distinctly Cuban terminology such as "son," "güagüanco," and "montuno." In particular, the lyrics to "Tradición" illustrate this point very well¹⁹:

Qué alegría sí señor	I'm so happy, yes sir
Aquí con toda mi gente,	Here with all of my people
Y con gran admiración,	And with great admiration
Brindo esta celebración,	I offer this celebration of
De mis raíces trascendentes	my roots.
Yo les traigo un güagüanco,	I bring you this guaguanco
	(another typical Afro-Cuban
	rhythm)
Para que nunca te olvides,	So you'll never forget this
De este ritmo sin igual,	unusual rhythm
Y con eso despertar	And to awaken
El orgullo de tu origen	your pride in your origins
Qué alegría sí señor	I'm so happy, yes sir
De mi Cuba a todo el mundo	From my Cuba to all the world
Yo no sé quien lo empezó	I don't know how it began
Para aquél que lo inventó	But to whoever invented it
Yo le rindo este tributo;	I now offer this tribute
Y aunque el tiempo pasará,	And although time will pass
Es nuestra responsabilidad,	It's our responsibility
A través de la canción,	through song
Servir como educación,	To serve as an education and
Y seguir la tradición	To continue the tradition
Que sigue la tradición.	May the tradition continue.

¹⁸ This CD is classified as salsa in music stores, Billboard magazine, and in nightclubs.

¹⁹ This translation is from the liner notes.

It is not so much that the Cuban claim to salsa is one motivated by a desire to "repatriate" salsa *per se*, but to remind people that salsa is merely a new twist to something that Cubans have been doing for sometime. Therefore, when other nations or cultures such as Puerto Rico and Nuyoricans make claim to salsa there is a sentiment among Cubans of appropriation. Similar to the sentiment of the roots of salsa being essentially African, there is a similar and related sentiment that the roots of salsa are essentially Cuban. Of course, no sound is "pure" and the roots or origins of any music or dance are always multiple and imagined.

Puerto Ricans and Nuyoricans: It's Ours Now

Salsa is as much a part of the Puerto Rican heritage as the typical asopao soup or the popular cockfight.

- Jorge Duany

Salsa is immensely popular in Puerto Rico and in the Puerto Rican diaspora. Puerto Rico is host to several salsa festivals, has high record sales, and is home to many, if not most, of salsa's biggest stars. Artists such as Tito Puente, Marc Anthony, India and Willie Colon are some of the main actors in the (re)production of salsa. Regardless of salsa's popularity in Puerto Rico and the diaspora, it is difficult to demonstrate (or imagine) that

the roots of salsa, even partially, are in Puerto Rico. However, it is possible to demonstrate and imagine that salsa's roots are in the Puerto Rican barrios of New York.

In his article, "Popular Music in Puerto Rico: Toward and Anthropology of Salsa," Jorge Duany (1992) locates salsa in Puerto Rico by de-emphasizing the Cuban history of salsa and focusing on its present manifestations:

The term may refer variously to the musical style of Cuba, Puerto Rico, or the entire Spanish Caribbean; it has even been extended to the music of any "Latin" country. In this paper, salsa will be reduced to a more specific and concrete phenomenon; popular Puerto Rican song and dance forms as they have evolved over the last two decades. (Duany 1992: 71)

Therefore, salsa is often understood not as a "Puerto Rican rhythm" but as "Puerto Rican popular culture" (Duany 1992, Aparicio 1998). It becomes clear that there is a desire to claim salsa in Puerto Rico as a result of its popularity, regardless of the perception, even in Puerto Rico (Aparicio 1998), that the Cuban or African roots are somehow more "legitimate." As a result, the notions of "authenticity," "roots," and "origins" are destabilized by the Puerto Rican claim. For example, Duany makes no effort to privilege the Cuban roots of salsa and, in fact, lists Cuba as one of five "other ethnic influences" to Puerto Rican popular culture.

It is also argued that although Puerto Rico may not be perceived to have a legitimate claim to the "roots" of salsa, diasporic Puerto Ricans living in New York, or *Nuyoricans*, do have a legitimate claim to the creation of salsa. For example, Duany argues that "salsa is, in any case, the unmistakable voice of the Puerto Rican barrio" (Duany 1992: 81). That is, the roots may be in Cuba or Africa but the genesis of salsa was in the Puerto Rican barrios of New York. He argues that it was Puerto Ricans living in New York in the 1940s and 1950s that forged this "Afro-Antillean" genre, strongly influenced by Cuban music, called salsa. He then argues that salsa is very different from its Cuban relative son and that the son was, in fact, not that musically distinct from what was developing in Puerto Rico. Furthermore, many of salsa's most famous artists involved in the New York salsa scene of the 1960s and 1970s were Puerto Ricans or *Nuyoricans*, including Tito Puente, Tito Rodriguez and Willie Colon.

Despite the popularity of salsa in Puerto Rico, its status as signifier or symbol of Puerto Rican culture or nation is highly contested even within the community. This is best illustrated by Frances R. Aparicio's (1998) description of the Puerto Rican celebration at Concierto Expo '92 in Seville that was entitled; "*Puerto Rico es*

Salsa." There was confusion and debate generated by the identification of salsa as the national rhythm or even as a symbol of Puerto Rico. The debate contained several issues: 1) many upper-class Puerto Ricans felt that the national symphony would have been preferable to a tropical music, 2) salsa is often associated with Cuba and, 3) other Puerto Ricans felt the *jibaro*²⁰ would have been a better choice of music as national symbol. This event marked an excellent example of how class, nation, and ethnicity interact in a dialogue aimed at determining which version in the construction of the national essence will be privileged or deemed "authentic."

Salsa: Rhythm of the Diaspora

Hablamos el mismo idioma (We speak the same language)
- Gloria Estefan

As I have illustrated on several occasions, salsa is often referred to very generally as Latin music (Rough Guide to World Music 1994, Gerard 1989, Duany 1992). It has become very popular throughout Latin America and with the Latin American diaspora and is often referred to as the rhythm of all of Latin America and, as a result, become involved in the reproduction of a pan-ethnic Latin identity

²⁰ Dance and music that originates in Puerto Rico.

of *latinismo* or *latinidad*. This claim is based on the phenomenon that salsa's "outposts" of popularity, production, consumption, and participation extend far beyond New York, Cuba, or Puerto Rico but, in fact, can be located from Montreal to Buenos Aires and beyond.

