Abstract: The article analyses how discourses around Cuban dance create an economy of authenticity that requires travel, presence, and shared experiences. Encounters in touristic settings bring forth imaginaries and performances of Cuban masculinity and femininity that are marketed to international tourists as transformative journeys, that become possible by means of consuming and embodying an "exotic" Other. Embedded in the current neoliberal transformations of global capitalism, ideals of authenticity become the ultimate goal in a culture of self-fulfillment, as music and dance lessons promise more than an immersive experience in the sounds and bodily practices associated with Cuban folklore and popular culture.

Keywords: Cuba, salsa, dance tourism, dance schools, heritage, gender, labor

[word count excluding references: 7.437]

Salsa seduction: the lure of "personal development" through dance tourism in Cuba

During the five years I spent conducting fieldwork in Havana's salsa schools, from 2015 to 2019, I often came across large groups of tourists who were starting their vacation in Cuba with a salsa lesson. While many of them were not in Cuba for the specific purpose of studying dance, salsa lessons were an almost unmissable element on their agenda. Dance classes were usually scheduled on the first days of the program, creating the idea of "immersion" in Cuban culture and providing participants with the opportunity to dance and enjoy their nights out in popular dance venues.

One of my research participants, a young Cuban dancer who used to teach private lessons to tourists in the living room of the bed&breakfast (B&B) run by his parents, summarized recent transformations in the dance business as following:

> People slowly understood this was easy money. In one hour, you can make the equivalent of the monthly salary in this country. And then maybe you find yourself a girlfriend; you leave the country. It's easy to make them fall in love with you. You don't believe all these women come here just to learn how to dance, do you? Some of them come because Cubans are so *cariñosos* [affectionate] and make them feel appreciated; others come because they

> already have a very good level, and they just want a man who can dance. But in the end, they all come for the attention, for the way we are, for how we treat women. (Luis, personal communication, Havana, 2016)

Luis expressed a widespread point of view I had come across many times during both formal interviews and informal conversations, not only with dancers or dance school owners: namely, the belief that foreign women come to Cuba looking for romance, love affairs or sex, and that the easiest way to fulfill this fantasy is by taking up dance lessons and attending dance events or concerts in the venues that catered to tourists and Cubans alike[1]. For the majority of tourists who arrive in Cuba, interactions with locals are usually reduced to short conversations and mostly revolve around services rendered in the tourism sector (by either tour guides, private accommodation owners, taxi drivers, bartenders). The case of dance instructors is a particular one, since they use their interpersonal skills beyond the strict demands coming from work requirements, performing an affective labor (Hardt 1999) that places them in the role of gatekeepers for many of their clients.

The dance business is thus situated at the intersection of an emerging private sector, built upon new work practices inscribed in the economic logic of Cuba's neoliberal turn (Perry 2016), and widely circulating imaginaries about the "hot" nature of Cuban people. Contact with foreigners elicits creative approaches for financial gain and perpetuates expectations about Cuban fantasies created and maintained by the global tourism industry and adopted by Cubans in their interactions with foreigners. It is not uncommon for Cubans involved in the dance scene to be regarded as the embodiment of an imagined lifestyle that responds to tourist expectations:

[1] Perhaps one of the most common representations of Cuba is that of an island where music and dance never stop, and many tourists I encountered during my research expressed their disappointment at not being able to attend a "Cubans-only" salsa party. Popular tourist venues where salsa nights are organized were frequented by tourists and Cubans alike, but the myth of the non-touristic dance events was busted quickly, even for the most eager and persistent tourists, who insisted to find their way to Cubans-only events (if and when they eventually did, the music played at those parties was usually reggaeton).

happy, carefree, always smiling, always ready to dance. Their "failure" to respond to these expectations is rarely interpreted as proof of the complexities of everyday lives unfolding (also) in tourist settings but is rather perceived as a violation of tourist expectations and met with disappointment, disenchantment, and sometimes frustration. Many of the women I spoke to during my research expressed their disappointment that during dance parties they were not invited to dance very often, and when they were, they understood that "not all Cubans are very good dancers".

Negotiations of expectations created on both sides of the touristic encounter was further complicated by the expansion of the dance school business into the territory of nightlife and entertainment. As dance teachers began to accompany their clients during their nights out in popular dance venues, dance came to function as an interface for more complex networks of alternative economies, creating new spaces and forms of revenue.

As they moved from the dance school to the dance floors of popular salsa venues, my research participants situated themselves on both ends of the leisure/labor spectrum, framed in tourism studies as a dichotomy: "one's person's leisure is another person's labor" (Chio 2014, xvii). What they clearly and unequivocally defined as "labor" spilled into the realm of "leisure", challenging the notion of informal encounter, and redefining the boundaries between spaces and times of work and recreation.

