THE DYNAMICS OF SALSIOLOGY IN CONTEMPORARY GERMANY: RECONSTRUCTING GERMAN CULTURAL IDENTITY THROUGH SALSA MUSIC AND DANCE

Eddy Magaliel Enriquez Arana

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2007

Committee:
Dr. Christina Guenther, Advisor
Dr. Francisco Cabanillas, Advisor
Dr. Valeria Grinberg Pla
Dr. Geoffrey Howes
ABSTRACT

Dr. Christina Guenther, Advisor
Dr. Francisco Cabanillas, Advisor

This thesis explores the significance of the consumption of salsa music and dance in the Federal Republic of Germany and its impact on the construction and reconstruction of German and Latin American cultural identity. The discipline of cultural studies has much to learn from the Latin American presence in and their contributions to the establishment of the salsa institution in the Federal Republic. The thesis discusses the level of German involvement in the creation of a transnational music and dance culture traditionally associated with the Spanish-speaking world exclusively.
To all my friends, peers and family who support me in my love for the German language and salsa music.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Ernesto Delgado of the Romance Languages Department for guiding and encouraging me in the conceptualization of the topic of this writing project; to Dr. Christina Guenther of the German section whose untiring and superb academic counseling oriented not only my scholarly development but also my skills as a writer, and instilled in me confidence and drive to excel in the study of cultures and languages; to Dr. Francisco Cabanillas, my enthusiastic ally throughout all stages of this endeavor; to Dr. Valeria Grinberg Pla and Dr. Geoffrey Howes of the Spanish and German section, respectively, for providing insightful suggestions for improvement of my arguments; to both departments’ invaluable resource Catherine Cardwell for teaching me the inner workings of Jerome Library’s research tools; to Dr. Nathan Richardson for providing me with the theoretical framework to visualize cultures through more critical, organized, and succinct ideas; to my friend, colleague, and peer Joselyn Ramey whose never-ending support and shared love for everything salsa motivated me to begin writing and complete this thesis; to all those friends, loved ones and fellow salseros/as who provided honest and constructive feedback and encouragement for ideas; and finally to my family for inculcating in me the appreciation of my own cultural heritage and that of those around me.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I. WHAT IS SALSA?</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introducing Salsa</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Origins of “Salsa” Music: A Multinational and Multiethnic Enterprise</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afro-Hispanic Popular Music in the 20th Century: A Brief Overview</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rico’s Afro-Hispanic Music Spectrum: A Brief Overview</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York City: The Translocal Birthplace of Salsa</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Salsa Diaspora: The Japanization and Germanization of Salsa</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II. GERMAN SALSAFIEBER</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salsa’s Translocal Travels: From Japan to Germany</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How and When Salsa Music Reached Germany</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where and When Salsa is Danced in Contemporary Germany</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study: Germany’s Salsa Industry</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlin’s Salsa Scene</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of <em>Salseros</em> in Germany</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dynamics of <em>Salsafieber</em>: Germany’s <em>Salsiology</em></td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring Salsa Indentities: German Salsa Marketing and Advertiseement</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III. RETHINKING GERMAN CULTURAL IDENTITY</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany’s Immigrant Society: Integration and Acculturation</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSIONS: Perspectives on the Future of Germany’s Salsa Scene</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES/TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure/Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 A Musical Representation of <em>clave</em></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 An Image of <em>clave</em> as a Percussion Instrument</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 The Salsa Visa Card</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Salsa Gala 2007</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Salsa Palladium Mainz</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Put a Little Salsa in Your Life</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Oster Special mit Yamulee aus New York</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Conexión &amp; Latin Factory</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Caribe Sals[ó]dromo</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION: CONCEPTUALIZING SALSA IN GERMANY

My thesis begins with a description of contemporary salsa as an independent and internationally-recognized musical genre and dance, and consequently, I attempt to furnish a definition that incorporates its origins and the traditional social contexts that can be attributed to its developments. Using salsa as the foundation for the topic of this study, I further describe its numerous musical and social transformations. Overall, I provide the reader with what the salsa experience entails for the study of culture.

My second chapter deals with an exposé of salsa dancing in Germany. Since its “introduction” into Germany approximately twenty years ago, salsa music and dance have become nothing short of a sensation among Germans of several generations. This so-called *Salsafieber* (salsa fever) is remarkable given this genre’s traditional association with two Spanish-speaking countries of the Caribbean: Cuba and Puerto Rico. Salsa can be heard and danced in any major city in the Federal Republic. This leads one to speculate: Have Latin American immigrants become the initial ambassadors of this sensation, and, beyond that, do they now draw on salsa as their ticket to cultural acceptance in Germany? Why are they in Germany? What is the nature of their involvement in German society within the salsa scene? This will be fundamental in Chapter Three when I theorize about the significance of this phenomenon for the multicultural dimension of German cities. I will demonstrate that salsa dancing has indeed earned a privileged position in multicultural events spanning salsa clubs, discotheques, dance workshops, festivals, and concerts in the Federal Republic.

I will further develop Chapter Two by addressing the following questions: Is the scope of salsa music’s attractiveness such that it has developed into a marketing tool used
by the German salsa industry? In other words, the “who”, “what”, “where”, “when” and “why” of *German* salsa dancing will be explored. A connection will be made in relation to Germany’s already existing dance traditions, a link between salsa’s institutions and the support of German *Tanzvereine* (dance associations and clubs).

I will conclude Chapter Two by providing a case study on German salsa dancing as it manifests itself through *Vereine*, workshops, competitions and its participants in Berlin. This example will make clear to the reader the level of German involvement in salsa, and, more importantly, it will be the basis for the cultural and social relevance of this project to the identity debate facing multicultural Germany today.

My third chapter will have a theoretical emphasis. I will argue that Germans’ embracing of salsa music and dance does in fact relate to the *reconstruction* and redefining of *their* cultural identity. This phenomenon will necessitate an accompanying fundamental question, namely, what are the cultural and societal implications of salsa music’s popularity in light of contemporary Germany’s integration efforts? This issue will guide my critical thinking and the theoretical component of the research and writing process as a whole.

Essentially, postcolonial and deconstruction theory will direct my cultural analysis of salsa dancing in Germany. Intellectuals such as Edward Said, Samuel P. Huntington, Stuart Hall, Néstor García, Iain Chambers, Edmond Jabès, Antonio Gramsci, in addition to John Shepherd’s perspectives on ethnomusicology of “music as social text” will build my theoretical framework. I join these theories by reflecting on the role of Latin Americans in this transformative contribution, exchange, marketing, importation and exportation of salsa as a full-fledged musical genre and dancesport in Germany.
From a cultural studies standpoint, I also examine the roles that are assumed by Germans in this process of cultural negotiation.

Furthermore, I shall identify the dynamic of “Otherness” brought about by the German salsa scene. In this study, an identification of the salsero “Other” is critical to interpreting his/her portrayal. By reflecting on Germany as an immigrant nation, I conclude that this cultural phenomenon does in fact lead to a creation of a Latin American immigrant culture in Germany. This is pivotal in my reasoning because I argue that the German and Latin American salsa experience in Germany redefines their respective cultural identity through the creation of place and belonging.

Postcolonial and poststructuralist methodologies, traditional and non-traditional critical thought and discourse of cultural identity as essence and/or social construction, respectively, serve as vital components to the development of my arguments. Germany’s Selbstbild (self perception) will be reconnected with its relation to the “exotic” from Chapter Two in order to explain a direct correlation between Latin Americans’ acceptance (integration) and their role in the salsa experience. Conversely, I explore the dark side of this immigrant population’s non-acceptance. Obviously, this topic cannot be completely idealized. The idea of tensions between Germans and Latin Americans will be used to refute the reinforcing of stereotypes and how they are perpetuated. Hence, the question: To what extent is Germany’s Selbstbild being altered by salsa music and dance?

Moreover, a perspective on Germany’s salsa fever serves as a connector to the future of this music and dance as either a fad or a contribution to German popular culture. Throughout this study, I search for the changing faces of salsa in Germany. Salsa is indeed undergoing significant and noticeable structural and ethnic transformations. My
own application of postcolonial theory demonstrates how Germans *adopt, adapt* and *adept* salsa; this analysis ties in with the notion of a construction of a transnational immigrant dancing culture. I conclude with the following question: What is compromised culturally and musically within salsa music and dance to secure its success in contemporary Germany? Ultimately, though, I seek to analyze the connection Germany’s salsa dancing industry creates for the discussion of cultural identity.
CHAPTER I: WHAT IS SALSA? INTRODUCING SALSA

As a means of introducing salsa, I will begin this chapter with the following musical debate raised by Gerardo Rosales:

Salsa is a rhythm, is a reality… That the root is from the Cuban son, it is true, that the clave is important and one has to keep it, is true. But salsa is salsa. El Gran Combo plays salsa. Let’s be clear. Eddie Palmieri plays salsa. Ray Barretto plays salsa. Richie Ray, Joe Cuba play salsa. Machito plays mambo, plays mambo jazz. Each thing in its place. Machito does not play salsa. I see it that way because of its harmonic and rhythmic structures. Cubans cannot play salsa. There is not a Cuban salsa group, it does not exist. (Berríos-Miranda 23)

In other words, who plays salsa and does it exist as a coherent and unified genre? That is the question many critics ask regarding this musical style. One could attempt to define salsa, but it would be just that, a mere attempt. Given the complexities and controversy surrounding the origins of salsa, this chapter will approach the development of this unique “way of making music”\(^1\) within its historical and social-cultural context. Furthermore, the method for introducing salsa to the reader will be to describe its beginnings, developments and transformations. After situating salsa, I begin with its Latin American roots and metamorphosis into a New York City-based musical genre. Finally, I will conclude this chapter with the notion that salsa’s survival as an

\(^1\) The term “way of making music” as it refers to salsa appears in Lise Waxer’s *Situating Salsa*. I apply it as a synonym to salsa throughout this thesis.
independent and internationally-recognized genre is directly linked to its so-called
translocality.

The concept of translocality serves to “uproot” salsa from essentialist notions that
associate the style specifically with West African, European, Afro-Cuban and Puerto
Rican roots. In sum, 19th century essentialism² will be called into question to
demonstrate that salsa’s existence has had to be and will continue to be a translocal
cultural phenomenon. Indeed, salsa itself exhibits a process of translocation. As Mayra
Santos Febres explains in her article, “Salsa as Translocation,” the process of
translocation in the context of salsa music could best be defined as “the emergence of a
globalized musical community” that supersedes the geographic limits of a nation” (186).
From all spheres of its production and reception, salsa thrives on its own
internationalization.

² Which holds that one’s culture and, consequently, cultural identity, are inherent to a geographical space—an indivisible, unchangeable and biological constant directly connected to a national identity.
THE ORIGINS OF “SALSA”:

A MULTINATIONAL AND MULTIETHNIC ENTERPRISE

In this chapter, I do not intend to discover the true and undisputed origins of salsa nor to assign it to one particular cultural unit—Latin American—thereby limiting it and denying its international importance. Instead, I will provide basic insight into the development of the genre that first and foremost could be understood as “a social and cultural way of looking at the world [that] is welded to praxis, ([the] making [of salsa]) through the creation and reception of musical sound” (Waxer 6). Simply put, salsa is a concept signifying experimentation, a creative perspective.

Salsa music and its beginnings as they are known today have been traditionally associated with several Spanish-speaking countries in the Caribbean Basin: Cuba, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, and Colombia. Thus, in this chapter I will focus on Cuba’s and Puerto Rico’s contribution to the genre as they relate to New York City during the 1960s and ‘70s. First, however, I will continue with a description of the development of “salsa.”

The term “salsa”—literally meaning “sauce” in Spanish—as it is understood historically, calls to mind the famous Cuban Ignacio Piñeiro and his song, entitled Échale Salsita, written in 1933 for his Septeto Nacional. This title is Spanish for “Give it sauce” or “‘Put a little sauce on it” (Waxer 3). Nonetheless, it is unclear whether Piñeiro in fact invented the term as applied to music. Indeed, credit for inventing the term “salsa” in reference to a musical genre is much contested. Cuban musicians during the first fifty years of the 20th century would call out “[¡]toca con salsa! (“hit it” or “play with salsa”) when playing Afro-Hispanic numbers (Waxer 4). Thus a reference to “sauce” as a

---

3 While there is a notable salsa tradition in Venezuela and Colombia, both are beyond the span of this writing project.
4 By “salsa,” I am referring to the genre as a cultural construction and concept.
mixture, the term “salsa” reflects the diversity of Latin America as a convergence of African, European (mainly Spanish) and indigenous cultures. This musical concoction that is salsa evokes the exoticism that is often conjured up in relation to Afro-Hispanic music and culture in particular. In addition, the spiciness of the sauce can be transferred to the genre and this musical concept signifies metaphorically a postcolonial meeting point of European, North American, indigenous, and African musical expressions.

Despite these multiethnic associations, the use of “salsa” became most popular in the U.S of the 1960s and ‘70s. The term “salsa” referring to a hybrid musical genre did not just come into existence spontaneously; it was consciously employed as a marketing tool by the mainstream music industry. During the 1960s and ‘70s in New York City, the recording industry used “salsa” to categorize a wide array of mainly Cuban musical rhythms that also integrated Puerto Rican musical traditions, even including jazz and rock from North America. The Venezuelan DJ Phidias Danilo Escalona was among the first to use the term to refer to Latin dance music on the radio during the early 1960s (Waxer 4). It is nevertheless disputed whether or not New York publisher Izzy Sanabria actually coined the term at the end of the decade.

All in all, the record company Fania Records astutely marketed its artists’ productions under the “catchy” marketing label “salsa” (qtd. in Washburne). Throughout the 1960s and ‘70s, Fania Records was pivotal in formalizing and institutionalizing salsa as a genre within the international music community. Fania Records helped forge an industry by selling the genre to the world as “salsa” and, in the process, successfully positioned this concept on the world market. In addition to providing the usual identifying information (name, album and list of songs for each record), Fania Records
also strategically labeled its Latino (and Latin American) artists’ albums with the term, and signs exhibiting the word “salsa” could be found at performances. After much exposure to Fania’s “salsa,” consumers came to accept the term and even identified with it. Thus, Fania Records was influential in linking this product label with the cultural identity of mainly Latin American (im)migrants living in New York City.