While Lopez argued that Latin American rhythms reproduce national essences and boundaries, she also argued that Latin American music is also part of the emerging process of aligning Latin American music with a "contestational Pan-Latin American/Latino community and/or identity" (Lopez 1997: 311). According to her position, Latin American music and dance are important signifiers of identity in and of Latin America, and music and dance are sites wherein pan-ethnic identities are being negotiated. This negotiation involves both self and other in a process whereby particular identities are produced and transformed.

Of all the Latin American music and dance styles, salsa is emerging as the rhythm involved in the production of a "Latin essence" integral to the negotiation of *latinismo*. This is a direct result of salsa's multiple origins, dwellings and its production in the diaspora. Salsa can represent several cultures, nations or groups at the same time. Gerard best articulates this as a contradiction in salsa;

...the genesis of the music reflects several sometimes contradictory attitudes: a desire to forge roots in Cuban music, an interest in adopting the musical lexicons of jazz and rock, and an often politically-motivated wish to create a pan-Latin American music. (Gerard 1989: 3)

Gerard high-lights the similarity these groups have and the feeling of commonality and solidarity that are part of the formation of *communitas*, as I illustrated earlier in this chapter. This is especially true for a Latin American diaspora living in the United States constituted by different cultures, classes, and national identities that are not always consensual members.

Since the 1960s, the Latin American population in the United States has increased significantly to become a strong cultural and political force in U.S. society. Despite the heterogeneity of this diaspora, they often join forces (based on a common language, some cultural traits, and belonging to a subaltern group) in the political arena. Thus *latinismo* becomes a "political phenomenon, a group identity used to gain advantages or overcome disadvantages in society" (Padilla 1985: 332-335). Whether brought together as Latinos, Hispanics, or in the name of *latinismo* or *latinidad*, there is a movement to find unity in diversity in the Latin American population (Oboler 1995).

As I illustrated earlier on in this chapter the power of music and dance like salsa is that it is performative and can therefore (re)produce a sense of solidarity of commonness that can be conceptualized as *communitas*. Certainly, salsa attempts to produce this sense of commonality by appealing to experiences that many Latin Americans could identify with. For example, on the album "Mi Tierra," Gloria Estefan appeals for Latin American solidarity in the song "Hablamos el mismo idioma" by expressing notions of travel and displacement where as Ruben Blades speaks of urban class struggle in "Mientras duerme la ciudad."²¹

In addition, one of salsa's major characteristics is its "reliance on the sounds and themes of lower-class life in the Latin American barrios of U.S. and Caribbean cities" (Duany 1992: 72). This ability to speak of and to issues of class in the Latin American barrio, whether it be in New York or Mexico City, is one of the reasons for its pan-Latino popularity.²² The lyrics of Ruben Blades, often described as the Latin Bruce Springsteen,²³ often refer to the variety of political and economical issues that face

²¹ "Caminando" (1991), Ruben Blades.

²² The music of Ruben Blades and Willie Colon is often associated with issues of class and struggle.

²³ Rough Guide to World Music, pp. 493.

Latin Americans. Latin Americans can embrace "salsa as an artistic articulation of urban life and a reaffirmation of class conflict and racial identity in Latin America."

(Aparicio 1998: 66)

In this chapter I have illustrated how the different claims, origins, and "outposts" of salsa have (re)produced certain national and cultural ideologies. At the same time however, the syncretic nature of salsa has also become a form of culture critique where notions of bounded nation or culture are challenged. Salsa as a social activity engenders a sense of solidarity (and conflict) in the diaspora based on a perceived commonality that is articulated in terms of Latinness, class and migration/urbanization. As a result, salsa has become a symbol that reflects a certain "Latino" experience of travel and a certain "Latino" essence. An essence that is characterized by a series of conflicting identities and contradictions.

Chapter 3

Travelers, Trespassers and Guests

But even though I enjoyed the music, I often had the feeling I was intruding into someone else's neighborhood.

- Charley Gerard

Like Charley Gerard, I have often felt like an intruder in someone else's neighborhood. Even though salsa's audience, manifestations and "outposts" are diverse and dispersed, it seems that the "neighborhood" called salsa is, despite the multiple claims, distinctly Latin American. That being said, there are a significant number of salsa "outposts" and travelers who are not Latino/a. Either traveling into the salsa neighbourhood or creating their own salsa "outposts" these non-Latino/as have come to constitute a significant presence in the production, consumption and participation of salsa. Regarded by some as intruders, cultural appropriators, or trespassers, others view these non-Latino/a travelers as guests or fellow salsero/as.

As illustrated earlier, the concept of travel and diaspora have been useful for destabilizing the

deterministic relationship between place and culture, successfully capturing that nuances of cultural flow and plurality that has become the challenge to modernist understandings of culture. However, similar to the criticisms of diaspora, travel as a metaphor has been criticized for failing to distinguish the specificity of different travelers and modes of travel; the slave; the migrant worker and the tourist are all understood as cultural traveler.

Culture as travel fails to recognize, by the very nature of its discourse, that gender, class, race and other dimensions of power play into how people and culture travel (Wolff 1993). There is a type of homogeneity enforced or assumed onto the travelers. For example, not all travelers are welcomed, some are guests and some are trespassers. This criticism of travel metaphors is an important consideration in the understanding of salsa's global popularity.

Salsa is involved in the identity politic of several different cultures and communities from Cuba to New York. Most encompassing, salsa is often articulated as the music of the entire Latin American community, and more specifically, the urban Latin diaspora. These multiple claims of salsa illustrate how, like culture, music and

dance travel and thus cannot be bound to one place or culture. Despite all these multiple claims and dwellings of salsa, there seems to be a sentiment that salsa is, at the very least, *musica latina*.

However, upon examining salsa it becomes apparent that there are a significant number of musicians, producers, arrangers, dancers and fans that are not Cuban, Puerto Rican, Nuyorican or Latin American. In fact, many famous musicians and producers of salsa are non-Latino/a including Jerry Masucci (co-owner of Fania Records), Larry Harlow (musician), Marty Sheller (arranger), *Orquesta de la luz* (musical group) and many more. In addition, there is a substantial, and increasing, number of non-Latino/a fans of salsa. The fact that there are salsa night clubs, festivals, clubs, and web sites located throughout the world illustrate that this *musica latina* is travelling beyond the Latin American continent, culture, diaspora, or community.