In what follows, I discuss how discourses around Cuban dance create an economy of authenticity that requires travel, presence, and shared experiences. From these encounters in touristic settings (whether salsa schools, festivals, or popular dance venues) come forth imaginaries and performances of Cuban masculinity and femininity that are perceived as more "authentic" than those pertaining to the worlds dancing tourists come from. Tourists are allured by these performances and by their underlying significance and promises.

Dance trips and dance programs organized on the island for international tourists emerge as transformative paths in the journey to one's "true self", achievable by means of consuming and "embodying" an exotic Other. Embedded in the current neoliberal transformations of global capitalism, ideals of authenticity become the ultimate goal in a culture of self-fulfillment, as music and dance lessons promise more than an immersive experience in the sounds and bodily practices associated with Cuban folklore and popular culture. Along with transmission of knowledge and skill acquisition, scripted interactions (Grazian 2008) with Cubans, on and off the dance floor, become central to these programs, as tourism organizers and tourists attribute to Cuban dancers (and, by extension, to Cubans as a whole) highly desirable qualities believed to have been lost elsewhere: sociability, a naturally flirtatious predisposition, lightheartedness and sensuality.

Based on a multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995), this article puts forward a transnational perspective, as I explore the imaginaries that circulate on local and global Cuban social dance scenes, along with the different types of mobilities that feed into each other and become possible through affective labor (Hardt 1999). The first section looks into the developments and the dynamics that brought "Cuban salsa"[2] to the core of the dance business in Cuba. I then move on to discuss the idealized and romanticized patterns of gender behavior that come forth in dance programs advertised to international tourists; the last section considers the implications of these divisions along gendered lines for the dance labor performed by women in the new economic context, which allowed private businesses to develop (also) around popular dance genres.

Embodied archives and embodied souvenirs

Cuba entered neoliberal logic through developments in the tourism sector that put

[2] Throughout this article, I use the more general term "salsa" when referring to what Cubans call "casino," as it circulated among my research participants.

together cultural products that would be recognizable to the foreign customer and retain the labor that initiated commodification of stereotypical images. Taking lessons with Cubans in Cuba entails the promise of "Cubanness" that can be embodied and integrated in salsa dancing. Essentialist and naturalized categorizations in terms of gender and ethnicity circulated widely among my research participants, as a result of interactions between Cubans and (usually) white European dancers who take up space as central dancing figures and co-create the cultural script that fetishizes Cuban black bodies, especially in settings such as salsa schools or popular dance venues.The sexualization of exotic bodies has become a standard tool of Caribbean tourist promotion, and feeds into the development of sex tourism in the region, transforming people into "embodied commodities" (Sánchez Taylor 2000, 42) available for tourist consumption. Scholarship on recent developments in Cuban tourism has emphasized the processes that connect the sexualization of Cuban people in tourism and leisure services to the colonial past of the island (Fusco 1997; Sánchez Taylor 2000; Kummels 2005). The reproduction of racial stereotypes contributed to the growing popularity of Cuba as a tourist destination where sex is easy, available, and part of the holiday experience. In fact, the reemergence of sex tourism in the 1990s recalled images associated with pre-revolutionary prostitution, corruption, and excess, that the government had wished forgotten. While relationships are often seen as purely sexual, usually between Afro-Cuban women and male tourists (Fusco 1998), Cuban men's involvements with foreign women are framed as "romantic involvements" and even though they do not exclude an important economic component, they reinforce sexualized racist fantasies that attract female (sex) tourists to the Caribbean (Kempadoo 2004).

The quest for "authenticity" manifested in Cuban dance is predicated on co-presence, sharing, and direct experience through the body. Furthermore, it is inscribed in a broader orientalizing discourse that portrays Cuba as "frozen in time" and disconnected from the rest

of the world, connecting dance genres to the idea of a journey "back to the roots" which can be experienced through the dancing body. Heritage can thus be understood as performance (Smith 2006), its historical and social meanings, as well as social values, constantly redefined and negotiated.

The rise of mass heritage tourism invites notions of "consumption" to enter the heritage debate. As embodied knowledge becomes commodified, disrupted transmission processes are revived and integrated into new socio-cultural contexts, shifting positions of knowledge control. Local dance memory is no longer the sole expertise of old practitioners or trained professionals. The transformative capacities of the dancing body as a living archive (Djebbari 2021) open pathways to memories of the past and at the same time new possibilities for future performances. As the meanings of heritage are not fixed, but context specific (Klekot 2014), assumedly traditional knowledge, central to cultural heritage, is confronted with political, bureaucratic, and business "expertise", and with the popular demand for certain cultural practices regarded as traditional or representative.