In fact, the commodification of this “new way of making music” was so successful that by the early 1970s, “salsa” became the identifying term par excellence for the Latin dance music developing in urban New York City. Moreover, “salsa” as both a concept and a socially-accepted product had a social task to carry out, namely, by means of its lyrics. The movement sought to create public awareness of the urban violence and disillusionment experienced by lower-class Latinos, whereas in the past, its Caribbean predecessors focused on nostalgic memories of rural life in Cuba central to the son\(^5\) tradition during the first part of the 20\(^{th}\) century (Chasteen 10). Yet, salsa’s differing social component did not hinder its acceptance in Latin America, for it was during the 1970s and ’80s that New York City salsa achieved popularity in Caribbean countries, particularly those sharing linguistic ties with their Spanish-speaking New York counterparts, such as Colombia, Panama and Venezuela. Contact between Latin musicians from New York City and the Latin American musical scene was facilitated by relatively close connections between (im)migrants from Puerto Rico and the rest of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean Basin.

Given their status as U.S. citizens, Puerto Ricans were especially instrumental in maintaining the bi-cultural musical dialogue between Latin America and the U.S.

\(^5\) I shall explain son’s significance to salsa in the section entitled *Afro-Hispanic Popular Music in the 20\(^{th}\) Century: A Brief Overview*. 
mainland. Unlike other Latinos living in urban New York City, such as the Cubans, whose travel to and relations with their country of birth was nothing short of complicated due to the U.S.-imposed political embargo, Puerto Ricans were not as limited from traveling to foreign countries. As a result of their privileged political status, Puerto Rican migrants became salsa’s cultural ambassadors throughout Latin America. Salsa proved its transcendence of national and social boundaries quite early during and after its emergence and construction.

Even though salsa initially emerged as a form of socio-musical expression by lower-class (im)migrant groups in New York City, this innovative music style was able to permeate into Latin America’s middle and upper-middle classes of the political Left. At the time of salsa’s creation, access to such pastimes as music production was to a large degree only attainable by the ruling class (Santos Febres 182). Salsa’s transcendence factor will be revisited in the last section of this chapter. Now, however, I will continue to trace the historical development of the term “salsa” and subsequently its musical growth.

Interestingly, the contact between traditional music of the Caribbean basin and that of New York City salsa that was facilitated by U.S. Latinos created notable friction among many music purists. Many challenged the nuances in New York City and considered the use of the term “salsa” a daring overgeneralization of Cuban music and championed a clear distinction between Afro-Cuban musical expressions and those from Puerto Rican and North American influences that were mixed to create “salsa” in the 1960s and ‘70s.
Before the term had been keenly marketed and had embedded itself in the urban Latino community, “salsa” was preceded by yet another misleading umbrella term: “Latin music.” As was the case during the era of salsa’s construction, the label “Latin music” was also attributed to predominately Cuban and Puerto Rican beats of the 1930s, ‘40s and ‘50s (Waxer 5). Some of the musical styles that were significant in the creation of “salsa” are as follows: guaguancó, guaracha, son, guajira, rumba, bolero, cha cha chá and mambo, seis, and plena— the first eight are relative to Cuba’s tradition and the last two pertain to the Puerto Rican “way[s] of making music.” These styles still exist to this day, and while they influenced the creation and are some components of “salsa,” they must be given their due place in the Latin American musical spectrum.

Although “Latin music” and “salsa” have often been used interchangeably and perpetuated stereotyping of Latin Americans in the United States and abroad as “hot Latins” (Chasteen 11) by those unfamiliar with these genres, the term “salsa” refers specifically to the musical expansion that took place in New York City in the 1960s and ‘70s. Thus, they are not to be used synonymously because each term is related to its respective musical era. In addition, “salsa” tends to fade into “Latin music,” which itself is a broader term used to categorize a wider array of diverse styles.7

Whoever the true creator of “salsa” may have been, the fact remains that the call-out phrases “Échale salsita” and “[¡]Toca con salsa!” and Fania Record’s marketing efforts are inextricably linked to how the international salsa community has come to

---

6 Although there are numerous musical forms that fall under “Latin music,” it would be erroneous to say that merengue, and cumbia stemming from the Dominican Republic and Colombia, respectively, could also be defined as salsa. Since merengue and cumbia have their own musical and social developments, a discussion of the two is beyond the scope of this study.

7 Examples of this are the Colombian cumbia, the Dominican merengue, or conjunto music of Northern Mexico and Texas—essentially music stemming from Latin America and most often bearing lyrics in Spanish (“Latin American Music”).
conceptualize its construction. For a great deal of salsa consumers Ignacio Piñeiro’s legendary song *Échale salsita* is the most convincing. Often deemed as watered down, “salsa” is said to misrepresent and blur the boundaries between many *distinct* African- and European-based musical styles of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. This is not the case, for “salsa” developed as a neutral (non-essentialist) concept and urban Latino experience that allowed for a compromise between four centuries of Afro-Hispanic and North American musical idioms\(^8\) in the last half of the 20\(^{th}\) century. This give and take was in the form of multiethnic (un/peaceful) coexistence and musical dialogue, or in other words, salsa’s translocality: as much a hybrid musical style as a form of cultural enclave.

---

\(^8\) Expressions of various forms of music.
AFRO-HISPANIC POPULAR MUSIC IN THE 20TH CENTURY:

A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Salsa music and dance of today are assigned extensively to the general category Afro-Hispanic, and more concretely, to Afro-Cuban music. It is, therefore, logical that this section begin with a panoramic view of Cuba’s role in molding New York City salsa as a musical style. Given that Afro-Hispanic music of the twentieth century could itself be divided into small subsections (each consisting of Spanish folk music, North American jazz, and West African call-and-response traditions), I will not only provide a brief description of North American jazz’s connection to Afro-Cuban developments, but I will also stress West Africa’s link to mainstream Cuban music.

The jazz nuances from Afro-North American styles in the United States were an invaluable contribution to Afro-Cuban music in that U.S. American jazz had already made contact with mainstream Cuban forms before WWII. This was most likely due to the radio waves that could be received in Cuba at the time of jazz’s popularity in the United States (Roberts 10). An example of this cultural borrowing is the Cuban ensemble performance tradition of the 1930s that was adopted from jazz. Cuba’s ensemble tradition already consisted of “brass-and-sax orchestras adapted from jazz, which mostly played the big Havana hotels [and casinos]” (Roberts 10). Finally, similar to jazz, Cuban ensemble arrangements also consisted of trumpet-and-percussion in conjuntos and the flute-and-fiddle in charangas.

---

9 The term Afro-Hispanic music refers to a confluence of European, indigenous and African traditions.
10 The name reflects, by pure definition, a convergence of European (mainly Spanish), (Afro-U.S.) American, and West African cultures. The adjective “Spanish” refers strictly to Spain as a contributor to Latin American music and dance traditions from the 15th century onwards.
Conversely, the big-band musical movement of New York during the 1940s adopted a great deal of Cuba’s big hotel orchestra arrangement practices. Cuban-style brass, reeds and violin became just another part of the big band movement. In this manner, the popular music of Cuba and the United States complemented one another throughout the twentieth century. The United States’ already close political involvement and intervention in the island’s internal affairs is perhaps one key factor that facilitated this musical dialogue.

During the 1940s and ‘50s Cuba, was a capitalist playground for big business. The lucrative hotel and gaming industry benefited greatly from foreign tourists and maintained the wealth of Cuba in the hands of a select non-Cuban few, that is, among private U.S. businesses and the elite. Furthermore, the borrowing of musical arrangements between Cuba and the U.S. set an important example for musicians to come. The emerging U.S. Latin groups followed this lead and, in turn, adapted this fusion of Afro-Cuban music and jazz as one component in building the New York City salsa scene of the 1960s and ‘70s (Roberts 10).

As interesting and dynamic as the musical connections between the U.S. and Cuba may be, the music of West Africa is of further importance to the creation of New York City salsa. The West African component of Afro-Cuban rhythms could be regarded today as a gift to the genre that is two-pronged: the production of music (as reflected in current arrangements and instruments in salsa), and, related to that, the development of dance in Cuba and, more specifically, salsa dance styles throughout the world.

The illicit slave trade that continued through the nineteenth century in Cuba allowed for African music traditions to permeate into the already institutionalized folk
music exported from Spain during Cuba’s four centuries as a colony (1510-1898) (“Cuba”). This forced exportation of West African musical culture subsequently led to the creation of a component of a mainstream, national Cuban music. This branch of music became known as son. As John Storm Roberts states, in Salsiology, the ‘deep’ blending of West African rhythms with Spanish melody—particularly that of Andalusia—produced a hybrid, Afro-Cuban music (7). Many salseros and ethnomusicologists trace salsa’s musical base back to the Afro-Cuban son.

Considered a “Cuban invention,” son was often played by singers, a nine stringed guitar called a tres, as well as maracas, claves and bongo drums. When a trumpet was added to this arrangement in the 1920s, a style known as septeto was born. It was in this context that Ignacio Piñeiro’s song Échale salsita has often been referenced as marking the beginning of the construction of the hybrid that was to be called “salsa.” Still, Piñeiro’s septeto song cannot receive all the credit for the naming of this New York City genre. Salsa’s core, son, however, is widely given due credit for the musical fruits of salsa and has to thank much of its hybridity to its Afro-Cuban predecessors.12

In addition, West Africa contributed to Afro-Cuban popular music in the form of its production (instruments and arrangements), song (call-and-response), and dance. These components are significant in that they further introduce the notion of cultural

---

11 “A bass instrument (derived from an African finger-piano) called marimbula…” (Roberts 10).
12 One such example is the dance hall mambo. Based on African folk music, the mambo, meaning “conversation with the gods,” is the name of a priestess in Haitian Voodoo. The concept of mambo was fused with the danzón, itself a mixture of English, French, and Spanish folkdance. Modern mambo’s history is said to have begun in 1938 when Orestes and Cachao López wrote a danzón called “Mambo” (“Mambo”). It is disputed whether the bass player Israel “Cachao” López was the true ‘inventor’ of this Cuban dance style. The Afro-Cuban Arsenio Rodriguez, a percussionist and master of the Cuban tres was given credit for incorporating the mambo “from the Congolese-derived religious groups into [Cuban] dance-halls” (Roberts 11). All the same, Rodriguez’s musical talent earned him a role as a pioneer and high authority that influenced the New York salsa band leaders during the 1960s. Hence, Rodriguez’s “compositions are a part of every salsa group’s repertoire” (Roberts 11).
mixtures and hybrid musical styles—a central idea to the concept of “salsa.” One such element of production, and the most fundamental component of the Afro-Cuban *son*, is known as *clave*. Generally, the word *clave* is Spanish for “key” in the sense of an answer key or a musical key signature. In the Afro-Cuban *son*, the *clave* sets the rhythm from which the rest of the instruments in an arrangement set their respective rhythms (“Clave Rhythm”).

Just as Afro-Cuban music is diverse, *clave* is as much a rhythm as it is an instrument. As a rhythm, it is most often played with a 2-3¹⁴ (sometimes a 3-2¹⁵) beat that equals two measures that are considered as one (Roberts 8). *Clave*’s beat can be divided into its strong first part and an answer-like second part, thus exemplifying the call-and-response element of African and Afro-American musical culture. As mixtures of West African and Spanish measure-patterns, the *clave*’s 2-3 and 3-2 beat set the temporal framework for Afro-Cuban popular music.

**Figure 1:** A musical representation of *clave*.

The “3 - 2 son clave” derives its name from its use in the Afro-Cuban *son*.

The “2-3 son clave” is a variation of the more common “3-2” pattern.

---

¹³ A “key signature” is, as the online encyclopedia Wikipedia defines it, “a series of sharp symbols or flat symbols placed on the staff, designating notes that are to be consistently played one semitone higher or lower than the equivalent natural notes (for example, the white notes on a piano keyboard) unless otherwise altered with an accidental” (“Key Signature”). Key signatures are generally written immediately after the clef at the beginning of a line of musical notation, although they can appear in other parts of a score, notably after a double bar (“Key Signature”).

¹⁴ Also known as the “son clave”, named after the Cuban *son* (“Clave Rhythm”).

¹⁵ Also known as the “rumba clave” used in the Cuban *guaguancó* (“Clave Rhythm”).
“[The 3-2 clave] differs from the son clave by only one note, which gives [it] an entirely different feel. The son clave has a much stronger 4/4 feel while the rumba clave retains a stronger 6/8 feel” (“Clave Patterns”).

With a 2-3 rumba clave it is typical for Afro-Cuban rhythms to switch between a rumba clave and a son clave beat.

“Claves” refers to the percussion instrument commonly consisting of two cylinder-like sticks of wood used to produce a high-pitched sound. Claves are used in salsa to this day.

**Figure 2:** An image of *claves* as a percussion instrument.


<http://www.rumbalatina.nl/historie/clave.jpg>
From a musical perspective, what makes the Cuban *son* so important to salsa is its “sense of rhythm subjected to a unity of tempo” and its incorporation of a “melody that has no rhythmic connection with the underlying percussion” (Roberts 9). In music, the word “percussion,” meaning “beating” or “striking” in Latin, refers to an instrument which, when “[struck], shaken, rubbed, [or] scraped” produces a sound is set in vibration (“Percussion Instrument”). For instance, drums (such as the single-headed *timbales* mastered by the late Tito Puente or the Afro-Cuban *bongo* drums) and *claves* are considered percussion instruments. *Son* preserves the Afro-Cuban percussion practice to this day.
PUERTO RICO’S AFRO-HISPANIC MUSICAL SPECTRUM: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

As was the case with the evolution of the Afro-Cuban son and its undeniable presence in the salsa of the 1960s and ‘70s, Puerto Rico’s Afro-Hispanic tradition, too, has influenced the construction of this “new way of making music.” Besides, the high number of Puerto Ricans living in urban New York City as the predominant Latino group further justifies connecting them to the creation of an international musical community.

Puerto Rican music, similar to that of Cuba, has developed as a result of a merger between African and Spanish idioms. Even though Puerto Rico’s musical practice added quantitatively less to the emergence of New York salsa in the U.S. during the 1960s and ‘70s than did Afro-Cuban music, the former’s role in the genre is nonetheless of great qualitative importance. Afro-Hispanic forms from the commonwealth were adapted by Puerto Rican salsa musicians in New York City during the 1960s and ‘70s when the genre is said to have emerged.

The Puerto Rican musical styles worth mentioning, because of their relation to salsa, are the bomba, the plena, and jíbaro music. Spanish for "bomb," the bomba, is both a musical style and dance and could be considered the epitome of the Africanization of Spanish music in Puerto Rico. As John Roberts explains in his article “The Roots,” the bomba was performed as early as 1778 with guitar and drum, and subsequently, “came under heavy Haitian influence during the early 19th century, and in the form in which it still survives in the Puerto Rican village of Loiza Aldea, it is performed on two or three drums with a distinct counter-rhythm …” (12). The use of the drums in the bomba reflects its connection to the rich West African two- and three-drum corps, in which a lead drum encourages dancers and improvises its beats while the second sets the
ground bass (Roberts 12-13). The *bomba* is furthermore of West African descent because of the highly syncopated\textsuperscript{16} three-note pattern (Roberts 13). The use of syncopated drum patterns is present in contemporary salsa as well.