What is of interest here is that the travel of Latin Americans within the salsa "neighbourhood" is distinguished from the travel of non-Latino/as, such as Euro-American, European or Japanese by *salsero/as*. These travelers are often marked (by themselves, as in the case of Charley Gerard, or by others) as different, strange, or out of

place. Sometimes these travelers are understood as curious tourists (or curiosities) and sometimes as intruders or trespassers. The question is then whether or not this is merely cultural travel, or a form of cultural trespass and appropriation?

Insiders and Outsiders

In the preface to his book Salsa! The Rhythm of Latin Music (1989), Gerard describes in detail his subject position as an "outsider" to the realm of salsa. Although a respected musician and fan of the salsa, Gerard felt that it was important to make clear that he is somehow located on the outside of the realm, that his presence is an intrusion "into someone else's neighbourhood" (Gerard 1989: xiii). Despite his appreciation of salsa, he felt that it was something that did not belong to him and that his participation in salsa was not just travel, but an intrusion, a trespass.

More revealing was the manner in which Gerard positioned his colleagues, informants, and subjects of the study as either insiders or outsiders or as a combination of both. For example, in discussing his meeting with his main informant and co-author of the book Marty Sheller, Gerard writes:

I was, of course, cognizant of the fact that Sheller was not Hispanic. I guessed correctly that he was someone whose initial contact with Latin music had been as an outsider. Because of this experience, I thought he might be the perfect teacher for another outsider. (Gerard 1989: xiv)

Yet, Sheller is recognized as an authority and, to some degree, an insider because he is a well known salsa arranger who has worked with many prominent salsa musicians.

For Gerard, the ethnicity of the *salsero/a* is essential in his/her ability to be an insider. Some claim, such as Gerard, that to produce good salsa you must be able to experience its origins. Even Latino/as of non-Cuban origin seem to be considered outsiders, at least to some extent.

Malabe's²⁴ background as a *Nuyorican* who learned the music by hanging out in the streets of the Bronx gives him an "in" to the music. On the other hand, he finds himself an outsider because of the fact that the music genres he plays are based on the traditions of Cuba...(Gerard 1989: xvii).

Accordingly, at the very least, an insider was "Hispanic" because that "neighborhood" was a Latin American neighborhood. Thus, this insider/outsider dichotomy set up by Gerard in his preface privileges ethnicity, and

²⁴ Frankie Malabe is a well known conga drummer.

specifically "Latinness" as a requirement for producing "authentic" salsa.

Yet salsa's international manifestations and "outposts" undermine essentialist notions of *salsero/as* like Gerard that inform both nationalist ideologies as well as an ideology of *latinismo*. An excellent example of the international manifestation of salsa is its immense popularity in Japan. This popularity is illustrated by the number of Japanese salsa web sites that discuss and share information on the history of salsa, available CDs, and salsa nightclubs in Japan.²⁵ Furthermore, Latin American musicians, most notably Tito Puente, have experienced a great deal of popularity in Japan. In fact, as a result of this popularity, Tito Puente has recorded a song called "Japan Mambo"²⁶ which is a hybrid of *mambo* and Japanese "sounds," and he has collaborated on several occasions with *Oquesta de la Luz*.²⁷

Most interestingly, however, is the fact that there are several salsa bands in Japan including the ground

²⁵ The Japanese Salsa Homepage (<http://www.salsa.org>) is an excellent link to other sites.

²⁶ *Mambo of the Times* (1992), Tito Puente

²⁷ *Sin Fronteras* (1991) *Orquesta de la luz* featuring Tito Puente.

breaking *Orquesta del Sol*, the all women band *Chica Boom*, and the internationally successful *Orquesta de la luz*. The success of these bands in Japan and the rest of the world challenges dichotomies of insider vs. outsider. *Orquesta de la Luz* has a huge international success, including a Latin American following, and are often featured at salsa festivals. Despite this success, and the respect they have received as musicians, in the most extreme case they are often considered by some commentators to be cultural trespassers, or at the least, curiosities. For example, Frances R. Aparicio (1998) states that:

Initially, many Puerto Ricans on the island and on the mainland did not react favorably to what was, to them, a Japanese appropriation of their musical tradition. To be sure, I know many Puerto Ricans who boycott their CDs for nationalist reasons, notwithstanding the fact that musically *Orquesta de la luz* has rendered a most impressive collection of salsa songs and repertoire. (74)

In addition, *Orquesta de la luz* is often treated as a curiosity or an oddity. The presumably inconceivable phenomenon of Japanese playing, singing and dancing salsa (and doing it well) seems to be out of place. For example, note the description of the band's sound in the Rough Guide to World Music:

Slot this into your CD drive, close your eyes, and you *really* won't believe your listening to a Japanese band. This is contemporary salsa as hot as it comes - and a huge success even in Latin America and New York. (1994: 495 emphasis added)

Orquesta de la Luz picks up on this insider/outsider dichotomy and comments upon it in many of their lyrics and song titles. Most strikingly, songs such as "Somos diferentes" (We are different), "Salsa caliente del Japón" (Hot salsa from Japan), and "Sin Fronteras" (Without Borders). In the latter song, they assert their difference as Japanese, as well as assert the irrelevance of it. For example, in the lyrics they sing that "somos japoneses" (we are Japanese), but go on to sing that this should not matter "porque ustedes no le importa que en Japón se gusta la salsa" (because it doesn't matter to you that they like salsa in Japan). In addition, they sing or appeal for "la salsa no tiene fronteras" (salsa has no borders). Their identities as both Japanese and as *salseros* should not, by their own contention, be understood as an oddity...considering salsa has no boundaries.

In addition to the participation of non-Latino/a travelers in salsa, there is also a significant amount of integration and experimentation with non-Latin musical forms such as jazz, rock, rap, and hip hop. Some artists sing in English (Ricky Martin, Ruben Blades), Japanese

(*Orquesta de la luz*, *Orquesta del sol*, Chica Boom sing in Spanish, Japanese and English), German (*Salsaludando*) and French (*Fatal Mambo*). The emergence of new salsa forms such as *salsa romantica*, and the dance-mix versions of salsa songs has led to many criticisms that salsa has lost its "tipica"²⁸ sound and has been commodified and appropriated. Similar to the critique that was leveled against salsa as a commodified pollution of Cuban rhythms, some critics argue that salsa is now polluted by other, non-Latino/a, musical forms (Aparicio 1998).