The arts and artistic education played an important role in the Cuban Revolution of 1959, as part of a broader project that had education at its core. Through the foundation of schools and academies that would educate the country's art instructors, the government aimed at forming *aficionados* (amateur performers) who would disseminate knowledge among ordinary people, and ultimately create active participation by "rescuing the talents that had been neglected through underdevelopment, social segregation, and reactionary social structures" (Kumaraswami 2009, 536). In 1962, the government inaugurated the National Art Schools (*Escuelas Nacionales de Artes*) specialized in four disciplines: ballet, theater, plastic arts, and music, to which modern dance and folklore were added in 1965.

Researchers in the department of folklore were the first ones to codify and standardize Afro-Cuban dances (Yoruba technique) and to create the curriculum for teaching students

who were not practitioners of any of the Afro-Cuban religions in which these dances were primarily situated. Through these processes of standardization, Cuban dance heritage of African roots began to be disseminated on a larger scale, and with the first generations of graduates, certain dance practices were massively presented and taught across the country. The institutionalization of Afro-Cuban practices, supported also by the establishment of the first revolutionary institution dedicated exclusively to folklore (*Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba*), was part of the revolutionary government's attempt to erase racial inequalities, in line with the concept of a raceless society, which stood behind revolutionary ideology. Before the revolution, venues dedicated to commercial entertainment were dominated by black, working-class performers, most of them coming from poor neighborhoods. Yvonne Daniel (1995) argues that such measures, although they did serve the equalitarian agenda of the government, were also meant to keep large groups of practitioners under strict supervision. Similar dynamics regarded popular music and dance, which although considered vulgar and crude manifestations of the "low class", had unquestionable utility for achieving certain goals, like the mass mobilization of workers or support for political campaigns (Moore 2002, 56).

The arts would foster new forms of social and political consciousness, elevate workers' spirituality, and help fight alienation through work. At the same time, they would reflect the rich Cuban heritage and the unique mix of cultures that made it up, while promoting ideals of racial equality and supporting the government's claims at having eradicated racism. Some of these attitudes would still be visible decades later, in official promotional campaigns aimed at international audiences. The Cuban government's promotional campaign, *Auténtica Cuba*, relies on images of dance that represent either cabaret dancers, ballet ensembles during rehearsal, or performances of Afro-Cuban traditions. In a similar fashion, the section of the Museum of the Revolution dedicated to culture and education displays pictures of the National Art Schools, the National Ballet of Cuba, performers of *nueva trova* (revolutionary song) and

the international book fairs.

As Cuba reopened to international tourism, most experiences presented in Western media or offered by international tour operators and travel agents put forward narratives that naturalized the exotic and praised the sensuality and raw sexuality of the Caribbean, embodied in cultural practices which ensured recognition, as well as revenue. The exotic representations in contemporary tourism echo the broader themes along which the Caribbean was imagined and narrated as a tropical paradise "open to be invaded, occupied, bought, moved, used, viewed and consumed in various ways" (Sheller 2003, 13), a symbolic construction of essentialized forms predicated on imperialist nostalgia (Rosaldo 1993). While media and tour operators did not exclude the classic Caribbean trio sun-sea-sand, in the Cuban case it was enriched by a growing interest manifested toward Cuban culture. Elements of tangible and intangible heritage came to play a key role in the development of the industry, through its economic value. With the rise of "experiential tourism" (Salazar 2011) active participation in lessons, workshops, festivals and concerts became an essential part of cultural tourism, also due to the increased popularity of Latin American dance and music on the international dance scene, which motivated many dance aficionados to come looking for inspiration and knowledge "at the source".

Many of my research participants expressed the belief that Cuban dance was revived in the past decades because of the large presence of tourists and their interest in a variety of genres. "Cuban dance was rescued by tourism. Thanks to it, Cubans became interested once more in their dances, in their folklore… even salsa. It’s back because it is so popular outside Cuba," was the opinion of Rogelio, a young dancer and dance instructor based in Old Havana. However, Rogelio's thoughts reflected a common perception among young dancers at the time of my research.

The presence of dance in tourist venues speaks of more than just the economic aspect:

in many instances, it is considered beneficial not only because of the financial opportunities, but because it reinforces the importance of dance for the community and draws international attention to valued and valuable manifestations of Cuban culture.

Although Cuban heritage regimes (Bendix 2013) come forth within the framework of state socialism, they did not remain untouched by neoliberal logic which led market ideologies to dominate the sphere of heritage management. Salsa emerges as the most sought after dance, "a gateway to the cultural Other, a fascinating and often exotic world where new selves find liberation from cultural strictures" (Waxer 2002, 3). Dance lessons aimed at foreign tourists capture the essence of the dance in a series of decontextualized movements, much like souvenirs function in touristic settings as "selective templates" (Benson 2004, 27), reducing the places they represent to a series of decontextualized moments. The main goal of dance classes taught in Havana's salsa schools was, in the words of many of my research participants, "to give a feeling of what Cuban culture is".