Secondly, the *plena* is a song type that is said to have originated in the Puerto Rican cities of Ponce and San Juan, the former on the southern part of the island and the latter being its capital. Similar to the *bomba*, the *plena* exhibits an Afro-Hispanic call-and-response element and mixes that with European verse-and-refrain styles. These were, in turn, fused with *septeto* forms during the “Latin music” era of the 1930s. *Plena*’s social message was often satirical and political in tone and its percussion element adapted from West Africa is not to be overlooked (13). Moreover, Cuban *septeto* forms of trumpet and clarinet as well as the accordion complemented the *plena* dance bands that played in New York City during the 1930s (13). As a whole, the salsa music of the 1960s and ‘70s mirrored this pattern of fusion by gradually incorporating the call-and-response tradition of Afro-Hispanic styles coming out of Cuba and Puerto Rico as well as the European verse-and-refrain imported from Spain to Puerto Rico since the 16\textsuperscript{th} century.

Historically, we cannot forget that Puerto Rico, along with Cuba, remained a Spanish colony until 1898. After Spain’s defeat in the Spanish-American War, Cuba was given independence “in name only”, as it was closely dependent on the United States politically and economically. Puerto Rico, on the other hand, became U.S. territory and has maintained commonwealth status. By the end of the nineteenth century, Puerto Rico had endured Spanish rule for nearly a century longer\textsuperscript{17} than the rest of the Spanish-speaking nations of the Americas, which achieved their independence in the earlier part

\textsuperscript{16} Known as the “off-beat” in music.

\textsuperscript{17} Only to be handed over to another, more stable imperialist power, the United States.
of the 19th century. Due to the longer lasting political and cultural control over the island, the effects of the institutionalization of the music of southern Spain are much more recent and pronounced in the popular music of Puerto Rico, and, in effect, earned a role in the molding of salsa in the 1960s and ‘70s. Jíbaro music became a rural tradition much embedded in what those living on and off the island came to consider part of Puerto Rican identity and musical legacy. Salsa is a product of musical colonialism indeed.

As was the case with the convergence of West African and Spanish styles that gave way to country dancing and the son in Cuba, jíbaro music is also considered a byproduct of a rich Hispanic rural tradition in Puerto Rico. Introduced to Puerto Rico by Spanish settlers of the southern region of Andalusia, this style takes its name from the jibaros, who became Puerto Rico’s small landowners in the highlands of the island (Roberts 13).

Two specific examples of jíbaro music are the aguinaldo—meaning “Christmas carol” (villancico navideño) and “gifts given during the Christmas season”—and the seis18 (“Aguinaldo”). During the month of December, the Puerto Rican aguinaldo is performed through poetic improvisation by families and musicians in the community as a form of gift-giving or offering to neighbors and friends.

Just like salsa, the so-called purely local19 jíbaro music of the Puerto Rican highlands incorporates instruments stemming from Spanish and African cultures. The arrangements often consist of the cuatro,20 a güiro,21 and often bongo drums, a clarinet or

---

18 Spanish for “six.” All translations of text from Spanish or German into English are mine unless noted or quoted otherwise.
19 In this case, “local” refers to jíbaro music from an essentialist perspective, thus considering it an inherent component of the island of Puerto Rico.
20 Spanish for “four,” this form of instrument is a “double course guitar … in which two strings are tuned in unison or octaves; are strung together and plucked as a single string” (Garfias).
a trumpet. Together as a musical style dating back to the 16th century, they incorporate the Andalusian improvised couplets of ten syllables each, known as décimas22 (Garfías). Despite the strong Spanish ethnic identity associated with the music of the jíbaros, the güiro clearly proves that the influence of West African instruments is equally noteworthy to the history of salsa and its precursors.

Throughout the 1960s and ‘70s, New York City salsa musicians adopted and adapted the Puerto Rican aguinaldo. The improvisation component of salsa is often cited as an adaptation from the aguinaldo and seis styles (Garfías). The presence of the güiro, the bongo drums and the brass instruments such as the trumpet have been commonplace in salsa arrangements since its inception. It was in New York City that this eclectic form of improvisation across the Afro-Hispanic spectrum truly came to embody the metaphor that “salsa” as a mixture continues to evoke today.

Yet, there are those (musicians, theorists and consumers alike) who believe that the New York City salsa scene of the 1960s and ‘70s provoked musical amnesia in the Latino community. The reality is contrary to this belief. Although many celebrate the nuances that took place in urban New York City, the genre (salsa) and salseros recognize their musical and cultural heritage, thus giving due credit to the Afro-Cuban son, to only mention one. Given that such a high number of Afro-Hispanic and North American musical styles are so closely associated with salsa, many musicians such as Celia Cruz23 and Tito Puente24 accused the genre of having enveloped a significant number of Afro-

---

21 This gourd-like instrument has ridges that are rubbed up against by a metal comb to produce a rasping sound to accompany the percussion (Garfías).
22 Spanish for “units of ten.”
23 An Afro-Cuban, Celia Cruz was known by her fans and the salsa industry as “La Reina de la Salsa” (“The Queen of Salsa”).
24 A Nuyorican himself and considered a pioneer in the U.S. Latin music scene, Tito Puente was given the nickname “El maestro de los timbales” (“The Master of the Timbales”).
Hispanic and North American musical styles. Even so, conservative Cuban musicians have dared to declare that salsa is “a faulty variation of the son cubano” (Santos Febres 178). The New York City-based genre was further considered by dedicated musicians and ethnomusicologists as lacking “any high artistic value . . . because it does not have a particular rhythm or musical structure” (178). We have thus far seen that the genre does, in fact, have a musical tradition and pattern, one consisting of experimentation and musical freedom.

So as to provoke thought and reflection regarding salsa as an experience of experimentation, I would like to conclude this section with a quotation from Puerto Rican sociologist Ángel Quintero. In translation, this reference could perhaps give the reader room to interpret what the nature and goals of salsa’s expression could be, independent of orthodox musical ideologies.

Salsa’s musical combinations are new and different because they are not aimed at creating new structures or types of music … good composers combine and move freely between traditional types of music (plena, guaracha, cumbia, samba, bolero, guajira, chachachá, and [different] types of bomba, aguinaldo, seis, and other[s]) in order to produce a particular sonority, and according to the feeling and message they want to communicate. And precisely this experimentation with a free combination of forms is one of the fundamental characteristics that identify, in my opinion, this movement, this “new way of making music.” (qtd. In Santos Febres 178-179)²⁵

²⁵ “Las combinaciones de la salsa son nuevas y diferentes porque no se dirigen a, o intentan la formación de nuevas estructuras o tipos … los buenos compositores de salsa combinan y se mueven libre y
My aim is not to perpetuate the “fusion” and “confusion” debate among musicians, scholars and fans, but rather to provide my reader with a glimpse into this world style: that it is not merely a musical genre, but instead an extraordinarily special improvisational and experimental “way of making music” which is not limited to fixed national or cultural boundaries. As we have stated before, salsa is a concept, an international cultural experience. As an adaptation of the various Afro-Hispanic musical expressions mainly of Cuba and Puerto Rico, salsa is a derivative of various genres. Just as the nature of salsa is diverse, those who created it came from varied backgrounds in Latin America. The distinct, yet similar musical styles of Cuba and Puerto Rico that developed throughout generations allowed for the birth of an international “way of making music” that became known as salsa. Due to this cultural mixture, the genre emerged as a form of improvisation and experimentation. As a result, it is not owned by any particular ethnic or cultural unit because of its constant change and diverse versions throughout the world.

In sum, salsa as a genre continues to draw from its Afro-Hispanic and North American predecessors. That said, salsa transcends national and cultural frontiers set by purist and essentialist beliefs, which in this case would insist that musical genres—and, in effect, their connection to cultural identity—are inextricably connected to a geographical

---

26 By “fusion,” I am referring to the erroneous idea that salsa incorporates and engulfs musical styles and by “confusion,” I also present the misunderstood attack that salsa creates confusion within the independent genres that supposedly define it. In contrast to this, we have determined that salsa is a legitimate and eclectic musical genre which deserves recognition.

27 Putumayo’s compilation entitled “Salsa Around the World” features just that, salsa-influenced music sung in Greek, Hindi, Haitian Creole, Papiamento, Wolof y Douala, among others.
or biological constant such as a nation or a cultural unit. A cultural essentialist might consider the *son* or the music of the *jíbaros* as purely Cuban or Puerto Rican and not a component that actually influenced the creation of salsa. In order to accept salsa’s existence as a valid form of musical and cultural expression, we must dismantle the notion of cultural essentialism linked to it. Mayra Santos Febres’ article “Salsa as Translocation” supports understanding the salsa experience beyond cultural essentialism. Latin American culture cannot own salsa; it must share it with consumers of other world cultures to allow it to thrive and develop. Salsa’s survival as a multicultural experience depends on it. I will further expand on this philosophy in the section that is to follow.
NEW YORK CITY: THE *TRANSLOCAL* BIRTHPLACE OF SALSA

Given the stereotypical adjectives, such as “hot” and “exotic,” and the “Latin” (American) cultural essentialism associated with this derivative of European and African musical traditions called salsa, it might very well come as a surprise to those unfamiliar with its history that New York City is considered salsa’s “cradle.” Many have referred poetically to New York City’s urban environment as “el caldero donde se cocinó la salsa” [“the cauldron where salsa was cooked”] (Santos Febres 179). Dubbed by many enthusiasts as the capital of the world, the New York City of the 1960s and ‘70s set the stage for the creation of “salsa” as a translocal phenomenon. Indeed, “salsa” is a translocal cultural artifact in that it sustains a “globalized musical community” (Waxer 5). Such communities exist throughout the Americas, Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia.

Therefore, I agree with Santos Febres’ reasoning in that salsa is absolutely a “multinational enterprise,” where salsa’s existence is dependent upon the “[construction] of a community of salseros” [in which consumers and producers alike] rescue a tradition that is larger than national and broader than ethnic” (179). To accept that salsa is, in fact, a multinational undertaking, one must call it translocal. I shall henceforth use the term translocal in reference to this “way of making music” as an international, non-purist experience.

To agree with the anti-essentialist argument would also mean that the Cuban *son* is not geographically inherent to Cuba. The untouchable, putatively ‘pure’ Afro-Cuban *son*, as its prefix and hyphen indicate, is [itself] a construction based on mainly West African musical styles that were combined with rural Spanish textures as a result of four

---

28 Spanish for those who either consume salsa (dancers or listeners) or those who produce it (musicians and singers).
centuries of colonial rule. As the Spanish band *Jarabe de Palo* maintains in “De vuelta y vuelta,” purity is non-existent:

> En lo puro no hay futuro/ la pureza está en la mezcla/ en la mezcla de lo puro/ que antes que puro fue mezcla.” [“There is no future in that which is pure/ purity is found in that which is a mix/ in the mix of that which is pure/ which, before it became pure, was a mixture.”] (Jarabe de Palo)

Since salsa’s cultural meaning and so-called musical guidelines have constantly been negotiated and renegotiated through production—by transnational Latinos and others—and through its consumption by a large international community, it spread dramatically throughout the Caribbean Basin. Reaching not just Spanish-speaking nations of North and South America, but also former French, Dutch and English colonies of the Americas, salsa embodied something different to everyone who experienced it.

Simply put, if salsa had not been marketed from the beginning as a multiethnic experience through Fania Records and *salseros* (salsa musicians and consumers alike), the genre would have fallen into a cultural-ideological trap called cultural essentialism. The diverse Latino musical experimentations that took place in urban New York City were sold to the world under an exotic label called “salsa.” Moreover, the genre has never lost its reference to its Afro-Hispanic beginnings which are too often generalized to be merely “Latin.” The vast majority of those unfamiliar with salsa music’s origins repeatedly link them exclusively to the stereotypically hot Latin subject of the Caribbean and not to an urban backdrop in New York City of the 1960s and ‘70s. Finally, the genre’s associations with salsa communities beyond the Spanish-speaking world could not be more distant from common knowledge.
Given that salsa music and dance did not merely transcend New York City, the Caribbean, and the rest of the Americas—but have also achieved high acclaim in Africa, Europe, Asia and Australia in the last twenty years—Santos Febres considers salsa a “translocal” cultural artifact more than a multinational one. The semantics of this concept lie in the word itself. The prefix “trans” reflects more clearly the concept of actively “[cutting] across national boundaries to create a community of urban locations linked by transportation, communication technologies, and the international market economy” (Santos Febres 180). “Multinational” would plainly convey the idea of numerous cultural units participating in salsa music and dance. Translocal, on the other hand, lifts salsa of the burden of essentialism and adds economic and dynamic aspects to this phenomenon.

Globalization has served as salsa’s powerhouse and has allowed the genre to thrive as translocal. Substantial (im)migration from Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic to the U.S. (Delgado and Muñoz 26) was pivotal in forging an international salsa community throughout the 1970s, thus making salsa by its historical trajectory translocal. Said (im)migrants have also maintained cultural dialogues with their countries of birth, thus facilitating musical communication across essentialist boundaries. As a result, a Puerto Rican and a Cuban can maintain their cultural identity on and off their respective islands of origin. From a postmodern perspective, this phenomenon is commonly referred to as translocal cultural identity. The Latino community of New York City was no exception, and salsa’s urban musical backdrop,

---

29 Technically, the Puerto Ricans who relocated to the U.S. mainland after 1917 were not, and until this day cannot be considered immigrants, but rather migrants, as all Puerto Ricans were granted U.S. citizenship status.
known as *el barrio*,\(^{30}\) was the active ingredient added to “the cauldron where salsa was cooked” (Santos Febres 179).

For that reason, one cannot neglect that the emergence of an urban New York salsa scene during the 1960s and ’70s was in part a result of mass (im)migration from Latin America. Political and economic instability particularly in Cuba (after the socialist revolution of 1959), Puerto Rico (after WWII), the Dominican Republic (after the assassination of President Trujillo) and Colombia propelled the Latin American diaspora to urban New York City in the latter half of the 20\(^{th}\) century. It is precisely “its referentiality to *el barrio* which distinguishes [salsa] from other Latin genres” (Santos Febres 181). Salsa’s historical connection to an urban environment can also be applied to the consumption and production of salsa in Caracas (Venezuela), Medellín (Colombia), and Santo Domingo (the Dominican Republic) where salsa was also a *barrio* phenomenon. For the Puerto Rican majority and other Latin American immigrants living in Spanish Harlem and the South Bronx, the urban salsa experience became synonymous with Latino cultural identity in the United States (“Salsa Musik”).