Those involved in the performance of these new sounds do not always agree with the critique of polluting traditional forms. The French band *Fatal Mambo* is an excellent example of this. *Fatal Mambo* mix the sounds of salsa with the sounds of their own country and call this fusion "salsaioli," a fusion of salsa (the sauce) and aioli (a type of mayonnaise). In a recent interview the lead singer of *Fatal Mambo*, J.F. Oscar Hammel, spoke of how some traditionalists or "purists", mostly Latino/as, will not even speak to them because they view this fusion as a "sacrilege." Interestingly, Hammel also states that

²⁸ "Tipica" means traditional, typical or of a region.

although Latino/as are skeptical at first, the band is winning over a Latin audience when they perform.²⁹

Despite the long history of fusion and multiple influences in salsa (including its origins as a jazz and Afro-Cuban fusion), the participation and influence of non-Latino/as is understood differently by many *salsero/as* and salsa academics (Gerard 1989, Calvo Ospina 1995, Aparicio 1998). The difference between the purported "pollution" of the Afro-Cuban rhythms by Latino/a and non-Latino/a actors can be contextualized within the frame of post-colonial relations. That is, the involvement of non-Latino/as is often understood as (re)producing the hegemony of western culture. Thus, non-Latino/a travelers and their influences on salsa are considered trespassers because they are perceived as exploiting, dominating or, (re)producing a homogenizing force in the music and cultures of Latin America.

Trespassers or Guests

Although George Lipsitz does not use metaphors of travel and trespass himself he does describe a distinction between "collusion and collision." Like trespass and

²⁹ "Mambo Fatal: puristes s' abstenir!" by Jean-Christophe in *La Presse* (March 27, 1998)

travel, collusion and collision differ in "which kinds of cross-cultural identification advance emancipatory ends and which ones reinforce existing structures of power and domination?" (1994: 56) It is, therefore, possible to suggest that some travelers are not necessarily trespassers but guests because they are engaged in a process of "collusion" to advance emancipation or liberation. Other travelers, those unwelcomed trespassers, are involved in the (re)production of existing power relations.

It is argued that all varieties of Latin American music and dance are conflated and by extension this conflation homogenizes all Latin American cultures (Lopez 1997, Aparicio 1998, Munoz and Delgado 1997). Salsa often becomes that catchall category which encompasses several Latin music genres (Gerard 1989, Aparicio 1998), thereby eradicating local variations and meanings in the commercial production of the music and dance.

In addition, it is also argued that the process of homogenization (re)produces certain stereotypes about the colonial Other. For example, Frances R. Arparicio speaks to both of these critiques in her study Listening to Salsa: Gender, Latin American Music, and Puerto Rican Cultures (1998). She argues that the mass production of salsa and other Latin American music forms acts as a means of not

just constituting the Other but "tropicalizing" the Other. Most Latin American music is conflated, often under the term salsa, and for what Aparicio describes as the "Anglo listener." This style of music and dance represents a primitive, pretechnological human essence that is lost in the western world. Homogenizing the Other creates a monolith upon which stereotypes can be ascribed. That is, the production and consumption of salsa by non-Latino/as works to (re)produce the Self/Other binary in post-colonial relations by exoticizing or "tropicalizing" the Latin American Other.

Part of this power dynamic results in Latino/a artists conforming to real or perceived western aesthetic standards in order to achieve success in the global economy. As a result, there is a manipulation or contamination of "traditional music and dance" for commercial success. For example, the emergence of *salsa romantica*, salsa dance mixes such as "I Like It Like That", "Everybody Salsa", "1-2-3 Maria" and the appearance of people singing in English.

Furthermore, dancing the salsa (and other Latin American dances) is a type of domination the dominant culture can "embody," "masquerade" or "dance" the Other (Aparicio 1998, Lopez 1997, Desmond 1997). As Desmond

argues the adoption of Black or Latin dances by upper and middle class whites is a way to embody the other. She writes:

On the one level, by dancing "Latin" or "black" dance styles, the dominant class and/or racial group can experience a frisson of "illicit" sexuality in a safe, socially protected and proscribed way, one that is clearly delimited in time and space. Once the dance is over, the act of sexualizing oneself through a performance of a "hot" Latin style, of temporarily becoming or playing at being a "hot Latin" oneself, ceases. The dance then becomes a social sanctioned way of expressing or experiencing sexuality (Desmond 1997: 48).

Through dancing, the dominant culture or class can embody difference, danger, and sexuality safely. In this process, the stereotype of the Black or Latin other as sexual, erotic, exotic, and rhythmic is reified. While the white upper-class dancer is embodying difference, she/he is also controlling it.³⁰

Moreover, as salsa travels the style of the dance changes and manifests itself differently. It becomes a hybrid of imported styles and local expressions. For example, in Canada my experience has been that while

³⁰This process is often used to describe the changing style of the tango. A scandalous dance that developed on the docks and brothels of Buenos Aires, that was eventually refined on the dance floors of Europe before being shipped back to Argentina in an acceptable form to find great popularity in the Argentine upper class (Desmond 1997).

dancing the *salsa*, *cumbia*, *merengue* or *bachatá* most people dance in a closed couple embrace. Whereas, in Central America and parts of Mexico, couples dance facing each other, but not embracing, especially while dancing the *cumbia*. Many *salsero/as* I have spoken with remark on the "ballroomization" of the dance, especially, the addition of spins and dips. One dance partner of mine often comments that here in North America people dance "too rock and roll," while others have said that the *salsa* is becoming too "fancy."

The "ballroomization" of *salsa* may be the result of many dancers, *Latino/as* and non-*Lationo/as*, learning how to *salsa* in classes held at dance schools, community centres, or often at nightclub on weeknights. Advertisements or flyers for Latin dance lessons are now common in community newspapers and on coffee shop bulletin boards. This same trend has also been noted in conjunction with other dances including the *merengue*, *cumbia*, *lambada*, and especially the *mambo*, *rumba*, *chachachá*, and *tango*. In fact, there is now a distinction made between the ballroom *tango* and the *tango latino* (Desmond 1997).

Beyond its "ballroomization," *salsa* is also starting to merge with other dance forms, such as line dancing. In

Miami the *salsa rueda* (salsa wheel or circle) is growing in popularity. A reporter described the new dance style:

Nights at the Palladium in New York's East Village once meant expressing individual exuberance and dance-floor passion to Latin rhythms. Now, nights at clubs like Starfish in Miami Beach and Club mystique at the Miami Airport Hilton mean synchronized choreography and partner swapping in what looks to outsiders like a hybrid of salsa and square dancing with a disco flair (Navarro 1997)³¹.