This dynamic was further accelerated as Cuban dance styles gained popularity around the world and processes of commodification triggered processes of codification. The feeling they referred to was joy, expressed through an outburst of energy that most teachers tried to recreate while teaching a class.

This codified and commodified knowledge started to account for mechanisms of differentiation in the field of social dance learning. The ultimate legitimization for dancing tourists, therefore, translated to collecting a body of knowledge about different dance techniques. Once mastered, the new techniques speak about entitlement just like "the exotic souvenir speaks about the exceptionality of its owner" (Wieczorkiewicz 2012, 47). Tourists' preferences for one genre or another create and maintain hierarchies built on levels of proficiency that further influence the development of the dance market. This process is reflected in the inclusion of new genres in the offerings of salsa schools, without necessarily

creating employment opportunities for larger groups of practitioners; many of the rumba practitioners do not work for any of the dance schools. Their contacts with tourists are limited to shows and performances that can bring them new students from time to time, but do not ensure a steady flux of work. As dance practices travel through dancers' bodies and memories in a global dance market, they take on the symbolic meaning of an embodied souvenir, which in its fragmentary and essentialized representational dynamic attributes value to tourists' danced experiences.

Mirroring a more general tendency among tourists to act as a cohesive group through the selection of souvenirs that recall the experiences of other groups, dancing tourists tend to favor genres that primarily function as symbols of Cubanness in touristic settings. As my ethnographic material indicates, in Cuba salsa or rumba encapsulated their dreams and desires of an island of dance.

The dance and the dancers, commodified as a whole, objectified as part of the scenery, provide the background for a project larger than simply being a tourist. Through the development of alternative forms of tourism, recent years have brought about a new kind of tourism (aimed mostly at female consumers). As I discuss in the next section, women are encouraged to fully immerse in Cuban culture through dance and street interactions, and such practices are promoted as means of empowerment and a path toward reconnecting to an ideal of femininity and female sexuality no longer achievable in the countries they come from, yet completely accessible when faced with Cuban performances of masculinity.

Dance, the art of seduction, and personal development

Dance programs are advertised as means to achieve a more intimate connection with Cuban culture. In the context of growing international tourism, emphasis was placed on the potential of culture to generate economic returns and new forms of commodification of "cultural resources" (Yudice 2003). By insisting on the "authentic" character of Cuban music

and dance and the enjoyment that results from immersion in this world, these dance programs put forward and explicitly advertise the promise of a "new path" toward one's "authentic self". The overwhelming majority operate with essentialist images materialized either in dance performances or in everyday interactions, and representations of Cubans become normalized as useful contextual material for the trip[3]. Claims at an innate predisposition for happiness become embedded in the political and economic context, as Cubans are praised for their resilience and creativity, while emotional identities are normalized and inscribed in the stereotypes of the happy, free tropical local.

The transformative power of dance is explained through the same nostalgic tropes of "isolation" that place the entire country in a "frozen in time" state. Furthermore, it is suggested that Cuban men have a particular ability to make women feel special and attractive. The normalized everydayness of sexual promiscuity and availability are framed as a "way of being" rather than a "way of behaving" (Ogden 2015, 123). Sex tourism has reiterated and reinforced some of these tropes, emphasizing the flirtatious predispositions and lax sexual moralities of the locals. Although such images partly converged with the observations of other researchers (Sánchez Taylor 2000, Kempadoo 2004) about the link between racialized bodies, the colonial gaze, and the developments of tourism in the Caribbean, they apply to Cubans more broadly (see also Simoni 2016). From being specifically attributed to black bodies, hypersexuality came to the fore as a representative feature of Cubans in general (although strong emphasis was still put on the unrestrained, almost volcanic sexuality of Afro-Cubans). Not only does such an approach transform Cuban people into means towards achieving one's ends (in this case, an "upgraded", strengthened femininity), but in an attempt at liberating women from the pressures

[3] At the time of my research (from 2015 to 2019), I mostly observed programs organized by European, Canadian, and US travel agencies or salsa schools that would collaborate with one or more Havana-based salsa schools for the duration of the program. In some cases, large tour operators would include such programs in their offerings, as a means to diversify their portfolio, while in others these were smaller scale enterprises, usually developed by women with an interest in Cuba and Cuban dance, and who wanted to share their passion with other women.

they are confronted with in their daily lives, it perpetuates the scheme of "femininity as spectacle" (Bartky 1997, 140). Moreover, as salsa crosses from the domain of leisure and fun onto new grounds upon which self-fashioning processes take place, ‘dancing wisdom’ (Daniel 2005) becomes less connected to high specialization and is subsumed under market logic.