Another way the salsa movement took on a translocal role from its beginnings was through its marketing in *el barrio* and abroad. The term “salsa” is said to have been imported from Venezuela; as noted above, Fania Records, a New York-based label created by Dominican Johnny Pacheco and Italian American Jewish lawyer Jerry Massuci, was pivotal in internationalizing this musical style; and most of the record company’s famous icons, artists such as Willie Colón, Ismael Miranda, Roberto Roena,

---

\(^{30}\) “*El barrio*” is Spanish for “the neighborhood.” I emphasize this in relation to New York City as an urban context for the development of salsa brought about by its mainly lower-class Latino inhabitants during the 1960s and ’70s. In the context of urban violence involving drugs and substance abuse, it can often be interpreted as the equivalent of a U.S. “ghetto.”
Richy Rey, and Bobby Cruz, were themselves Nuyorican\textsuperscript{31} or Puerto Rican (Santos Febres 181). Salsa’s subject matter, too, linked it to a street environment. Artists like Willie Colón and Rubén Blades addressed crime, drugs and violence in their recordings. The former’s lyrics, in particular, call attention to the urban hostility and insecurity in New York City during the 1960s and ‘70s. One of Willie Colón’s songs where this is apparent is *Calle Luna, calle Sol*:\textsuperscript{32}

\begin{quote}
\textit{Mete la mano en el bolsillo, /Saca y abre tu cuchillo/ Y ten cuidao. /Póngame oído: / En este barrio [a] muchos guapos han matao. /Calle Luna, calle Sol. / (Coro) / Camina pa’lante/ Y no mires pa’los lao. [Put your hand in your pocket, /Take out and open your knife/ And be careful./ Listen to me: / Many guapos have been killed in this neighborhood. /Calle Luna, calle Sol. / (Refrain) / Walk forward/ And don’t look to your sides]. (Rondón 97)}
\end{quote}

Unlike its Afro-Hispanic predecessors, New York City salsa largely abandoned traditional lyrics idealizing rural life in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. As an alternative, New York salsa’s subject matter developed initially by analyzing and narrating street life in the city. Ultimately, this “new way of making music” appealed to its consumers by addressing issues they themselves faced on a daily basis. One of the many famous “Fania Allstars” himself, Willie Colón, is celebrated for his untiring dedication to urban-style salsa.

\textsuperscript{31} The term Nuyorican refers to a person of Puerto Rican descent who is born, lives or has grown up in the urban environment and surrounding areas of New York City.

\textsuperscript{32} Although commonly attributed to Willie Colón, *Calle Luna, calle Sol* was sung by Héctor Lavoe and made popular under the music label Fania Records in 1973.
The task of unmasking New York City violence was not only ascribed to those who made salsa music in *el barrio*, however. The genre also earned mainstream television’s attention outside the U.S. mainland. One such example is the salsa group *Cortijo y su Combo*. As Santos Febres states, when referring to *Cortijo y su Combo’s* first appearance on Puerto Rican television, salsa is also “the direct offspring of industrialization; a cultural expression of the part-human, part-machine entity of the black, white, and mulatto proletarian” (181). Salsa’s depiction of violence and social unrest became central to its “program” and was further perpetuated by the media. For *Cortijo y su Combo* this was no exception. Urban Caribbean centers such as New York City were conducive to this, and it was by no means as celebratory as the translocal salsa of today, where the subject matter also features love, romance, and heartache among others.

Additionally, urban New York City was, as César Miguel Rondón observes in his book *El libro de la salsa*, the ideal place for this “way of making music” to flourish. This was in view of *el barrio’s* predominantly Latino (Puerto Rican) resident population. New York City’s commercial space was receptive to experimentation, in contrast to the outdated colonial social structures in Latin America, where well-funded musical pastimes were not as commonplace among the lower class, but rather among the dominant social and economic groups of European descent who controlled the production and consumption of mainstream music. In other words, “the music [of Latin America] was [largely] produced for the entertainment of the ruling class” (Santos Febres 182). Tradition or ‘purity’ was given less priority in New York, where the so-called “local” economic and cultural authorities were replaced by an urban and working-class
Enríquez Arana 32

(im)migrant Latino majority. In the world of the streets, the underdog took on the role of protagonist in Fania’s recordings. This new-found freedom of the subaltern (im/migrant) subject allowed for open competition to experiment and improvise within Afro-Hispanic musical styles to yield salsa.

Nonetheless, Santos Febres points out that salsa created a unique code, only to be understood by those “in the know,” a certain clave (or access code in this case), inhabiting the spaces conceptualized by salsa: el barrio. Salsa’s own urban clave (in this case beat or tempo) is defined by being constantly in dance mode. As a form of support for a “globalized musical community,” salsa is a musical and cultural enclave that is forever in motion; as such, this style cannot stagnate and commit to one musical or dance formula. Its very beginnings reflect this. To do otherwise would eliminate its reception as a translocal form of cultural expression. As Santos Febres concludes, salsa could not have ‘taken off’ without the existence of its “people:” migrant contract laborers, workers in the drug industry, musicians, students, community activists, “an urban Caribbean whose current livelihood depends on international structures such as the music industry, the academy, drug cartels, telecommunications, political alliances, and agrobusiness” (Santos Febres 186-187). This provides for a belief in salsa music and dance as a reference both to tradition as well as to the perseverance of innovation. This is fundamental to salsa as a translocal artifact. On the one hand, salsa cannot be divorced of its local influences, such as the Cuban son or the Puerto Rican jibaro tradition. On the other, salsa cannot deny non-Latinos membership into its globalized musical community. World salsa entails the experimentation across genres that the Puerto Rican sociologist Ángel Quintero champions in his writings, namely, that salsa is a product of placing
various genres at equal levels in relation to one another, thus preserving and respecting traditional musical forms—but not privileging them as the only “pure” ones. As seen in Chapter 1, salsa’s translocality is similar to how the process of mutual embrace of the “Other’s” musical culture—where Cuban (-American) and U.S. American jazz and big band and Afro-Cuban styles have enriched each other—is no longer deemed as the acceptance of the “opposite.” During this musical mixture, Afro-Cuban and U.S. American musical styles were no longer alien to one another, but rather took on an “appositional”33 dimension. The notion of juxtaposing two equal cultures (salsa as the global in contact with local culture[s]) paved the way for the adoption and adaptation of salsa music and dance in Asia and Europe throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

---

33 The term “appositional” refers to the act of placing two things side by side, apposition can be understood such that mainstream music of Cuba and the United States not only complemented one another but also coexisted, thus allowing for mutual enrichment (“Appositional”).
THE SALSA DIASPORA:

THE JAPANIZATION AND GERMANIZATION OF SALSA

We now know that salsa’s translocality has been the prerequisite for its introduction and survival in the global community. For that reason, the internationalization of salsa cannot only be traced to the rest of Latin America, but also to Japan and Germany, to name but two countries. The presence of salsa music and dance in Japanese and German society demonstrates that this genre has challenged music purists and has earned acceptance among liberals alike: a meeting point of the local and the global.

Salsa’s popularity in Asia was quite literally brought to the world stage by the all-Japanese salsa group Orquesta de la Luz (Spanish for the “Orchestra of the Light”). Orquesta de la Luz revolutionized salsa in Japan by breaking with tradition: they adopted salsa; they adapted it, but did they adept it—make it their own? The broader, more meaningful question one must pose is: Did salsa become Japanese? In the process, did salsa continue to embody a diplomatic negotiation of local and global discourses of Latin American and Japanese cultural identity?

Within cultural studies, the late post-colonialist Edward Said is often cited in relation to issues of cultural identity among individuals from former (European) colonies. In his writings, such as in Orientalism, Said is known for the concept of universalism. According to this school of cultural analysis, the members of former colonies (known

---

34 In postcolonial theory, the term adept refers to a cultural unit’s ability to incorporate (adopt) and adapt a former-colonial power’s culture and transform it to create their own original form of culture. The colonial power is oftentimes a point of departure for fusing local forms to yield hybrid cultures. It must be noted, however, that the terms adopt, adapt, adept have been traditionally applied to former colonies. Thus, the use of these terms, particularly adept, in relation to Japan’s or Germany’s importation of “foreign” cultural practices could best be described as a process of cultural appropriation.
Enríquez Arana 35

individually as the post-colonial subject) no longer accept traditional European attitudes that view the third world as savage-like and in need of taming. This form of cultural theory privileges the post-colonial subject and empowers his or her ability to adopt, adapt, and adept the colonizer’s culture to understand his or her very own. These three terms are crucial for the case of Orquesta de la Luz, as they indeed adopted and adapted salsa for a Japanese public. Nevertheless, the matter is yet to be addressed: Did Orquesta de la Luz in fact create an original Japanese rendition of salsa?

The question of making salsa Japanese—and not merely a Japanese copy of it—continues to provoke debate among musicians and ethnomusicologists (Japanese and others) because many critics disagree on whether or not Orquesta de la Luz was actually successful in this cultural endeavor. An explication of this controversy is dictated by whether one approaches it from an essentialist or anti-essentialist (constructionist) point of view. Belief in constructionism would provide an affirmative response; that is, Orquesta de la Luz played a Japanese variant of translocal salsa.35

Essentialism or not, one fact remains; the arrival of salsa in Japan proves that “global power and aesthetic relationships” necessarily shaped Japanese culture (Waxer 289). The salsa band did have a cultural effect on traditional Japanese pastimes and the music industry. Japan began to dance more and more salsa. As a result, translocal salsa’s fan base grew as well. One can still find salsa dance clubs throughout Japan today.

Nora Suzuki, Orquesta de la Luz’s lead vocalist, almost always sang completely in Spanish and the band itself was, therefore, accused of copying salsa imported from the

35 For further information on salsa venues in Japan, www.salsapower.com is a resource available on the internet.
Americas. Thus, the local (mainstream “pure” Japanese culture, whatever that may mean) and the global (packaged in what we have come to know as translocal “salsa”) were placed face to face and interacted with one another. In other words, putative Latin musical expressions of the Caribbean and Japanese local notions of culture created a similar “appositional” phenomenon similar to the one that took place between Cuba and the United States throughout the twentieth century. An example of this juxtaposition could be drawn from the song *La aventura*\(^36\) taken from *Orquesta de la Luz*’s album entitled *Arroz con salsa*:\(^37\)

> La salsa no tiene fronteras,/ no ni barreras/ Queremos agradecer a todo/ público oyente/ Que abrieron nuestras puertas…/ Esta música es para todos/ Baile conmigo, pueblo latino/ Tú sabes que somos de Japón/ Pero tenemos sabor latino./ Todos somos hermanos [Salsa has no frontiers,/ no barriers/ We thank all the / listening public/ Who opened our/ gates…/ This music is for everybody/ Dance with me, Latin people/ You know we are from Japan/ But we have a Latin flavor/ We are all brothers].\(^38\) (Waxer 293)

Even though these lyrics point to an apparent desire to unify all salsa lovers and allow for all to enjoy the genre, irrespective of one’s origins, *Orquesta de la Luz* was underestimated for the supposed limits it created between Japanese and Latin American culture. In *Salsa no tiene fronteras*:\(^39\) *Orquesta de la Luz* and the globalization of popular music,” Shuhei Hosokawa projects a critical view of the Japanese salsa band.

---

\(^{36}\) Spanish for “the adventure.”

\(^{37}\) Spanish for “rice and salsa.”

\(^{38}\) All translations from the German or Spanish into English are mine unless otherwise noted.

\(^{39}\) Spanish for “salsa has no borders.”
Hosokawa’s essentialist views imply that *Orquesta de la Luz* intended to copy a certain “Latin flavor” by constructing its own adaptation of it. Hosokawa’s stance is an unfortunate one, for Japan’s only world-famous salsa band was (and I use the past tense because the group disbanded in 1997) truly translocal in its adoption of salsa, as it sought to appeal to an international “Latin” community constructed through its very (original) lyrics. Although the group did not introduce new musical arrangements to the genre, they daringly promoted the notion that the salsa experience could be enjoyed by all, regardless of one’s cultural identity and language. In using the Spanish language (as well as Japanese) *Orquesta de la Luz* held the translocal torch for Japan during the 1990s and created a Japanese dimension for salsa to flourish—it was a great decade indeed.

Although *Orquesta de la Luz*’s lyrics differed from those of its New York counterparts and the group’s non-urban subject matter did not reflect the original topics of New York salsa of the 1960s and ‘70s, it did demonstrate a new direction, away from mere street music. As a translocal salsa band, *Orquesta de la Luz* was a daring reconstruction and renegotiation of Japanese and Latin American cultural limits. They paved the way for other non-Latin *salseros* and supported the *appositional* placing of the local and the global. *Orquesta de la Luz* not only supported an international “Latin” community by means of its lyrics, but also included itself in a translocal group of *salseros* by acting as a medium through which salsa was produced and consumed, thus restructuring not only the group’s own position on the discussion of cultural identity as Japanese musicians, but arguably, that of their Japanese fans.

In the end, the local and the global were implicated in this process of a “creation of an international music community” I call translocal salsa. The form of Japanese salsa
in question made an enormous impact on the genre and delighted many *salseros* across continents. These Japanese *salseros* proved to the world that non-Latinos could sing, perform, and even dance salsa and so earn cultural acceptance among fans in the translocal Latino community. Thus, it comes as no surprise that *Orquesta de la Luz* reached number one on the Billboard’s Tropical Chart in 1990, toured North and South America and Europe from 1989 to 1994, and received the UN’s Peace Award in 1993 (Waxer 290).

The construction of translocal salsa in Japan is not the only success story within the “globalized musical community” in question. This “new way of making music” has also made a stop in Europe. Salsa’s presence in Europe further exemplifies the resilience of the style’s translocality, and its popularity in Germany is of utmost cultural value. The arrival of salsa music and dance in Germany approximately twenty years ago was expected given the genre’s translocal dimension. In fact, one must be know that by the end of the 1980s, translocal salsa had reached the far corners of North and South America, Africa, Australia, and Europe (“Salsa Musik”). Although there is not, to my knowledge, an internationally recognized and award-winning German salsa band, there is, in fact, a salsa-dancing craze in Germany, which I refer to as *Salsafieber* (salsa fever).