These changes to the way salsa is danced has meant a shift in the dance from couples heavily relying on improvisation to "synchronized choreography." Whether it is line dancing or ballroom classrooms, the emphasis on spontaneity is decreasing.

In her article "Embodying Difference" (1997) Jane Desmond explains that these processes of ballroomization, synchronization or de-improvisation mentioned above, are some of the means through which dance styles travel. She argues that it is important to understand how dance styles manifest themselves differently and, more importantly, how their meanings manifest themselves differently. Desmond argues that "dance forms originating from lower-class or non-dominant populations present a trajectory of 'upward mobility' in which the dances are 'refined,' 'polished,'

³¹ "Heady Days for Salsa Nights" by Mireya Navarro in *The Globe and Mail* (October 22, 1997).

and are often desexualized" (39). That is, in order for the dance to travel, or to be transmitted, it must become more predictable, teachable and "acceptable."³²

These processes of "tropicalization," "homogenization," and "ballroomization" are critiqued for (re)producing post-colonial power relations, stereotypes, and the marginalization of the Latin Other. However, it can be argued that the travel of music and dance and their incorporation into local expressions are signs of understanding, tolerance, and solidarity. For example, George Lipsitz (1994) argues that people become involved with salsa, and other Afro-American musical styles, because they identify with feelings or notions of discrimination, marginalization or of being "outsiders."

Lipsitz uses the example of salsa pioneer and star Larry Harlow, also known as "El Judio Maravilloso" (The Marvelous Jew). Harlow is one of the original Fania stars and is well known for his innovations and contributions to salsa,³³ including a recording of "Yo soy Latino" (I am

³²This could also explain why salsa, and not some other non-western music/dance style, has achieved such widespread popularity. Salsa is exotic and different yet it is "familiar" in that the dance is in the style of other European social dances.

³³Interview with Larry Harlow by Edie Lewis
(<http://www.salsaweb.com/features/larry.htm>)

Latin). Lipsitz argues that these musicians, who are not Latin or African, are drawn to the Afro-American musical styles as a result of their lived experiences that enable them to feel a sense of solidarity with the subaltern. That is, Larry Harlow's Jewish identity and the fact that he grew up in Spanish Harlem drew him to the music of another marginal group. Viewed from this angle, what "sometimes seems like simple appropriation may take on very different qualities in the context of energetic contestation and conflicts over meaning among individuals and groups" (Lipsitz 1994: 56).

Furthermore, the existence and popularity of bands such as *Orquesta de la luz* undermines certain national ideologies as well as certain notions of pan-ethnic solidarity. In short, if salsa is the rhythm of a Latin American continent, community or diaspora, how does one reconcile the Japanese salsa bands and Japanese salsa fans? The international popularity of *Orquesta de la Luz*, especially in Latin America, articulates a clear contestation of the "origins" or "authentic claims of ownership" of salsa. It questions what "feelings of belonging" are evoked or expressed when a Japanese salsa band performs. Does the history of salsa include a history of Japanese salsa? Considering the popularity of *Orquesta*

de la Luz in Japan, Latin America and other salsa "outposts" and that they are often invited to participate in salsa festivals, can they really be understood as appropriators?

One way to understand bands like *Orquesta de la Luz* is to call this process "appropriation." However, as Jane Desmond (1997) contends, it is important to understand that cultural transmission occurs on terrains of asymmetrical relationships of power. It shifts the focus away from "how" these cultural products are transmitted, and most importantly, how the meanings shift and transform. According to Desmond, it would be important to understand that salsa in Japan has different meaning than salsa in New York. For example, one could argue that New York *salsero/as* are involved in (re)producing a pan-Latino/a identity, whereas in Japan they are embodying a Latin-Japanese identity in order to safely express notions of sexuality. The issue would not then be whether or not the Japanese "appropriated" salsa.

When cultural travel occurs on a terrain of asymmetrical power relations it is important to acknowledge those relations and critique them. These contestations, travels and trespasses in salsa illustrate how Self/Other binary systems are maintained by the tropicalization of the

Other. Salsa illustrates how post-colonial relations are articulated, negotiated, (re)produced and challenged. However, despite the fact that some Puerto Ricans view *Orquesta de la Luz's* music as a form of appropriation, it is difficult to situate their involvement as a form of western hegemony. The involvement of non-Latino/a travelers that are also non-western resists and challenges notions of a distinct dichotomy between the west and the "rest." When cultural travelers do not (re)produce colonial relations of power are they too considered trespassers who "embody" the Other in order to "control" it? That is, should Japanese salsa bands be distinguished from African, French, American, or Brazilian salsa bands?

In contrast to the arguments that global popularity and the participation of non-Latino/as are (re)producing postcolonial relations and homogenizing or Americanizing non-dominant music, Steven Feld (1994) argues that these processes need to be "demystified." He argues that essentially they reveal a "mutual process of splitting and escalation" or schizophonia and schismogenesis. Simply, schizophonia can be used to describe the process by which music and dance are no longer confined to the time and space from which they were originally produced as a result of the development of mass media technology. This can be

understood literally and metaphorically. First, music and dance can be recorded and (re)performed in an alternate space and time. Second, and more revealing, music and dance can travel to alternate social and cultural contexts, i.e. salsa can be performed in Japan.

Borrowing from Gregory Bateson, Feld defines schismogenesis as the phenomenon wherein two dissimilar processes (traditionalism and experimentation) are mutually appropriate and dependent (Feld 1994). The creation of syncretic forms of world music has also led to the growing popularity and production of "back to the roots" music. For example, in conjunction with the popularity of such syncretic musical and dance forms such as the Macarena, there has also been an increase in more "traditional" forms. In particular, the music of Gloria Estefan, Celia Cruz, and the growing popularity of Cuban bands such as Los Van Van, Irakere, and Celina Gonzalez all illustrate a "back to the roots" movement. More simply, George Lipsitz states that "precisely because music travels, it also augments our appreciation of place." (1994: 3)

The very nature of salsa is that it is constituted by travelers and trespassers and while it is important to understand why there are so many travelers it is also important to understand why salsa travels so well. Similar

to the multiple claims on salsa that were illustrated in the previous chapter, the existence and popularity of *Orquesta de la luz* and, I would argue, other non-Latino/as "has destabilized the value of salsa as nationalist marker or as product of cultural essentialism" (Aparicio 1998: 74). As a result, salsa not only undermines certain national ideologies but also undermines certain notions of pan-ethnic solidarity. Salsa is a site and a process wherein essentialisms of nation ideologies, cultural boundaries and self/other binary systems are negotiated, and more importantly undermined and transcended. Salsa, like the travel metaphor, is a form of culture critique.