Dance programs operate with two layers of idealized patterns of gendered behavior: an idealized model of femininity to be followed, to be treated as a source of inspiration, and an idealized model of masculinity which – by means of interactions– can help boost one’s self-esteem and confidence, ultimately leading to new performances of femininity.

Idealized images of Cuban femininity are expected to materialize in self-improvement, in enhanced femininity that has learned the secrets from the source. Interactions with Cuban women are, however, quite limited, and usually are reduced to "styling lessons" and the adoption of a few visual elements understood as signs of body positivity. "Styling lessons" are aimed at breaking down specific movements of the arms, shoulders, and hips, and place strong emphasis on the woman’s capacity for creative improvisation during moments of solo dancing. They usually come to complete dance lessons with a male partner, in order to make the movement look more ‘natural’, more "fluid", to give it "Cuban flavor", as explained by the women I met in various schools during my research. Most of these were women tourists who spent a few weeks (some of them a few months) perfecting their dance technique and who would occasionally take one or two "styling lessons". Only some of them considered it was necessary to study with a female instructor for longer, and in many cases the focus was not on bodily movements and improvisation, but rather on partner dancing, with the teacher leading – or *bailando de hombre* (dancing the male part). As many dance programs emphasize seduction and flirtation as desirable skills to be transferred from Cuban women to foreign women visiting the island, intertwining gendered body and beauty ideals with narratives of success (understood in many cases as successfully performed seduction), movement and learning to dance "like

Cubans do" become the path towards achieving this goal. Paradoxically, features of femininity and skill that are admired for being "disconnected" from consumerism and capitalist logic are to be put to work in order to increase efficiency and success in a neoliberal scheme that is not to be challenged but improved through knowledge extraction.

Although dance holds an important part in these personal projects of enhanced femininity, other elements come into play. Bodies are conceived as spaces of transformation that leave nothing untouched – from clothing to ways of walking, looking, touching, and flirting. Attributes of a broader idea of "Cubanness" (seduction, playfulness, sensuality) are framed as desirable skills that need to be acquired and improved, in order for women to realize their full potential. This entails a strong belief in one's capacity to develop self-esteem, self-love, build meaningful relationships and become more confident. The lack of such qualities is usually attributed to external factors pertaining to the "developments of the Western world" and presumably, can be fought back through immersion in Cuban culture, as advertised by many of these dance programs. The example below is illustrative for a broader tendency to valorize Cuba's imagined state of "isolation" and put it to work towards personal goals of female tourists:

> Many of us are so caught up in the system, that we've lost connection to our true selves, our authenticity, our female wisdom. However, in Cuba, the rules are different, and you can feel the female wisdom vibrating through the air. It's the best place for women to learn how to fully embody this feminine wisdom from in to out[4].

Such beliefs are deeply connected with the idea that it is possible to seek and find "meaning", "authenticity", "truth" through practices related to embodiment and performance of Cuban dance – which stops being a purpose in itself, but a tool towards self-discovery,

[4] https://www.powerofsomaticintelligence.com/retreat-power-of-sabrosura accessed 31.08.2020

ultimately leading to increased satisfaction and a sense of being content, comfortable with one's "true self" or "true nature".

Rooted in the neoliberal idea(l)s of "self-discovery" or "self-building", these programs emphasize the process of transformation one should constantly undergo in order to realize one's full potential. For the neoliberal self-governance mode, "to be empowered, free and actively choosing becomes the normative ideal" to which one must aspire through ceaseless self-care and perfection, and for which one must bear full responsibility and take risks (Chen 2014: 448).

Styling lessons aside, some of the fashion choices made by tourists try to emulate what is perceived as body confidence, usually attributed to the way Cuban women dress (tight leggings and tops were mentioned in conversations about "Cuban body positivity"). Long, breezy, tropical dresses are quickly replaced by shorts and cropped tops, and they become almost the norm during dance lessons, when it is not uncommon for the top to be replaced by a simple bra or a sports bra. What is perceived as an adaptation to local norms through a transformation in looks and overall appearance turns out to be, in fact, a misreading of local norms that breaks the codes of proper conduct. Respectability, understood as a virtue pertaining to a celebrated femininity (De Shong 2012) is incompatible with certain choices made by female tourists. My friend Elena, whose parents owned a B&B, which I regularly rented in Havana, made the following comment one day, upon seeing a tourist leave the house in a sequined bra and a pair of shorts that revealed her buttocks: "I don't know why people say that Cuban women are sluts, maybe because we like very tight clothes, but then you see all these tourists in their very short pants, and short tops, showing off everything, and we're the sluts?"