Nothing short of a sensation, salsa can be danced in any major city in the Federal Republic and has earned a privileged position as yet another German pastime, spanning salsa clubs (run primarily by Germans and Latin Americans alike), dance workshops (led by both Germans and Latin Americans), and festivals and concerts. As an introduction to
the cultural phenomenon central to this thesis, German salsa dancing, I present the following quotation in translation\textsuperscript{40} taken from an established German website.\textsuperscript{41}

Their [Latinos’] tropical drink stands are always to be found at any city festival or small cultural celebration. Don’t even small cities have one small Latin bar or at least a salsa discotheque on weekends? Andean ponchos and El Condor Pasa folklore no longer make a foreign impression in German pedestrian areas, but because of frequent performance are a bit outdated. Latinos make, if not the highest number of goals in the \textit{Bundesliga}, then at least the most beautiful ones. Throughout decades, [Latinos] have lured us [Germans] to tango, cha cha cha, lambada and salsa and right back to tango.\textsuperscript{42} (“Noche Latina”)

The purportedly exotic attraction of Latin American culture in Germany is made quite apparent by this quotation, which illustrates how commonplace expressions of so-called “authentic” Latin American culture have truly become in contemporary Germany.

Simply put, German salsa dancing represents significantly more than just an exposure to the “exotic” \textit{Ausländer} (foreigner) or even contact with the non-German “Other.” Salsa dancing in German cities is a move in a positive direction as an example of salsa’s translocal resilience against cultural essentialism. Within an immigrant context, salsa dancing takes on a whole new meaning, one which necessarily affects how

\textsuperscript{40} All translations from the German or Spanish into English are mine unless otherwise noted.
\textsuperscript{41} This website, http://www.salsa.de, is completely dedicated to the German salsa scene and German-speaking salsa lovers.
\textsuperscript{42} “Bei keinem Stadtfest, keiner Multikultifete fehlt ihr fröhlicher Tropencocktail-Stand. Hat nicht auch jede Kleinstadt eine Latinokneipe oder mindestens Salsadisko am Wochende? Andenponchos und El Condor Pasa-Folklore in deutschen Fußgängerzonen wirken auch schon lange nicht mehr fremd, sondern ob der vielen Auftritte fast ein wenig überholt. In der Bundesliga schießen Latinos, wenn nicht die meisten, so doch die schönsten Tore. Und schon über Jahrzente haben sie uns vom Tango über Cha Cha Cha zu Lambada und Salsa gelockt, und gerade wieder zurück zum Tango“ (“Noche Latina”).
Germans can understand and renegotiate their cultural identity or *Selbstbild* (self-perception). Translocal salsa allows for this to take place. I explore this topic more in depth in Chapter 2.
CHAPTER II: GERMAN SALSAFIEBER

SALSA’S TRANSNATIONAL TRAVELS: FROM JAPAN TO GERMANY

In the last chapter, we provided a general synopsis of salsa’s social and musical developments. We determined that salsa is in fact a translocal artifact as proven by its elastic and innovative nature, which makes it appealing to various cultures beyond Latin America. Using Orquesta de la Luz as an example of salsa’s translocality on an international level in Japan, I posed several fundamental questions one typically associates with the field of cultural studies. Once non-Latin cultures are captivated by salsa music and dance, they are faced with determining the genre’s role in how they view their local culture.

The issue of developing consumerism by incorporating so-called ‘Latin’ music into Japanese cultural activities raised the ethnocentric bias against Japanese salsa dancing as merely an imitation of Latin music. Nonetheless, few would dispute the fact that the Japanese salsa band adopted and adapted salsa to their cultural environment. As a result salsa as a musical genre changed and so did the discourse regarding Latin American linguistic and cultural identity. Overall, we came to understand that the example of Orquesta de la Luz does, in fact, help reorient perspectives regarding Japanese culture in contrast to that of Latin America. By means of its recordings, said salseros symbolized a bold move in upholding salsa’s translocal origins and demonstrated that this musical hybrid is not owned by Latin Americans exclusively. Japanese salsa, therefore, calls into question the essentialist notion that salsa can only “authentically” be practiced or created within the limits of a Spanish-speaking Caribbean context. The success of Japanese salsa firmly establishes its translocal mutability.
In the process, Nora Suzuki and her band did in effect *adept* salsa; they made it their own. A Japanese *variant* of salsa was born, which represented another cultural addition to the saucy mixture in East Asia. This group of Japanese *salseros* appealed to Latinos by way of their all-Spanish lyrics, thereby guaranteeing the continued support of a “globalized musical community” (Santos Febres 186). Indeed, one can agree that salsa music and dance in Japan is as innovative as it was at the time of its inception in urban New York City during the 1960s and ‘70s. *Orquesta de la Luz*’s Japanese salsa serves as an example by translocal Latin American identity that successfully travels the globe. Certainly, this transnational genre dances its way from continent to continent via the various elements of our globalizing world: it thrives on immigration and travel. More concretely, the global dimension of salsa meets up with its local counterparts in the Hispanic Caribbean.

Nevertheless, my discussion of salsa’s transnationality in Asia was but a surface analysis of the genre’s malleability across musical styles and world cultures. Our reading of salsa music as a multiethnic slogan of the urban New York experience of the 1960s and ‘70s was juxtaposed with an analysis of the genre’s acclaim in Japan. Salsa music and dance also plays a role in reshaping contemporary German pastimes. Consequently, this chapter will introduce the reader to the notion of German salsa dancing within its social and cultural parameters.

Salsa dancing as one of many expressions of Latin American culture in Germany has, therefore, become routine in that it is no longer viewed as entirely foreign. This phenomenon43 can be experienced throughout the Federal Republic and warrants further

---

43 Throughout the body of this chapter, I will expand on the level of German involvement in the Federal Republic’s salsa industry and describe it as *Salsafieber*. 
study, as it represents yet another manifestation of salsa’s transnationality. I shall consider the use of this term later in Chapter Three. In the field of cultural studies, there is minimal research on the topic of German salsa dancing, not to mention its social and cultural implications. From an interdisciplinary approach, the question of how salsa’s dynamics in Germany affect its participants’ self-perception and cultural identity is thought-provoking and has, heretofore, not been considered.

Before I continue theorizing about the cultural effects of German salsa dancing, I will briefly showcase Germany’s current and past salsa scene. How and when did salsa music arrive in Germany? Where and in what context is salsa danced? What organizations serve as the backbone for salsa’s translocal support? Who dances salsa in Germany today? What is the nature of this translocal dynamic taking place? Is it a peaceful intercultural exchange and dialogue? What role do Germans and non-Germans play in this phenomenon in interaction with one another? What is the extent of non-Germans’ (Latin Americans’ especially) involvement within the salsa scene? In fact, I shall briefly address the current Latin American immigrant context within Germany’s salsa industry. Can salsa be seen as a means of socio-cultural integration or adaptation? How is the “Other” perceived by Germans in this cultural interplay? Who is the “Other?”

These questions will build a contextual framework for determining the possible interpretations that salsa dancing in Germany can yield in understanding and (re)negotiating the self-perception of its German and Latin American participants.
HOW AND WHEN SALSA MUSIC REACHED GERMANY

Prior to the 1970s, salsa music was anything but rare in Europe (“Salsatanz”). Comparable to the contact that took place between Latin American culture and U.S. American musical styles during the twentieth century, globalization, too, can be the most logical explanation for salsa’s arrival in Europe. Salsa developed as a transnational and multicultural experience in the urban New York City backdrop as a pan-American enterprise. By contrast, political relations between Germany and the U.S. after WWII, too, have made way for exchanges of culture. The U.S.’s military presence in Germany is cited as one of the first avenues through which salsa music could travel to Europe (“Salsatanz”). The genre’s translocal musical “flight” was to develop not into a uni-directional but rather into a multi-dimensional dance among cultural partners.

Unlike the rest of Latin Americans, Puerto Ricans were given U.S. citizenship as of 1917 and have, since then, been eligible to join the armed forces of its northern neighbor. Puerto Ricans, then, particularly Nuyoricans, constituted the majority of Latinos in the service and were among the first to listen to salsa in the numerous military bases scattered throughout West Germany from the 1970s and well into the 1980s (“Salsatanz”). Similar to their fellow Latin American (im)migrants from Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and those from Puerto Rico residing in el barrio of New York City after WWII, Puerto Rican military men and women stationed in Germany brought with them pieces of home: salsa albums. Nonetheless, salsa music heard on U.S. military bases in Germany was not sufficient to expose the general public to this “new way of

44 See Chapter 1.
45 If we recall from Chapter 1, during and subsequent to the translocal salsa boom during the 1960s and ’70s in urban New York, the genre became closely linked to how Puerto Ricans identified culturally. Thus, for many local and translocal Puerto Ricans, their cultural identity contained ingredients of salsa music, both on and off the island (Waxer 4).
making music.” There were other cultural additives involved in creating this version of the translocal “mixture.”

Latin Americans living among Germans as part of a society from the 1970s forward can be considered the true catalysts for sparking interest in salsa in the Federal Republic. Subsequent to Puerto Rican military personnel living in West Germany, immigration from the rest of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean as well as Mexico, Central and South America leading into the 1980s, ‘90s, and the turn of the last century, further propelled the salsa diaspora to Germany. Essentially, immigrants from the Caribbean Basin and South America were the most instrumental in initiating and fomenting a salsa scene in German cities. Among the first pioneers of salsa dancing and consumption in the Federal Republic were Colombians, Venezuelans, and Peruvians. In these and many other Latin American countries, salsa music had already undergone a process of translocation in the 1970s (Waxer 4) and into the 1990s, imbedding itself in national pastimes and contributing to the (re)construction of their respective cultural identities. Salsa music had previously become an institution amid various other Latin American genres in the Spanish-speaking Americas, particularly in countries with close connections to the Caribbean (Waxer 4). It would not be long before Germany, too, experienced a similar salsa dancing boom. Immigrants from countries with a salsa tradition could also offer Germany yet another product of their cultural identity: an organized music industry from North and South America.

---

46 Beginning in the late 1950s after the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and political unrest after President Trujillo’s assassination in the Dominican Republic many conservatives from the upper class sought refuge in the U.S., and Europe.

47 As a result of political and economic instability stemming from violent military dictatorships, many lower- and upper-class Central and South Americans (particularly Colombians, Peruvians, Ecuadorians, Argentineans, and Chileans) abandoned their homelands and established themselves in the U.S., Canada, and Europe.
Thus, salsa bands began to emerge in Germany as early as the late 1970s. There are numerous Latin American-founded salsa groups worth mentioning in this context: Cuban contrabassist Victor “Vitico” Cruz’s Berlin-based “Sugar Cane” and Colombian percussionist Daniel Bazanta and his “Yamabo” were founded in Cologne in 1979 (“Salsa Musik”). Interestingly, however, Latin American musicians were not the only salseros to forge a salsa community in Germany; Germans also took part in this endeavor. Among the German importers of the genre, several are noteworthy. The Munich-based “Conexión Latina” was founded by Rudi Füssers in 1980 upon his travels throughout Puerto Rico (“Salsa Musik”). The first all-German salsa band, Düsseldorf-based “Salsa Picante,” did not emerge until 1981 (“Salsa Musik”). In the following year, in West Germany’s then-capital Bonn, the Peruvian singer Mario Reynoso started his own “Salsa Latina” (“Salsa Musik”). Finally, in 1983, Salvadorean singer Jorge Anchieta and German percussionist Leonard Gincberg formed their own Cologne-based “Bongo Tropical” (“Salsa Musik”). Intercultural collaboration was, without a doubt, common practice from the early stages of salsa’s translocal tenure in Germany.

Alongside the creation of salsa bands in the Federal Republic, a DJ movement also began to develop. German and Latin American salseros needed places to dance, and German record companies facilitated consumers’ exposure to the genre in dance clubs (“Salsa Musik”). In the midst of this expansion, an entire salsa culture began to take form. Salsa centers surfaced in the West German cities of Cologne, Bonn, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt, and Munich. In the decade following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Berlin and Munich often competed for the status of Germany’s salsa capital (“Salsa
Given its high number of salsa dancing locales, Cologne became one highly specialized translocal focal point of salsa in Germany.

According to salsapower.com in 2007, Cologne, a city of approximately one million (Lane 537), is home to as many as eleven dance schools to learn salsa. *Salseros* in Cologne can practice their hobby in ten of the city’s night clubs every night of the week where the cover charges range from zero to six Euros (“Salsa Cities: Cologne”). Despite this, Berlin, too, boasts a highly developed and popular salsa scene. Together, all German metropolises make the Federal Republic a unique country in which to live and dance salsa.

With a steady influx of Latin American culture in Germany, the stage was set for translocal salsa to anchor itself in contemporary German leisurely activities. Such was the demand for salsa music in Germany that as early as 1982 such salsa bigwigs as Machito, Tito Puente, Mongo Santamaría, Celia Cruz, Willie Colón and Rubén Blades performed for 12,000 fans at the *Horizonte Festival* in Berlin (“Salsa Musik”).
WHERE AND WHEN SALSA IS DANCED IN GERMANY TODAY

As this “new way of making music” began to earn significant support throughout the 1990s in the country’s diverse salsa dancing venues, salseros sought out more opportunities to develop. After the reunification of the two Germanies, mass tourism to the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, particularly to Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, also brought Afro-Hispanic music one step closer to German salsa aficionados (“Salsatanz”). By the turn of the last century, this translocal product was accessible to people of all walks of life. In fact, the internet is filled with German websites dedicated to informing the general public about salsa dancing possibilities. This medium, then, has helped salseros maintain interconnectedness. Well into the first decade of the new millennium, salsa music can now be heard and danced in all major cities of the Federal Republic (“SalsaDe: Click mal an”) and, therefore, constitutes part of any major German night club scene.

Yet, salsa music’s presence is not limited to German night clubs and discotheques alone. This genre has also attracted salseros wishing to learn the intricacies of the dance that accompanies this hip musical style. For those striving to become avid salseros, there exists a plethora of offerings, both private and public. In addition to traditional courses in partner dancing such as ballroom and Latin, dance schools and academies also attract new students with salsa, merengue, and bachata classes (“Kursanbeiter in

---

48 A great majority of the descriptions of the structure of the German salsa scene provided herein is based on my own experiences with salsa dancing in Europe from February 2004 until July 2006. During these years as a graduate student in German and Spanish, I lived and studied in Germany, Austria, and Spain and frequented salsa clubs, and also took dance classes on a regular basis. If what I relate seems somewhat anecdotal, it is—to a degree—as I lived it. These encounters with salsa music and dance inspired the conception of the topic of this thesis and are, therefore, not to be ignored.