Chapter 4

Conclusion: The Sentiment of Salsa

Salsa is feeling. Salsa is fun. Salsa is life.

- Klaus Reiter³⁴

Although I think the processes invoked in the transcultural and transnational travel of salsa are important to understand, they do not reflect the entire complexity of salsa's global popularity. Salsa is involved in a dialogue that constitutes different identities, but this dialogue can not be reduced to just a politic. In fact, explaining the popularity of salsa in terms of politics is not only partial but also misleading. It is misleading because salsa is not just a dialogue or a discourse in which people engage but it is a dialogue that people sing, dance, play, embody, feel and sense. It is the sensuousness of salsa that makes it so contagious and so addicting. However, the sensuousness of salsa should not eliminate or take away from the importance of understanding the political nature of salsa because, in

³⁴Klauss Reiter runs a Salsa web page for Aachen, Germany (<http://aacehn.heimat.de/salsa>)

fact, the two are co-constitutive. Salsa is a *sensuous politic*.³⁵

The Meaning, Agency and Feeling of Dance and Music

Dance and music are powerful symbols or sites of struggle because they are a part of the everyday lived experiences of individuals that evoke emotions and communicate meanings. They are powerful because they are performed/participated cultural forms that can transcend spatial and temporal boundaries. In an attempt to understand the influential nature of dance and music, academics have approached them at a multiplicity of levels including, but not limited to: 1) dance and music as text; 2) dance and music as agent (dominant and resistant) of cultural (re)production and; 3) dance and music as embodied, emotive and sensual (Shepherd 1991, Frith 1988, Thomas 1995, Grossberg 1997, Lipsitz 1994, Feld and Keil 1994, Delgado and Munoz 1997, Browning 1995).

First, understanding dance and music as social "texts" implies that they are communicative. That is, that dance and music are communication systems, perhaps similar to language, that carry with them socially produced meanings

³⁵A great deal of this chapter is inspired by a number of conversations with Caura Wood since 1997.

that can be read through a complex system of symbols (Blundell 1992, Ventura 1996, McClary 1987, Shepherd 1991). Reading music and dance as markers, symbols, or signifiers of identity, whether they are identities of gender, age, class, race or ethnicity, is well established in anthropology and cultural studies (Daniel 1995, Peña 1980 (1996), Shepherd 1991, Lopez 1997, Aparicio 1998).

Second, dance and music are not only vehicles of communication of meaning but can, in fact, (re)produce, shape, or challenge social values, beliefs, and worldviews (McClary 1987, Ventura 1987, Blundell 1992). That is, notions of race, ethnicity, class and gender are not only communicated in dance and music but are also (re)produced, contested, defined and challenged. Therefore, music and dance become agents of social and cultural (re)production and change. In his book Noise: The Political Economy of Music (1977), Jacques Attali went so far as to argue that music "heralded" social change in an almost prophetic fashion.

Third, music and dance can also be embodied, emotive, and sensual. This approach cautions against reducing music and dance to text or politic and to go beyond "cracking the code" (Feld 1994: 81). In other words, we can understand music and dance using a semiotic approach to unpack,

decode, or deconstruct its meaning, if we assume that the meaning of dance and music is somehow located outside the activity itself or that it operates in the same cognitive processes as language (Shepherd 1991). This distinction becomes important when we emphasize that dance and music are *performative, participatory, felt, sensed and embodied*.

If all three approaches are understood as intertwined, not as mutually exclusive, the conception of salsa as a sensuous politic becomes evident. Salsa, and perhaps all forms of music and dance, can not be reduced to just a politic or, conversely, as a sensual or emotional experience if a holistic understanding is incorporated. Neither the politic nor the experience should be privileged when the two coexist and mutually affect one another.

In her article, "On the Politics of Cultural Theory: A Case for "Contaminated" Cultural Critique," Kathleen Stewart (1991) argues that discourse, and here I will argue dance and music, is not just a reflection of situations, but a situation in itself. Drawing from Bakhtin, Stewart contends that "discourse is *productive*. Discourse does not reflect on an extraverbal situation the way a mirror reflects an object but is an act. It acts... It does not reflect a situation, it *is* a situation" (1991:397). For example, salsa does not just reflect postcolonial relations

and dancing salsa does not just reflect certain gender dynamics and relations of power. Rather, salsa produces them and is "entangled" with them *actively*. Furthermore, salsa defies definition and ownership despite the attempts of many because it is fluid, "messy," "entangled," and it is a part of the lived experience of the *salsero/a*.

Furthermore, she argues that the external meanings or reflections often associated with discourse/dance/music are "side-effects" of the *act/situation* of the discourse. These "side-effects," such as salsa's (re)production of certain identity politics, are important foci for inquiry as they reveal much about the social context that these discourses/music/dances occur and are (re)produced. In the case of salsa, its "side-effects" are produced through its travels and (re)productions that reinscribe, transcend and critique national ideologies, pan-ethnic politics, and self/other binaries.

By privileging the "side-effects" of music and dance as *the situation* dance and music then become products of essentialisms, whether it be essentialisms of nation, culture, class, or diaspora. The *other situation* which is lost if the "side effects" are privileged is the simple fact that salsa makes people "feel good." It is this feeling, or sentiment, that urges, compels, and drives

people back to the dance floors, concerts, and music stores. It is why the sounds of salsa echo in my living room and in those of Japanese salsero/as. It "brings the senses to dynamic life" (Fernando Ortiz as quoted by Calvo Ospina 1995). However, these two situations are not separable, they too are entangled and, as a result, co-constitutive.

Addicts and Fanatics

Andrea Shepherd is a journalist for the *Montreal Gazette* and a self-professed "salsa-holic."³⁶ She often writes about the salsa scene in Montreal, which is a dynamic and growing site of Latin dancing in Canada. In her article "Confessions of a Salsa-holic: Latin dance scene attracts a devoted following" (1997) Shepherd describes the phenomena of salsa in terms of an addiction;

Few dancers on Montreal's ever-growing Latin circuit describe themselves as "liking" what they do, weekend after weekend, night after night. More commonly heard are words like "fanatical," "obsessed", and "addicted."