As interactions with Cuban women are rather limited for most female tourists, idealized images of local femininity are usually materialized entirely through interactions with Cuban men. The streets of Cuba provide the venues for other types of scripted interactions, as women

can relish the prospect of being complimented and chatted up by Cuban men. A Polish tour operator advertised trips to Cuba as following:

> Too fat, too thin, too old… Feel like a super-attractive woman in just two days, without killer diets, without expensive cosmetics or medical procedures. Come with us to Cuba! You will dance salsa with handsome, dark-skinned men- wonderful dancers. You will attract looks filled with lust, and you will walk like a queen, graciously receiving compliments. We have been organizing groups to Cuba for five years now, getting to know real Cuban life. We dance, we meet people and their authentic world- a world in which complementing and seducing women are natural as breathing.

The female (dancing) body became central to these personal-development programs, in a world of presumed freedom and tolerance around the body. Yet normativity characterizes the ways in which women are expected to interact with the world around them; through sensual and sexual(ized) experiences with local men, the 'secrets' of local femininity are broken down into sequences and reduced to almost mathematic formulas that can be successfully learned. Havana becomes a stage where seductive, flirtatious, and skilled at dancing Cuban men are the only social actors who matter in daily interactions, and where Cuban women are repositories of knowledge about seduction. This knowledge is assumed to be transferable through the body and then practiced with local men. Foreign women arrive in a 'border zone' (Bruner 1996) and their tourist gaze is already conveniently directed toward essentialist representations of local masculinities and femininities, hence what is seen and experienced is interpreted further in terms of these categories (Urry 1995:132).

In her study of the practice of *piropos* (catcalling, compliments and comments in street interactions), Silje Lundgren discusses the centrality of this practice in everyday life in Havana, and analyzes the various challenging strategies employed by Cuban women who 'by no means

passively or silently accepted this symbolic appropriation of the arena of the street' (2013: 13). While piropos do belong to the various performances of Cuban masculinity, Cuban women display a certain resistance to the practice, and approach it critically. Their stances reflect broader attitudes in Cuban society and the gender hierarchies that the egalitarian revolutionary project could not shake. The reality of Cuban women's daily lives points out a complex, multilayered femininity, related both to broader understandings of femininity in Latin America and to the particularities of the Cuban Revolution.

As pointed out by Emily J. Kirk, 'Cuban feminism does not fit into the typical frameworks of Marxist, Socialist, Liberal, or even Third World feminism. Rather, Cuba has encouraged the development of a unique form of feminism that is based on universal values and Cuban revolutionary ideology' (2011: 148). The Revolution brought about the patriotic duty of women to participate in the workforce, but their domestic obligations remained unchanged and traditional gender roles remained dominant, being strongly linked or related to a kind of machismo that is deeply embedded in Cuban culture. Rooted in almost four centuries of Spanish colonial rule, it portrays the ideal man as hyper-masculine, strong, virile and unfaithful, while mystifying women's sexuality.

Despite the achievements and expectations in terms of social equality, the economic crises that have characterized Cuba in past decades have been deeply gendered. The Special Period made things even more difficult, as house chores, regarded as almost exclusively women's responsibility, became more time-consuming and challenging, because of limited resources. This reinforced the idea that women are domestic "experts" solving problems, doing the work, saving money, knowing what products to buy so that they wouldn't be overpriced. Cuban women embodied (and still do) the *luchadora* – a person of great resourcefulness and strength, who relies only on herself within *la lucha* (a widespread concept in Cuba, referring to the daily struggle of making ends meet). Touristic discourses today naturalize emphasis on

the growing role of family/personal relations, emotional connections, and 'unspoiled' feminine wisdom. However, they completely overlook the growing importance of such networks as survival strategies beginning with the Special Period, as a response to the withdrawal of the state (Härkönen 2016) or the re-traditionalization of gender roles in the wake of an economic crisis that insinuated itself in people's daily lives (Garth 2020).

Dance work and the female body

Within the revolutionary project, women came to make up a high percentage of the workforce in general, and in highly qualified professions. In the private sector, the situation appears to be different, as, according to official data, only one in seven workers is a woman (Hoffmann 2010: 4). It is worth pointing out, however, that many jobs in the private sector are not always licensed or subject to taxation, and in many instances, domestic labor (upon which private accommodations and private restaurants rely heavily) is carried out informally. With the new laws that liberalized hiring of labor and allowed Cubans to set up small enterprises, dancers could obtain licenses for self-employed workers as 'teacher of music and other arts' (*Profesor de música y otras artes*).