49 As with the merengue, the bachata is also a dance style that originated in the Dominican Republic as a rural and lower-class dance style. Known for its melancholic lyrics about disloyalty, infidelity, and
Deutschland”). Salsa excursions on *Salsa-Boote* (salsa riverboats) traveling the Adriatic Sea (off the coast of Croatia) as well as on Germany’s major rivers, such as the Rhine, also take place in the spring and summer months (“SalsaDe: klick mal an”). Salsa amateurs go great lengths to organize salsa dance trips to Cuba to learn the ‘authentic’ Afro-Cuban dance styles (“SalsaDe: Click mal an”). Even within Germany, (cultural) street festivals in Berlin and Munich, for example, showcase salsa music and dance alongside merchants’ food and clothing stands from around the world during the warmer months. Such public events provide amateur and professional salseros an avenue for open-air display of their skills and passion for salsa.

Nevertheless, salsa dancing relies on a professional dimension as well, one which is transforming the style and its consumption in Germany. Professional dancers, German and Latin American instructors alike, also participate in nation-wide and international workshops and competitions. Such competitions take place throughout Germany and are known by German *salseros* and the “global musical community” as so-called salsa congresses. Professional *salseros’* leadership in salsa congresses, therefore, further aid in institutionalizing salsa dancing in Germany. Indeed, salsa still remains translocal even beyond its “golden era” of the 1960s and ‘70s in New York City; and salsa congresses in Germany have helped ensure the dance’s popularity growth as a social institution well into the current decade.

unrequited love, the *bachata* has also become translocal, as it, too, has been incorporated into the German Latin music scene. Neither form of dance should be considered salsa, however.

50 A *congreso de salsa* in Spanish or a *Salsakongress* in German is the equivalent of a conference in English. In the international salsa industry, the word “salsa congress” is also used by English-speaking *salseros*. I will henceforth use the term “salsa congress” to refer to events where salsa competitions and workshops take place.

51 It must be noted that salsa congresses also take place in North America (Toronto, Puerto Rico), Europe (U.K., Madrid), among others (“SalsaDe: Click mal an”).
Typically spanning long weekends, (e.g. from Friday afternoon until Sunday evening), a salsa congress takes the form of a workshop, where highly-skilled *salseros* partake in intense and laborious dance competitions. According to the German salsa website SalsaDE, during the year 2007, *Salsakongresse* are planned for the months of March, May, July, and November in Munich, Regensburg, Stuttgart, Hamburg and Düsseldorf, respectively. As one can see, the north, south, and west of Germany also cater to salsa aficionados, in addition to Berlin. During these highly-acclaimed events, competitors also teach workshops for other instructors and informal dancers from throughout Germany. As an integral part of professional development for aspiring *salseros*, the structure of these congresses generally consists of hourly workshops ranging from beginning to more advanced levels in the morning, competitions and shows in the late afternoon or evening, and/or performances by live bands or DJs in the late evening and well into the night. Thus, salsa congress participants create an entire salsa scene that further accentuates and fortifies the already-existing Latin dancing dynamics in three of Germany’s largest cities:52 Berlin, Munich, and Cologne.

Although international salsa congresses have gained great popularity among German *salseros*, those taking place within Germany’s borders are especially noteworthy, as they constitute an active contribution to the German salsa scene and have begun to represent a social institution. Unlike the more mobile international salsa congresses, 53

---

52 Although Berlin is the largest city in Germany with almost 3.5 million inhabitants, it must be noted that the port city, Hamburg (with nearly 2 million), takes second place for the second-largest in Germany (“Die Größten Städte”). A city of over a million and a half, Hamburg, too, celebrates an appealing salsa scene as northern Germany’s salsa hotspot (Lane 546). SalsaPower.com documents ten must-see salsa locales in Hamburg.

53 In the past, such cities as Toronto, Zurich, and Miami have hosted international salsa congresses. Seeing as salsa music has been so closely attached to Puerto Rican national identity, San Juan, Puerto Rico is still considered the capital of salsa congresses. Nonetheless, one cannot forget that salsa music is neither
which take place in different world cities throughout the year, Germany’s salsa congress industry is strongest in larger metropolises such as Frankfurt, Munich and Berlin. Despite this, the region surrounding Cologne is also among the most specialized salsa scenes in Germany.

I will now provide a general overview of one strong component in the salsa dancing industry in Berlin. This case study of Germany’s salsa dancing networks will also necessitate a description of German Salsavereine (German salsa dance associations), as they represent one of Germany’s social-cultural traditions that support a great deal of Germany’s salsa industry.

geographically inherent nor owned by Puerto Rico; salsa is translocal by pure definition and is therefore for all to enjoy regardless of cultural origin.
CASE STUDY: GERMANY’S SALSA INDUSTRY

In order to describe Germany’s current Salsavereine, I will briefly examine Germany’s history with Tanzvereine (dance associations). An introduction to these organizations as a support system for the institutionalization of salsa dancing in the Federal Republic will provide an understanding of why such groups have been so successful among the German middle class.

Also known loosely as clubs, there are many types of German Vereine: Automobilclubs (automobiles clubs), Sportvereine (sports associations), and Gesangs- and Musikvereine (singer’s and music associations), among many others. Tanzvereine in Germany are significant to the country’s salsa culture, as they are social institutions that function as public outlets for leisurely activities among the civil population. In fact, Tanzvereine have been instrumental in transforming dance in Germany into a sport. Salsa dancing is no exception. Members of these so-called dance companies invest exorbitant amounts of personal funds and time into their routines; the results of their efforts are brought to the stage, and are nothing short of spectacular. Dancers and their accompanying Vereine are often hired to perform Showtänze (dance shows) at various functions such as weddings or special company events.

Aside from formal dance alliances, other more informal salsa dance societies have emerged in Germany. Through personal networking and marketing, salsa dance organizations establish ties with one or two salsa clubs in particular. Usually, salsa instructors from a dance school or Verein frequent a locale with their students, and in doing so, attract prospective salseros and regular customers. Like the dance it promotes, the large body of German salseros “sways” between the dance school by day and its
respective “sister” club(s) by night. Nightclub owners frequently hire an instructor or informally appoint a salsa liaison to facilitate this “dance” among business owners. In this manner, even bars remotely associated with a dancing crowd sometimes have been known to implement a salsa night—one on the weekends and another during the week. This very phenomenon cannot go unnoticed in Germany’s Hauptstadt (capital city), Berlin.
BERLIN’S SALSA SCENE

The commercialization of salsa dancing in the regions surrounding the cities of Cologne, Bonn, Berlin and Munich are significant to Germany’s salsa industry, as they boast the largest and most influential business component of the salsa business in the Federal Republic and are, thus, the active conduit through which this dance becomes an artistic and ideological commodity. Much like other forms of instruction, the teaching and dancing of salsa in Germany has transformed itself into a product and service that can be bought and sold throughout dance clubs, schools, and workshops. Yet, how can one describe one section of the inner workings of Berlin’s salsa scene? What role do the German Salsakongresse (salsa congresses) play in this world city’s salsa business?

Berlin’s salsa industry proved to be highly specialized in 2006 by hosting its 6th Annual Salsa Congress, the MiSalsa Sommerfest, and the 4th Annual Salsacard Gala. The German website www.Salsacard.de is one path through which these annual events are publicized. The product being sold on this website is not merely salsa dancing in the form of congresses and workshops, however. Salsacard.de also markets its brand new Salsa Visa Card. This credit card is available to salseros who wish to become members of a privileged consumer base for this popular German salsa website. This card is, according to SalsaCard.de, “die ganze Salsawelt mit einer Karte!” [“the entire salsa world with one card”]. In fact, the Salsa Visa Card offers dedicated German salseros many benefits besides the usual buying possibilities at various vendors linked to Visa. Bearing its trademark salsa emblem, Salsacard ®, the credit card is available in various styles and colors, gives its customers discounts at participating merchants as well as free tickets to
such sought-after events as the *Annual Salsacard Gala* held in Germany’s capital. Below is an image of the *Salsa Visa Card*.

**Figure 3: The Salsa Visa Card** “Die Vorteilskarte, mit der Sie auch bezahlen können!”

![Salsa Visa Card](image)

*Salsacard ®*


In addition to facilitating access to salsa congresses and workshops, Salsacard.de sells dance shoes and instructional videos for the self-teaching of salsa. Even though the website supports a highly intricate salsa business dynamic throughout the Federal Republic, by advertising an entire list of events, its focus revolves around the up-coming 5th *Annual Salsacard Gala* in Berlin’s newly-opened Maritim Hotel. The organizers of this March 10th salsa spectacle expect as many as 850 distinguished *salseros* from throughout Germany and abroad to attend (“Salsacard.de”). This luxurious Berlin hotel is so important in commodifying salsa that Salsacard.de claims this locale has transformed its yearly *Salsa-Treffpunkt* (salsa meeting point) into a way “to redefine event planning in the German capital” (“Salsacard.de”). One could say that a salsa gala is to German *salseros* what the Berlin Film Festival is to Germany’s film industry. In short, these venues are most successful in securing the musical style’s survival in Germany’s diligent dance culture.

---

54 “The discount card with which you can also make purchases!”
Furthermore, their very participants, “German” salseros, patronize these events and also legitimize salsa dancing. Below is a picture of Berlin’s newest addition to the salsa congress industry. Salsa dancing in a professional and organized setting is undoubtedly becoming a respected industry.

**Figure 4: Salsacard Gala 2007**

![Image of Salsacard Gala 2007](http://www.salsacard.de)


Once obtained by salseros, Salsacard.de’s Visa credit card symbolizes salsa’s purchasing power. With this fiery-red and exotic-looking credit card, Visa and salseros further support an international salsa dancing community in Germany and abroad. All cardholders are considered members of Berlin’s transnational salsa scene—virtually and in interaction with one another the internet serves as a business platform for all things salsa. Indeed, salsa events such as these have not only become popular, they have earned a privileged position among Germany’s salsa dancing elite, too. Salsa congress organizers rely on such companies as the airline Germanwings and the popular rum brand Havana Club for sponsoring (“Salsacard.de”). Yet, Berlin’s glamorous salsa congress culture deviates considerably from salsa’s earlier years in New York City’s urban backdrop.
Although the salsa movement began as a form of expression within the working-class’s struggles, one can revisit Santos Febres’ article “Salsa as Translocation,” to illustrate the notion that salsa has not only become a product to be purchased by those German salseros in “the know,” but also that this industry no longer shares el barrio as its participants’ clave (or access code). Instead, salsero’s economic means are setting novices apart from true dance professionals. Through the support of Salsacard.de and its consumers, salsa is taking a synchronized capitalistic step into the realm of a true sport in Germany. Companies sponsoring salsa events have become one of salsa’s economic allies in empowering the genre in Germany. As a whole, the dancing and teaching of salsa has undoubtedly turned into a product, Germany’s translocal commodity par excellence. Nevertheless, determining who these events’ participants are is worth further discussion.
TYPES OF SALSEROS IN GERMANY

With a strongly supported German salsa scene in place, one must ask the question: Who dances salsa in Germany today and how is that relevant to the dynamics of Salsafieber? We know that salsa instructors dance salsa. We are also aware of the fact that salseros dance salsa in German night clubs, dance schools, (street) festivals, and salsa congresses, but we must first determine from what part of German society they come.

Although one cannot paint an exact picture of the typical German salsero who participates, one can divide him/her into two categories: amateurs (from novice to advanced dancers) and professionals. Beyond the inner circle of salsa’s high society in congresses and competitions, the music is danced to by Germans of all walks of life. Germany’s salseros range in age from their late teens to well into their fifties, and even though they do not seem to be confined to any one social group, middle-class Germans typically have the most access to this leisure activity in dance schools and night clubs. Parents even seek out professionals specializing in children’s salsa classes (“Kursanbeiter in Deutschland”).

Historically, such ballroom dances55 as the waltz have been part of the organized social dance culture in Germany since the nineteenth century (Herbison-Evans). Also a dance sport,56 ballroom and partner dancing today continue to be popular among Tanzvereine and professional dancers alike. The growth of a large middle class in Germany made these dances more accessible to those not belonging to high society

55 The modern waltz, the tango, the Viennese Waltz, the Foxtrot, and the Quickstep are considered the five “modern standard” ballroom dances (Herbison-Evans).
56 With its own set of rules and bodies of administration and regulation, the term refers to dance as an internationally-recognized sport where (professional) dancers compete for prizes and titles.
Long gone are the days where glamorous balls dominated leisure activities after dark. On the contrary, one could say that the salsa dancing craze in Germany, supported by its salsa congress industry, only diversifies dancesport in the global community. Could salsa’s accessibility to the middle class contribute to its success in Germany? A dance community such as the salsa scene described herein and its appeal and availability to the common folk no longer excludes this group from the leisure dancing of the privileged high society of the nineteenth century, during which time Germany underwent a process of cultural and political unification.

Still, salsa dancing in the Federal Republic’s cities today is not the nation’s first manifestation of such a form of musical and cultural relocation. During the reconstruction era of the West Germany of the 1950s the younger generation developed an affinity for the jazz and rock ‘n’ roll from the U.S. As Uta Poiger explains in her ethno-historical study illustrating the jazz and rock craze in the Federal Republic during the Cold War, city officials supported jazz clubs for adolescents throughout West Germany, and its Defense Minister Franz-Josef Strauß declared jazz a proper music style for the West German armed forces (1). The genre was, in effect, declared legitimate by the army. This resulted in West Germany’s support for and consumption of U.S. American cultural imports and unleashed an entire dancing culture and an era of U.S. music consumerism. Moreover, during the Allied occupation and the Cold War, U.S. American goods, particularly popular music, dictated how the younger generation identified itself in contrast to its so-called “democratic” East German counterpart (Poiger 57).
2). The fact that even “young East Germans would [cross into] West Berlin to buy “boogie-woogie shoes” with thick soles, jeans, leather jackets, or [jazz and rock records]” (Poiger 2), despite certain governmental prohibitions, is quite similar to German salseros’ love for everything salsa.