She goes on further to say "the music is intoxicating" while a fellow "salsa-holic" describes it as a drug. In the same article she also describes how part of the

³⁶ "Confessions of a Salsaholic: Latin dance scene attracts a devoted following." by Andrea Shepherd in the *Montreal Gazette* (January 19, 1997).

attraction or "lure" of salsa is the "charming" Latin American men. In this context, Latin American men as the exotic and sexual Other (the politic) become part of the experience.

The feeling of salsa as addiction and compulsion is not uncommon. Klaus Reiter, a German salsa fan has created a web page, a testimony in itself to his commitment to salsa, that provides links, a general history of salsa, performance dates, and local bands that can be found in Aachen, Germany. He explains that "Even among the so-called stiff Germans [sic] there are more 'Salsa-Aficionados' here in Aachen we also like to use the word 'Salsaholics.'" In this case, the "stiff German" is set up in contrast to the "loose Latin" reifying different cultural stereotypes while negotiating a particular identity politic.

In both of these examples there are references to particular cultural images that (re)produce identity politics or stereotypes. At the same time, however, both examples illustrate that what compels, drives, addicts and infects the "salsaholic" is a feeling, or a sentiment of salsa that is often referred to but rarely described. For example, Klaus Reiter confesses that "After all I have to admit, that salsa can't really be explained, it has to be

felt. Although I try to help everyone interested [sic] to learn a bit about salsa, I can't give you that feeling via internet."³⁷ That unexplainable "thing" that captivates the *salsero/a* is sometimes described as a feeling, high, or state.

In an interview with Larry Harlow, Edie Lewis (a.k.a. Edie the Salsa Freak) discusses the history of salsa and the origins of the rhythms in African religious cults. Larry Harlow, who is a priest in the *Lucumi* religion (part of the *Santería*), describes how all the rhythms, including the *clave*, originate with different deities. Edie Lewis asks Larry Harlow about that sentiment in salsa³⁸;

So let me get this straight. That *hypnotic feeling we get when we listen to the basic rhythms of Salsa (Afro-Cuban Mambo or any mixture thereof)*, that feeling stems from the descent of ritualistic tribal rhythms from ancient Africa. (emphasis added)

Larry Harlow replies;

Correct. The hypnotic state...it overpowers you.....The ritual has a lot to do with the music because the music puts you into a trance-like state. The cowbell and the congas are secrets to all that.

³⁷Klauss Reiter, Aachen Germany
(<http://aacehn.heimat.de/salsa>)

³⁸Interview with Larry Harlow by Edie Lewis
(<http://www.saslaweb.com/features/larry.htm>)

Whether it is a feeling, high or "hypnotic state" the sentiment of salsa is what appeals to people, transforms them into "salsaholics". Of course, the obvious answer to this is that salsa is a "sexual" dance. Latin American dances are often conceptualized as "hot and sexy" dances (Fraser Delgado and Estéban Muñoz 1997) that people (Latino/a or non-Latino/a) participate in to express their sexuality. As Jane Desmond suggests, Latin American dances are a way of "sexualizing oneself through a performance of a 'hot' Latin style, of temporarily becoming or playing at being a 'hot Latin'" and, therefore, Latin American dancing becomes "a socially sanctioned way of expressing or experiencing sexuality" (Desmond 1997: 48).

However, it is important not to essentialize salsa into a "masquerade" of a sexual act, or sexuality. That is, instead of reinscribing notions of sexuality to Latin American dances we should ask *why* salsa is considered sexual. The answer to this is in the understanding of dance and music as embodied and the perpetuation of stereotypes of Latin American and African culture.

First, non-western music, such as salsa, is often associated with dance. In fact, Charles Keil (1991), an ethnomusicologist, argues that non-western music is almost always associated with dance. In Keil's words there is a

"romance" between non-western music and dance, and the music is almost always performed. Therefore, in non-western musical forms it is difficult, if not impossible, to maintain a Cartesian mind/body dualism. The music/dance are experienced together in the mind and the body. They are embodied, sensed, and felt.

As a result of strong association of dance with non-western music stereotypes of the African or Latin American as "rhythmic" (being good dancers) have become common (Fraser Delgado and Estéban Muñoz 1997). In addition, there is a historical association of "sexuality" with the colonial other (Bhabha 1994). The "rhythmic" and "sexual" characteristics of the other become signifiers of the primitiveness of the other.

In particular, the stereotypes of Latin American "culture" as sexy and sexual have infiltrated western popular culture³⁹. Images of the "macho Latin lover," immortalized by characters such as Valentino, Zorro and Don Juan have been perpetuated in film, television and literature and images of the "sultry Latin seductress,"

³⁹A thorough examination of the association of "sexuality" and Latin American cultures was not possible in this thesis. However, many academics that study Latin American popular culture have examined this issue in depth c.f. Fraser Delgado and Estéban Muñoz (1997), Desmond (1997), and Aparicio (1998).

such as Carmen Miranda have become infiltrated other mass media forms. As a result, there is an expectation that any Latin American dance and music will be "sexual" and "scandalous." For example, the tango is often described as "the vertical expression of a horizontal desire" despite its categorization as a modern dance in ballroom dancing.

The dancing body is often associated with the other as sexualized, thus, dancing is understood as "sexual" rather than "sensual" or "sensed."

This resonates with what Paul Stoller's conceptualized as a "sensuous" anthropology. In his book, Anthropology of the Senses (1998), Stoller argues that anthropology should incorporate senses and embodied experience into ethnography. Stoller writes:

That the body is inscribed is uncontestable, but to stop there is a serious epistemological error, for in its textualization the body... is robbed of its movements, odors, tastes, sounds-- its sensuousness, all of which are potent conveyors of meaning and memory. (Stoller 1998: 59)

Dancing is so powerful and contagious because it is sensuous and as a result it evokes powerful memories and meanings for the dancer. That is, the appeal of salsa is not necessarily "sexual" (although this could be significant) rather it is "sensuous." Memories are evoked

not necessarily because the body is liberated, but because the body becomes a focus and a medium of the experience.

Steven Feld, an ethnomusicologist who has diligently tried to insert the senses into anthropology,⁴⁰ argues that listening or participating in music creates a "coherence" that is constructed by a "unity experienced across natural/cultural/physical and aesthetic fields of reference" (Feld 1994: 91). That is, music and dance travel or transcend all barriers or boundaries by the very way in which they are sensed: heard, seen, and felt. Salsa's complexity in meaning, its inability to have a singular reading, its global popularity, its "messiness" all result from the "feelingful" nature that engages the listener (Feld 1994: 91).