The kind of flexibility required by the private sector means that dancers need to be fully available at any time, depending on the dancing tourists' schedules. In addition, they are expected to actively seek new clients by either attending salsa parties and concerts or by handing out business cards and flyers in crowded tourist areas. Tania, a dancer who at the time of my research had already worked for three different schools in the course of a year, explained that if she had no clients for a few days, she would usually go out dancing, or be out in the street handing out leaflets and business cards. But when clients eventually did show up, the school owner would assign them to the dancers who had been the longest without any work. Eduardo, Tania's partner at the time, made the point that

> When you have a business which does not belong to the state, you need to have a capitalist way of thinking. You need to think more about the business than about the personal problems of the people who work for you. (personal communication, Havana, 2019)

Their example illustrates how functioning outside the state-regulated system guarantees self-employed workers a newfound independence and a sense of freedom that the state sector lacks. But at the same time, they bring their contribution to the creation of new social norms characterized by increased individualism and autonomy (Ewick and Silbey 2003). The "self-steering" capacities of the individual designate new rules for everyday life: initiative, ambition, personal responsibility.

Although workers in this new economic paradigm remain somewhat attached to the idea of being members of a collectivity, they also develop new economic strategies and make decisions that were not necessary under the socialist system. Subjectivities are reconstructed to encompass a growing range of individual choices, grounded in autonomy, risk-taking, and decision-making. At the same time, the private sector reflects changing ideas about how work should be remunerated and about the relationship with the employer, as independent workers experience a certain degree of freedom. This holds true for dancers perhaps even more than for owners of private accommodations or restaurants workers, as teachers are not always considered "staff". Despite certain loyalties and perhaps a sense of belonging to a school or another, solidarity and competition co-exist, doubled by a sense of independence, which ultimately manifests as promoting one’s work instead of the school one works for. Dance teachers' work is inscribed in larger networks of heritage-making processes, both institutional and grassroots, grounded in post-revolutionary cultural policies and the emergence of a dance market as a result of growing international tourism after the Special Period.

Women dancers were usually less well-situated than their male colleagues and, on average, earned less than men did. However, they did have access to hard currency and functioned in a system that required them to look more and more like their dancer counterparts in Europe (fit, voluptuous, not too curvy, not too skinny). Most of them were in relationships that required more than one source of income and they contributed financially to maintaining a family (at times even the extended family).

Tania recalled that one of the reasons why she left her previous school was the owner's willingness to overlook clients' abusive behaviors, as most of them would leave generous tips. Tips would rarely, if ever, make it into the pocket of the teachers, who were pushed into a type of transactional relationship that disregarded their personal boundaries. Critical dance scholars have addressed gender inequalities in dance careers in the international salsa circuit (McMains 2015, Pietrobruno 2006), pointing out that they reflect broader inequalities in society that make women more vulnerable to harassment. While defending their professional identity is common to all dance teachers[5] who seek to actively dissociate themselves from self-professed dancers or self-professed dance teachers, women have to fight against the moral stigma that still surrounds dance and dance-related activities, perceived by many as "*cosa de putas*" (a slut thing). These tensions situate the female dancing body on murky grounds where desire, power, and capital are constantly negotiated, and where the histories of dance academies in pre-revolutionary Cuba are echoed, as described by Melissa Blanco Borelli. For example, men who found themselves attracted to their dance partners could pay extra (at the ticket desk of the academy, to the girl's mother or chaperone) for a more intimate contact off the dance floor (2016, 74).

[5] The professional trajectories of dancers involved in this research show how meanings attributed to professionalism change within the new logic of entrepreneurship, as dancers begin to internalize notions designed for the marketing of commodities. Notions of pride, professionalism, and 'correct behaviors' become central to dancers' identities, especially in the early stages of their interaction with clients – building reputation and building networks are two of the most important elements in establishing a client base, a constant workflow, and subsequently securing constant access to hard currency.

For my research participants, it became imperative to separate the morality of dancing from the morality of sexual labor. Mireya, the owner of a dance school, recounted the following situation:

> Once I had a client coming to the school, asking for dance lessons, and to go out at night. And he asked if we provided full service. So, I asked him, what do you mean by full service? And he said dance classes, going out at night, and then, when the party is over, you know... I told him to go look for another school because this is a dance school, not a prostitution school. If you want a woman to sleep with, you can look for one in the street, but these women in my school, they are professional. In my school this is strictly forbidden. And the teachers who do this, they know they can expect to be fired. I do not want such people in my school. Ultimately this creates a very bad image of Cuba, and of Cuban women. (personal communication, Havana, 2016)

Mireya's moral concerns reached beyond school management and maintaining a clean professional account for herself and for her dancers. She wanted to make sure that none of the actions associated with the school could ultimately denigrate Cuban women and she was keen to defend an image built around respectability as one of the highest virtues.