Although the East-West political rivalry in Germany no longer exists to the degree it did subsequent to WWII, and there is no overt competition among Ossis (Eastern Germans) or Wessis (Western Germans) for obtaining salsa ‘products,’ it is worth mentioning that Germans are again treading new cultural waters. In an ever-more interconnected and globalized world, Germany’s salsa developments draw attention beyond those of its over two and a half million Turks, who are often the topic of the immigration debate in Germany today and are its largest minority culture (Oster). Even though Latin Americans are not making as large an impact on Germany as they are on U.S. culture and society, the time has come to address Latin Americans’ role in reshaping the national discourse on German cultural identity through salsa, and music and dance in general.58

Germans are not the only salseros partaking in Salsafieber in Germany. However, Latin Americans are being employed as salsa “consultants” and consequently diversifying this translocal music’s institutions worldwide. In the last ten years, Germany’s growing Latin American population has magnified its role in fortifying the salsa scene and, consequently, in reshaping the debate over German society’s “agreed upon” identity. To those Germans to whom the genre’s history and sphere of influence is

58 Schmalz-Jacobsen and Georg Hansen’s Ethnische Minderheiten in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, ein Lexikon (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1995.) contains only one section on immigration from the Spanish-speaking Americas, Chile. Thus, this gap in documentation warrants further study on Latin Americans’ cultural contributions to Germany’s cultures.
unclear or unknown, the exotic lands of the Spanish-speaking Americas are synonymous with hot Latin salsa. It is not until Germans come into direct contact with Latin Americans in salsa’s translocal outposts in society (night clubs, workshops and so on), that the truth about Latin Americans’ link to salsa music and dance overrides stereotypes. Provided in translation, Rob Lücking, a self-proclaimed salsaholic and German salsa DJ states in a website forum:

Der typische Latino, der typische deutsche, der typische Gringo, das sind alles Klischees. Solche Leute gibt es, aber sie sind selten. Ich kenne viele Latinos, die Salsa und Merengue schrecklich finden und sich tanzmäßig wie ein Holzklotz bewegen. . . . Allerdings: wir Deutschen werden niemals die gleiche Spontanität, das gleiche Feeling für Salsa und Merengue entwickeln wie ein Latino, der mit dieser Musik aufgewachsen ist und sie sich von klein an zu eigen gemacht hat! (Lücking) [The typical Latino, German, gringo are all clichés. Such people exist, but they are rare. I know many Latinos who think salsa is terrible and who cannot dance and have two left feet. . . . Nevertheless: we Germans will never develop the same spontaneity, the same feeling for salsa and merengue that a Latino who grew up with this music and made it his own from childhood can!]  

Therefore the question: What is the nature of the salsa dynamic among Latin Americans and Germans in the Federal Republic today? In other words, beyond their dance moves, what role do Latin Americans play in this intermingling of three continents? That is to say, there are scarcely explored ideas that lead to a better

59 All translations from the German or Spanish into English are mine unless otherwise noted.
understanding of Latin Americans’ identity cycle inherent to the immigrant experience in relation to salsa in contemporary Germany.
THE DYNAMICS OF SALSAFIEBER: GERMANY’S SALSIOLGY

A deeper look into Germany’s assumptions that salsa equals Latin Americans would reveal an all-too surprising fact. For many Latin American immigrants from countries where salsa is not necessarily a lived practice or heritage, that is to say, a component of national identity, such as in Puerto Rico or Colombia, the host country (in this case Germany) is their first true personal encounter with this translocal artifact. Faith University (Istanbul, Turkey) English professor Sheenagh Pietrobruno follows this very phenomenon. Using the global arena as a backdrop, Pietrobruno studies the cultural effects of the “determinitorialization” of salsa out of its supposed “place of origin” in Latin America, a so-called purely undisturbed cultural habitat, into Canada (20). In showcasing Montreal’s salsa scene, Pietrobruno examines how Latin American immigrants adopt salsa as part of their own assimilation process and self-identification only after establishing themselves in this French-speaking Canadian metropolis (19).

In her study *Salsa and its Translocal Moves* Pietrobruno attributes Latin Americans’ adoption of salsa in a translocal environment as a way to recuperate the cultural loss(es) associated with the “Latin diaspora:” the Spanish-language atmosphere (19). This very dynamic is applicable to Latin Americans’ connection to salsa in Europe and in the German scene in particular. The (re)adoption of salsa in the Federal Republic by Latin American immigrants can be seen as a means of alleviating and coping with the tribulations of cultural adaptation, integration and self-preservation.

Partly based on Germany’s perception of Latin America as a salsa-dancing entity, immigrants from Perú, Bolivia and Ecuador, to mention only a few, supposedly “embody

---

60 The term salsiology is taken from the Vernon Bogg’s book entitled *Salsiology: Afro-Cuban Music and the Evolution of Salsa in New York City*, in essence an analysis of the social dynamics of salsa music and dance.
a cultural affiliation that [uninformed] people of non-Latin descent believe is tied to their previous experiences in [the Spanish-speaking Americas]” (Pietrobruno 19). It is assumed that all Latin Americans have experienced salsa in their respective countries of birth. It may be surprising to those unversed in salsa’s translocal history that this music and dance style can become either a social pastime or a way to make a living, and even a tool to (re)construct a new Latin American identity—one incorporating the heritage culture as well as the German way of practicing salsa. Even though there are immigrants in the Federal Republic, such as those from Cuba, for whom salsa is perceived as “heritage,” for those who do not, Germany is the first platform where they retailor their “cultural fabric” to be worn for the global audience (Pietrobruno 19). Pietrobruno’s explanation for why many Latin Americans in Germany subscribe to the Salsafieber community by either dancing or teaching salsa comes as no surprise given the artifact’s “commercial status as a transnational marker of Latin identity distributed through the media” (19). By actively supporting Germany’s salsa industry, immigrants of non-salsa heritage, such as many Central Americans who grow up with the cumbia tradition, for example, can select the culture of which they want to be a part.

Furthermore, Latin Americans for whom salsa is not “heritage” no longer form part of a “tacit reproduction of practices,” such as when an individual subscribes to expressions of popular culture in his/her home country (19). Instead, Latin Americans who adopt salsa upon their arrival in Germany reconstruct a new identity based upon the

---

61 Many purists in Cuba would dispute the use of the term “salsa,” for their “version” of is called casino. Often danced in a wheel of two couples or more, the rueda de casino (dancing salsa in a wheel-like manner) consists of synchronized dance figures where dancers switch from partner to partner. This style first developed as culture expression of the lower class on the streets of Cuba and made its way into the capitalistic casinos, thus appealing to the upper class. Similar to Puerto Rican Afro-Caribbean styles of dance, the rueda de casino has made it way to all countries affected by the Latin American diaspora.
translocal “markers” conceived not in a local, Latin American context, but in one of transnational proportions. Latin Americans dance according to the essentialist beat of the national discourses of culture associated with salsa. Essentially, newly-baptized Latin American salseros become who the German salsa scene dictates: an over-generalized pan-American salsa dancing community—the non-German “Other.” This idea is quite different from the phenomenon described in Chapter 1 where salsa is translocal and dismantles cultural essentialism in that it welcomes salseros of all cultures. Finally, stereotypes of salsa being universal to all Spanish-speakers are perpetuated by eurocentrists in Germany; needless to say, Latin Americans are not far behind in sharing these stereotypes.

The interactions between Latin Americans and Germans in salsa dancing, is noteworthy in that they represent a figurative dance in which Germans and non-Germans are able to lead or follow in the (re)construction of Latin American identity abroad. We know that the Latin American diaspora in Germany can be largely attributed to the effects of globalization: economic inequality, political unrest63 and instability, as well as professional development in the case of university exchange students who also participate in salsa festivities in their free time. Nevertheless, a close analysis of the Latin American immigrant experience in Germany is beyond the scope of this study.

Therefore, we cannot trace with great detail Latin Americans and their role in German society beyond the salsa industry, that is, those not limited to stories of Latin American cultural identity being gathered up and reconstructed through salsa dancing. Instead a further, more detailed analysis of Germans’ perception of Latin Americans

---

63 Although beyond the scope of this thesis, some issues worth further study are the various dictatorships, wars and social strife throughout the 1970s, ‘80s and ‘90s in Central America, Chile, Argentina, not to mention the current violence in Colombia.
involved in the salsa scene is fundamental in understanding how Germans view themselves. As stated earlier, the notion of Latin Americans as exotic salseros in Germany too closely links them to the cultural group misrepresented as the strictly Latin American and Spanish-speaking salsa melting pot. The mere fact that salsa and other genres bearing Spanish lyrics or Afro-Hispanic musical idioms fall under “Latin” music demonstrates this misconception (Waxer 5). Despite the fact that salsa is certainly a mixture of various musical expressions spanning hybrid cultures in Africa, Europe and the Americas, it would be, without a doubt, an overt exaggeration to claim that all Latin Americans are hot “Latin” salsa dancers by birth and upbringing. And although some may choose salsa as their “ticket” to entrance into the German salsa industry, some participate in German Salsafieber because of mere interest in the genre and for others it is a source of income in a country with complicated immigration laws and regulations.

While it may seem that Latin American salseros remain in their cultural comfort zone by adopting salsa as their newly-found Latin American identity in Germany, Latin Americans, regardless of their country of origin are identified with stickers of “Otherness” in comparison with “homogeneous” German culture. That “Otherness” is constructed by perpetuating and marketing a so-called “Latin” genre. Could it be that Latin American salseros are cultural subjects attempting to adapt to the German salsa community in order to be considered “authentically Latin”? Indeed, by participating in the German salsa scene, Latin Americans are integrating themselves in this German social institution. In order to uphold their credibility and salsa’s authenticity, Latin Americans must live up to stereotypes; their existence as the non-German “Other” depends on it.

---

64 Some example of these are the cumbia, merengue, or the Norteña music of northern Mexico.
Still, one point must be made: There is limited academic literature specific to salsa dancing in Germany and any discussion about its contribution to this nation’s *Leitkultur* (mainstream culture) for that matter. Clearly, such a controversial term signifying “German” heritage and culture provokes loaded discussion, but salsa’s popularity in its German context can shed light on reevaluating the incorporation of non-German immigrant culture into a fraction of the contemporary German experience. This is due to the fact that, as Sheenagh Pietrobruno concludes, “Information about dances rooted in popular expression, such as [translocal] “street” salsa, are predominantly not found in books and manuals but ascertained through actual performance and lived circumstances” (203). This would perhaps explain the story-like yet noteworthy contribution of salsa dancing and its connection in reorienting the discourse of German identity (re)construction. The German salsa industry is telling the transnational story of its consumers and recording these nuances within communication media.

The internet, it seems, is becoming the stronger form of documentation of the intricacies of salsa dancing in the German social context. The field of cultural studies has a great deal to draw from these most up-to-date happenings of world salsa. Thus the question, do German salsa websites also perpetuate salsa stereotypes? Do they merely reflect the point of reference of salsa’s locality, that is, its connection to the so-called sources of salsa’s mixture: Cuban, Puerto Rican and other “homogeneous” national identities from the Spanish-speaking Caribbean basin? So as to identify essentialism, we turn to other forms of “Latin” identity represented through salsa, this time in the form of event advertisement on German salsa webpages.
EXPLORING SALSA IDENTITIES:

GERMAN SALSA MARKETING AND ADVERTISEMENT

Within the German context, one must understand that universalist misconceptions of Latin Americans as innately exotic and sensual salseros are inaccurate at best and manipulated to set them apart from their German host culture who also dances salsa.\footnote{The term “fictive sexualization” that sexualizes the practice of salsa within a Latin context could be used.}

The exoticism is perhaps rooted in the practice of salsa dancing itself. The German salsa industry makes reference to salsa culture in relation to a Spanish-speaking paradise. Similar to the U.S.-based record label’s, Fania Records’, commercialization strategies during the 1960s and ‘70s championing Afro-Hispanic music as “salsa,” German salsa party organizers further perpetuate the exoticism linked to the subaltern subject. Catchy one-liners and marketing phrases such as “Put a little SALSA in your life;” “Conexión & Latin Factory: Yamulee (NY/USA);” “Caribe Sals[ó]dromo: Ritmo Cubano;” “Salsa Palladium Mainz;” and “„Frankfurt goes Salsa;” (“SalsaDe: Click mal an”) demonstrate a non-coincidental knowledge of transnational, hybrid salsa identities in Germany.

Although this type of publicity does not neglect salsa’s true history, it does misrepresent it: one that began as translocal in New York beginning in the 1960s, transitioned to local when it reached Latin America in the 1970s and is continually supported by translocal Latin Americans in Germany well into the first decade of the twenty-first century. There has indeed been a flow of identities attached to salsa music. This identity movement continues today and keeps translocal salsa alive. On the other hand, Latin Americans do not own salsa.
Some of these salsa sales pitches do not just paint a general “Cuban” or “Latin” picture of the “Other.” They include the German host culture as well. “Salsa Palladium Mainz” and “Frankfurt goes Salsa” reference salsa’s well-documented musical history. By including the Palladium as part of the Mainzer salsa scene, German salseros, too, are identifying with the genre’s translocal legacy in the hybrid urban musical center.

**Figure 5: Salsa Palladium Mainz**

Source: “SalsaDe: Click mal an.” Salsa.de 29 Feb. 2007 <http://www.salsa.de/2.0.html>

In an analysis of the salsa party discourse, it is apparent that salsa’s history is not foreign to the German salsa community on the internet, and we know how crucial this medium is to the creation and information flow of the Federal Republic’s salsa institutions.

I mention translocal once again because although there is referentiality to local notions of national culture rooted in the heritage of the Cuban and Puerto Rican (im)migrants in New York City during the latter half of the twentieth century, the same ontological enclaves partook in close collaboration with African- and Italian-U.S.

---

66 After the closing of the legendary Palladium Ballroom in New York City in 1966 (Flores 76), and marking the end of the mambo craze of Latin music that had reached its peak during the 1950s, a musical style known as boogaloo earned popularity. Itself a hybrid of the appositional contact between Afro-Hispanic, Afro- and Italian-U.S. American musical experimentation, the boogaloo fused big band and bebop with the Cuban guaguancó and son styles during the 1940s in New York (Flores 76).

67 Boogaloo later included harmonized doo-wop love songs and rhythm and blues novelties in the 1950s, and assumed the role of transitional music between the mambo era and the beginning of salsa, dubbed by Juan Flores as “a bring and a break” in the U.S. Latino musical experience (Flores 76). The Palladium Ballroom was subsequently replaced by a venue called the Palm Gardens, that later became known as the Cheetah Club. It was in this club, that a performance by Fania’s Allstars was filmed. *Nuestra Cosa* (Our Latin Thing) is cited as the “inauguration of salsa” music (Flores 76).
American musical culture. The use of the cultural semantics of the Palladium in the German salsa world, therefore, is a clear call to the translocal identities that formed salsa in the first place. This type of salsa rhetoric is no coincidence.

**Figure 6: Put a Little SALSA in your Life**

![Salsa in your Life](image)

Source: “SalsaDe: Click mal an.” Salsa.de 29 Feb. 2007 <http://www.salsa.de/2.0.html>

The image accompanying “Put a little SALSA in your life” includes a salsa band in the background contained by a jar of edible salsa. German *salseros* cannot just dance to this infectious rhythm; but [www.salsa.de](http://www.salsa.de) allows them to “eat” this translocal musical identity at parties as well. Why does the internet associate salsa with the local and not transnational Latin American identity? Surprisingly, it does.