There is a very close relation between Victor Turner's concept of *communitas* and Steven Feld's concept of "coherence." For example, both transcend boundaries, binaries and dualisms based on a "feeling of commonality." In his article "Ritual Structure in Chicano Dance" (1980 [1996]) Manuel H. Peña argues that Chicano dance events are *communitas* in that they are symbolic, ritualized events where participants establish and maintain the Chicano

⁴⁰Most notably, Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics and Song of Kaluli Expression (1990)

culture and community. More importantly, Peña illustrates that essential to the (re)production of this feeling of commonality or solidarity in the community is that "the daily grind of life was suspended."

I would argue that the understanding of dance and music as an ability to "suspend the grind of everyday life" which creates feelings of "coherence," or "communitas" represent different strategies that academics have incorporated in an attempt to capture that "feeling" that the musical or dance experience creates. The dancing body may have many meanings ascribed to it, such as sexuality, class, gender, and ethnicity but the difference is that these identities are lived, experienced and expressed overtly in the body. These expressions, of course, are also "side-effects" that can be understood in terms of a "body politic" where the body being inscribed with meanings of sexuality, class, and ethnicity. The (re)focusing on the body as the medium of the experience "suspends" the "grind of everyday life" which creates the feeling of belonging, community and coherence.

When individuals, whether they be *Nuyorican*, African, Cuban, Latino/a, Japanese, or Canadian, listen, and more illuminating when they perform or dance to salsa they feel good. The dancing allows them to express (sensuality,

ethnicity) creatively and to remember sensually through the body. At the same time, however, there is also a feeling of "coherence" (Feld 1994) or "*communitas*" (Turner 1969) where these dimensions are constantly evoked and transcended by the dance. Therefore music and dance have two levels; as politic and as experience. However, it is important to remember that these two levels are "entangled" and one is always influenced and affected by the other.

Salsa travels so well because it is "contaminated" and its "messy" nature resists being located or claimed because its origins are ambiguous. The very nature and history of salsa blurs national boundaries, (re)produces ethnicity, nation, class, self/other divisions as well as transcends them. Like any travel/trespass salsa contains within it a politic of power but like any music or dance it also contains a sentiment. This "entangled" nature of salsa allows multiple actors (or dancers) to participate in salsa. Their participation has several political implications or motivations but their experience of salsa is emotive, sensed, felt, and remembered.

In short, salsa is involved in certain identity politics and this is significant, however, these politics are diverse and they are not necessarily unique to salsa; there are other means to express and produce them. What is

consistent for each "outpost," neighbourhood, traveler, guest and trespasser is that salsa makes them feel or sense something difficult to describe. These feelings or sentiments are often entangled with the politics and identities, but they differ for each salsero/a. Yet, what is common among the experience of all salsero/as is that the salsa experience is "feelingful." This is best described by Bill Cosby:⁴¹

It has nothing to do with whether Tito can speak Italian, Yugoslavian, Russian, Chinese, or Japanese. The beautiful thing about it is, once he bangs those two sticks together counting off the rhythm like sign language, *they all come together and dance, they tap their feet, and they feel good.* (emphasis added)

It is this global "foot tapping" and dancing to salsa that is lost in the discussion of salsa as travel, politic, or even salsa as cultural critique. Salsa is so contagious because it makes people *feel good*.

⁴¹Liner notes, "Mambo of the Times" (1992) Tito Puente

Conclusion

When I first embarked on this project my intention was to examine the role of Latin American dance and music, specifically salsa, in the (re)production of Latin American identity, culture and community in the Canadian context. In particular I wanted to examine how music and dance was involved in the negotiation of a "sense of place." That is how music and dance, dance bars and dance events worked as a method of integration for immigrants into a host society. Aspects of this original question appear in the section where I describe salsa as the rhythm of the diaspora, a concept that salsa somehow signifies or symbolizes a growing pan-ethnic sentiment.

One of the most obvious problems with this approach that kept (re)surfacing was that not all Latin Americans were involved in the "salsa scene," in fact, some Latino/as expressed ambivalence or rejected tropical dance and music styles such as salsa entirely. Furthermore, there was even an ambivalence or rejection of the pan-ethnic identity or the concept of *latinismo* by Latin Americans who strongly articulated their national identities. Moreover, not all people involved in the "salsa scene" were Latin American, such as myself.

Much of the literature on salsa, and other Latin American dance and music styles, referred to its history as well as its role in an identity politic, particularly its role in a pan-ethnic identity politic. What troubled me was that this literature failed to capture the dynamic of salsa experienced, it failed to capture the voices of the fans of salsa or the *salseros*. The passion and energy was lost and the phenomenon of two people sweating on a crowded dance floor was forgotten.

At times I felt as if I might have been projecting my own strong sentiments of salsa onto an imagined population. This fear was partially, if not wholly, inspired by the well-established self-critic in anthropology that argued for a more reflexive discipline. Despite this fear, I realized during my participant observation and informal interviews that I was unable to ignore my own experiences and feelings associated with salsa and those sentiments expressed to me by other people who were also involved in the "salsa scene." Salsa did not make them more or less likely to identify with a larger pan-ethnic identity nor did I feel that my involvement and other non-Latinos in salsa could be completely explained by a desire to consume, control, or masquerade as the Latin American other.

At the same time, criticisms stemming from cultural studies and post-colonial study that insisted on recognition and understanding of the politics of the everyday encouraged me to question the politics of salsa. More specifically, these criticisms encouraged me to question to what degree certain post-colonial relations of power were at play in the popularity of salsa with Latin Americans and non-Latin Americans. That is, some Latinos did feel a sentiment of pan-ethnic solidarity with salsa and some non-Latinos were masquerading as the Latin American other, at least some of the time.

On the one hand, I was concerned with addressing the politics of this multi-cultural encounter of dance and music and, on the other, with expressing the sentiment of salsa. At first, it seemed these two aspects were mutually exclusive but in the end I concluded that they were not exclusive but co-constitutive: the politic was sensuous and the sentiment was political. Salsa at this point became a tool not only to critique the concept of culture as static but also as sense-less. The nature of salsa critiques concepts of culture as well as the split between the political and experiential. Salsa, by its very nature of having multiple origins, of traveling, of being political and sensuous all illustrated the entangled nature of

culture. Salsa is Latin, Japanese, Cuban, political, and sensual. Salsa is a *sensuous politic*.

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