Further divisions across gender lines are revealed by the corporeality of dancers, their physicality, and the different regimes of the body. Male dancers emphasized the importance of rest and regeneration after long hours of dancing and they were the ones who usually spoke about the limitations in the life of a dancer, usually referring to the deterioration of their (own) physical capital. Many male dancers were actively seeking possibilities to travel abroad and build an international career while still young and in good shape – yet in their case, fitness or physical shape had almost nothing to do with appearance. While male dancers explained they were not particularly keen on working out or frequenting gyms (some did, but the majority insisted dancing was enough to keep them in shape), women dancers were either making efforts

to have a workout routine or expressing feelings of guilt over not being able to be "disciplined enough". Many of the women I worked with saw the gym and various types of workouts as a necessary addition to their already busy daily schedules, complementary to various forms of dieting.

On the other hand, women's perceptions, ideas, and desires were beginning to be influenced by bodily practices and gendered performances that were different from their own. As their dancing had been subjected to professionalization strategies and transformed into their main income source, perceptions of a dancer's body were modeled onto representations coming from the world of ballet or contemporary dance, as these genres had benefited from constant and substantial promotion from the state. Furthermore, in recent years, due to the increased visibility and accessibility of the transnational salsa circuits (whether directly or indirectly), the standardized image of the female salsa dancer became a reference point for many Cuban dancers. The salsa scene brings into the spotlight bodies that are shaped through 'body work' (Gimlin 2007), which includes dieting, working out, certain hairstyles, and possibly cosmetic surgery. All of these are used in order to attain a certain appearance, which is highly valued in salsa circuits (Menet 2020).

Changes in the tourist sector over the past decades have brought about rising inequalities as well as the adoption of some elements of non-Cuban beauty ideals, coupled with an ethos of independence and idealization of self-discipline. Yet these processes, however visible among female dancers, have also indicated that conflicting attitudes and beliefs about the body are located somewhere other than within ideals of beauty. These conflicting attitudes and beliefs reveal processes of self-referencing, showing how social relations are conditioned by multiple, at times contradictory, values and practices.

Conclusions

With the development of international tourism, heritage becomes a valuable resource; constantly redefined and negotiated, it is placed into hierarchies as a result of approaches to culture in light of neoliberal practices and ideas (Scher 2011). In the Cuban case, notions like 'authenticity' or 'being frozen in time' build up on the imaginary of the Global South as an unspoiled, unique place and – paradoxically – this perceived 'underdevelopment' becomes a selling point for tourists seeking new experiences (MacCannell 1973: 176).

The global fascination with Cuban music and dance is part of the affective and emotional networks of interest in Cuban culture and Cubans (Ferguson 2003: 2) and one of its consequences is the transformation of bodily assets into economic capital.

Dancing bodies, racialized and sexualized, become transactional through their inclusion in hybrid business tactics, formal and informal. Cuban dance instructors reinvent themselves as cultural brokers, adapting and responding both to the neoliberal logic of entrepreneurship and to tourist imaginaries and desires, which to an extent govern their participation in the global dance market. Their racialized and sexualized identities become part of an embodied and commodified performance that is interpreted as "natural" and "real", reproducing one of the main tropes of tourism promotion in the Caribbean, the sexual objectification of "exotic" bodies. The socio-economic changes of the post-Soviet period in Cuba are reflected in micro-transformations at the level of everyday life, activating new economic possibilities that build on widely available cultural resources. In the process, dance becomes a cultural commodity that is co-produced by Cuban dancers, dance instructors, and international tourists alike. Dance performance and practices are shaped by notions of tradition, authenticity, and global imaginaries.

For tourists, dance practices become the equivalent of "embodied souvenirs" (Author, Date) that make "Cubanness" available and, in a way, portable through the body that has

experienced it. Taking lessons with Cubans in Cuba entails, therefore, the promise of a Cubanness that can be embodied and integrated in salsa dancing. It is the (usually) white European dancers who take up space as central dancing figures, co-creating the cultural script that fetishizes Cuban black bodies, especially in settings such as salsa schools or popular dance venues. International travel agencies and salsa schools that organize dance programs on the island, and that market primarily to a female public, promise self- development experiences through immersion in the bodily practices associated with Cuban dance. Inscribed in the broader frame of new forms of self-governance, these programs encourage female tourists to explore Cuban culture as new paths considered most adequate and compatible with their self-interest. For European women tourists, especially, Cuban dance creates their own "project of the self," which is aimed at building up confidence and individual identity, and is subsumed to the domain of marketized self-governance. Private dance schools and popular dance venues in Havana become the meeting grounds for tourists, dance professionals, and local dance aficionados, who are teachers who facilitate the exchange of essentialized ideas about dance; racialized and sexualized bodies become the meanings of a constantly negotiated Cubanness. Bodily assets are transformed into economic capital, and the tourist dancing bodies become the epitome of "authenticity". "Embodied souvenirs" emerge from the work of a globalized tourism industry, as consumption of dance forms feeds into the idea that the world can be experienced through the individual journey of the dancing body, a body that discovers new ways to move, to feel, to connect to itself and to others.

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