The Frankfurt-based dance company Conexión and night club Latin Factory are included in the city’s most recent *Escuela de Salsa*, an online salsa newsletter announcing the following:

**Figure 7: Oster Special mit Yamulee aus New York**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oster Special mit Yamulee aus New York</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Oster Salsa Special**


Die *Yamulee* Dance Company, als Vertreter der original NY-Style Salsa mit gleichnamiger Tanzschule in New York kommt **direkt aus den USA** zu uns, um Sie mit ihren Choreographien und Moves der neuen Mambo Ära zu begeistern.
[Easter Special mit Yamulee from New York]

**Easter Special**
Latin Factory and [Club] Conexión present an extraordinary New York Style Event from **Thursday, April 5th through Sunday, April 8th for** Easter 2007.

As representatives of the original NY-Style Salsa, the **Yamulee** Dance Company will be there with us **straight from the U.S.** to wow us with their new-mambo-era choreography and moves.


This salsa announcement in German, Spanish and English not only reflects the hybridity and juxtaposition of three vast cultures that are key to understanding salsa practices in Germany, but also documents a yearning for salsa’s motherland. To continue to establish a connection between salsa dancing in Germany and its developments in the urban New York of the 1960s and ‘70s is to supplement the essentialist pitfall that salsa has undisputed origins. The advertisement assumes that the New York salsa tradition is the authenticity on which the style is based and defined. Claims to genuineness are marketing tools that sell salsa as a translocal and capitalistic product.

On the other hand, the trilingual form of communication of the salsa advertisement further hints at salsa’s ability to create hybrid cultural identities among **salseros** in the Federal Republic.
The German Conexión makes specific reference to NY-style salsa as the “original” salsa style from the United States. Germany’s salsa dance sport industry is well-informed about New York’s claim on salsa. Yet, the newsletter does not seem to be aware of its connection with the genre as a translocal and non-essentialist hybrid musical style. An idea such as this is not apparent to those who think in terms of Latin American cultural identity as biology, geography or locality, but rather to those salseros “in the know” of the cultural clave who understand salsa as a fusion, experimentation and as innovational across cultural imaginaries, in other words, in terms of translocality. Here, too, the geographical location and cultural weight of U.S.-American New York is conceptualized as the ‘origin’ of salsa music and dance. German salsa consumers are compelled to believe in a set salsa authority culture. No other history pertaining to the development of this musical style is explored or allowed to permeate. Startlingly, an uninformed German salsero presented with this type of advertising would develop a limited awareness of salsa. In this manner, essentialist attitudes concerning authenticity and authority are molded. Yet, salsa’s other local components are not ignored.

The next image explores salsa locality but blurs Cuba’s “official” role in claiming the genre as essential to the island. The line “Caribe Sals[ó]dromo: Ritmo Cubano” [Caribbean Salsa Dome: Cuban Rhythm] explicitly calls attention to the experience and
cultural source of the type of salsa to be played by D.J. Rey (Spanish for King) on April 7, 2007.

**Figure 9: “Caribe Salsórdromo”**

[Image: Caribe Salsórdromo poster]

Source: “SalsaDe: Click mal an.” Salsa.de 29 Feb. 2007 <http://www.salsa.de/2.0.html>

There seems to be a contradiction in this juxtaposing of Cuban identity and salsa dancing in Germany. If we recall, when addressing the issues of salsa as a legitimate musical genre, that Marisol Berrios Miranda confidently states: “Cubans cannot play salsa. There is not a Cuban salsa group, it does not exist” (23), it seems that the Cuban musical tradition is sacred, and even though the Afro-Hispanic *son* is a forefather of the salsa continuum, essentialism still continues to defend itself in light of immigrant and transnational ideals. Again, I do not wish to enter into the debate on salsa’s legitimacy as a pure musical style—that would be an essentialist flaw. Instead, I underscore the bridge being built between local Cuban identity and salsa music and dance by the German salsa industry. It is assumed that the *Caribe Salsórdromo* (Caribbean salsa dome) is the place where ‘authentic’ *Cuban* salsa is danced. German *salseros* can experience the “true” Caribbean salsa variant. The rich Afro-Hispanic musical tradition of Cuba is present in the memory of German salsa advertisers. In this manner, origins seem to acquire new names.
The key to understanding the presence of the local and the global in the cultural identity of salseros throughout the world is based on the perception and knowledge of music and dance based on a “circulation and distribution of cultural commodities at the local and international levels” (Pietrobruno 7). The identities, be they translocal U.S. Latino or local Colombian self-perception created through salsa experiences, will always include some degree of reference to essentialism. Nonetheless, salsa must remain predominately translocal to ensure its survival in non-‘Latin’ societies.

Salsa music and dance in Germany today follow the identity linked to it as an historical continuum. Salsa is the result of over four centuries of Spanish-colonial rule that pooled African, European and indigenous groups and herded Latin American subjects into an essentialist and universalist corral. In contrast, (im)migrants from post-colonial Spanish-speaking North and South America shared urban New York with other ethnic groups to construct salsa music through shared experiences. Like multiethnic New York after WWII, will Latin Americans and Turkish immigrants in Germany some day collaborate musically? French society, for example, has already seen the creation of a new North African form of salsa: Salsarai. Contact between post-colonial North African Arab culture and salsa practices are not surprising this far into salsa’s translocal trajectory.

Like boogaloo and its precursor, mambo, salsa can be viewed as the cultural compromise of that multicultural New Yorker’s shared urban experience that constructed an identity marking an era of translocal music stemming from Latin America. This same process is in its early stages in Germany today. Salsa’s circular movements fueled by globalization and facilitated by travel, (im)migration, and the media can be traced in the
Federal Republic’s cities. Germany’s post WWII experience as a multicultural society is raising questions as to the accuracy of traditional notions of cultural identity. Latin American immigrants and travelers to Germany who contribute to the importation of salsero culture are also implicated in this discourse of identity as a construction. German travelers to the Afro-Hispanic countries of the Americas are also seeking out the “true” rules of salsa and developing with quite decisive Gründlichkeit (thoroughness) and Übersichtlichkeit (clarity) a strong German salsa industry. Salsiology’s Latin American participants, although the point of reference for those craving Salsa-Bildung (salsa education), can no longer stand alone as the active players in the construction of a salsa community. Consequently, salsa music and dance cannot be reduced to a Spanish-speaking Latin American immigrant identity, but can be applied as a tool for understanding how German salsa lovers can reanalyze their cultural identity as well. Keeping in mind that ethnic groups construct identities through shared practices, Germany’s salseros must take a closer look at their role in perpetuating or altering generalized notions of Latin Americans as the innately exotic and sensual salsero “Other”, and consumers must examine the changes their own identity as a cultural unit is undergoing in its “salsa” cities. I explore how salsa dancing in the Federal Republic affects German cultural identity in greater detail in Chapter 3.
CHAPTER III: RETHINKING GERMAN CULTURAL IDENTITY

In the last chapter we looked at the various ways salsa dancing takes form in German cities today. We provided some answers to several important questions regarding the who, what, where and when of German Salsafieber. We know that Germans’ and Latin Americans’ side-by-side movement on the salsa dance floor is a form of cultural interaction between the two groups. The beginning of salsa’s history in the 1970s Germany coincides with the Cold War era during the U.S.’s military presence. Immigration from the Spanish-speaking Americas further supported the salsa diaspora in Germany throughout the 1980s, ‘90s and well into the twentieth century. The tourism boom in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and other translocal salsa regions has brought German aficionados within hearing distance of Afro-Hispanic music. In the last ten years, some of Germany’s largest cities, Berlin, Munich, Cologne, Hamburg, and Frankfurt have experienced a positive growth in their salsa scene, particularly in the salsa congress industry domestically and abroad. This has coincided with two effects of globalized world: immigration and travel.

Travel to countries where salsa is “heritage” has educated German salseros in such a way that they, too, can claim to have imported salsa in its so-called ‘purest’ form back to the genre’s translocal outpost im Lande der Dichter und Denker (in the land of philosophers and poets). Germany’s Salsabildung (salsa education), therefore, has been especially fruitful in fortifying the country’s salsa industry by maintaining open communication channels between its consumers. One way this is achieved is via the internet’s well-visited salsa websites and forums. A brief description of one of Berlin’s
dance congresses gave insight as to the degree of German involvement in further building the country’s salsa framework.

In this complicated and controversial development, there are several crucial questions one must address. Can cultural borrowing in the form of salsa dancing in Germany be a strategy for coping with the challenges of cultural adaptation and integration challenges faced by non-Germans? Within the context of globalization and a large immigrant population, is the adeption of salsa music and dance in Germany’s civil institutions not adding an element of the “Other” to the German experience? What is German culture compromising since more “traditional” forms of dance sport such as the popular nineteenth-century waltz or hip-hop in night clubs are now sharing the cultural market’s title of popularity with salsa music?
GERMANY’S IMMIGRANT SOCIETY: INTEGRATION AND ACCULTURATION

Even though German salseros have developed salsa into an industry as business leaders, one cannot gloss over the crucial lead that Latin American salseros take in social salsa dancing in the Federal Republic. Choosing to adopt salsa dancing cannot be viewed as a mere ticket to Latin Americans’ cultural acceptance and positive interaction with Germans. Latin American cultural identity is at stake in this discussion. Eurocentric and universalist portrayals of translocal salsa culture and their “authentic” links to historic, geographic, and ethnicized identity constructs make evident the need to re-evaluate Latin America’s connection to salsa music and dance beyond the limits of exoticism and sensuality. Again, salsa music and dance are translocal and cannot be considered “heritage” to and by all Spanish speakers exclusively; this globalized genre flourishes despite the creation of political and internal cultural borders. Government regulations designed to control immigration cannot end the process of transplanting cultural practices to the host country. Given Germany’s nearly 15 million inhabitants with an immigrant background, transnational expressions such as salsa cannot be ignored by the host culture’s leaders (“On Integrating Immigrants in Germany” 598). I apply the term transnational consciously, for the practice of salsa dancing within Germany’s social (dance) institutions has spread throughout the country’s largest cities. Salsa dancing as a social pastime in Germany has allowed for community building just as jazz and rock ‘n’ roll gained acclaim in post-WWII West Germany. Yet, this dynamic does not run parallel to the country’s leadership agenda.

The German government’s efforts to integrate non-Germans and recent ethnic German returnees are the focus of much discussion in a country where the establishment
of a clearly defined nation state is not uncomplicated. By means of the Residency Act and the National Integration Plan (2005) Germany’s political leaders seek to:

1. develop integration courses
2. promote ‘good’ education and training thereby increasing labor market potential
3. improve living standards and gender rights among women and girls
4. support integration on-site
5. strengthen the civil society

Such elements are cited as progressive strategies championed by the highly influential Große Koalition (Grand Coalition) that has dominated immigrant policies since November 2005 (“On Integrating Immigrants in Germany” 597). As leaders of the largest immigrant society in Europe (597), German lawmakers defend and promote the acquisition of the German language among all its legal citizens. As an internationally recognized nation state, the Federal Republic of Germany is exercising its cultural and sovereign right to build the country’s political and cultural unity based on the use of and identification with the German language. In the eyes of advocates of homogeneity and economic prosperity, to require the adoption of German signifies a crucial step in the adaptation and integration process.

If the use of the German language creates a sense of cultural belonging for local Germans, then so could its adoption on the part of Latin Americans. The labyrinth-like processes involved in achieving this goal entail more than adherence to government laws and programs rooted in ethnocentrism; they also require the plan’s enforcement and the strengthening of the civil population, the sixth action area of the German National
Integration Plan. Interestingly, the support and growth of salsa’s institutions (salsa dance schools, Vereine (clubs, associations), discotheques, congresses, trips to the ‘salsa’ Caribbean countries, and the advertisement thereof through the internet) can be interpreted as a form of “strengthening [Germany’s] civil society” through music and dance. Salsa entrepreneurs are benefiting from the influx of consumers’ purchasing power through their participation in the salsa scene.

Salsa being a sensually intimate dance, German and Latin American salseros are creating their own integration and social adaptation structures. Any sort of integration efforts on the part of local German society and transnational Latin Americans in the Federal Republic, respectively, is difficult to measure. More research needs to be carried out to document Latin Americans’ adoption, adaptation, and adepition of traditional “German” pastimes. For the purpose of this thesis we can only provide insight as to how German salseros can restructure the criteria by which they measure their membership in a supposed homogeneous German-speaking nation.

While the Federal Republic continues to grapple with its own essentialist ideals of adopting the prosperous ‘German’ way, transnational cultural practices such as salsa dancing in its biggest cities contradict these efforts. The integration tactics can be regarded as the steadfast defense of the local.

Conversely, the manifestations of transnational immigrant culture from Latin America can be seen as an attempt to preserve the global. Transnational Latin Americans who dance salsa do not just represent the experience of an identity continuum branding them as “authentically” Spanish-speaking salseros. Instead, they are seen as “true” representatives of their all-too-often generalized ethnicity. This is exemplified by the
German-run marketing tactics of the salsa industry in the Federal Republic. Idealized exotic and sensual ‘Latin’ salsa “Othering,” although celebratory in nature, constructs a German-perceived Latin American identity that is inaccurate. Throughout this thesis we have come to understand that salsa music and dance is but a sampling of the wide array of Latin American cultural practices that span its local geographies from Tijuana to Tierra del Fuego. For this reason, Latin American immigrant identity, as seen through this cultural entity’s participation in the German salsa scene, can no longer be conceptualized in terms of “normative approaches that promote essentialized and bounded notions of culture and identity” (qtd. in Ehrkamp 347). Intercultural Bildung (education), tolerance and negotiation on policies directing identity construction does not jeopardize heterogeneity; they accept and promote it. Homogeneity cannot exist in its purest form because it is based on heterogeneous mixtures and cultural negotiation.

In terms of establishing and preserving homogenous, local, and national German unity, that is, promoting and monitoring integration, an acceptance of the dichotomy between the global and the local must also be integrated in these political efforts. Therefore, if the cultural compromise between the local German host and the translocal Latin American “Other” is to be achieved, awareness of hybrid identity discourse must also be considered. Latin Americans who cling to their supposed geographical “origins” by (re)adopting salsa in Germany have a challenging task before them. If they are to be accepted by the ruling “German” population, they are to adhere to the government’s National Plan for Integration. Yet, said plan makes no reference to cultural practices such as music and dance. Social and cultural negotiations involving defenders of the global, translocal Latin American, and local, German citizens are crucial to social and
intercultural tolerance. Assuming that all or most of the fundamental integration
“requirements” were someday achieved, itself an idealized misconception, the
negotiation of social pastimes would further necessitate intercultural negotiation. Hence,
salseros must reassess the terms by which they, 1. define and experience salsa, and 2.
grant importance to their cultural identity and that of their fellow (non) Latin salsa
dancers. A belief in German society as homogeneous would surely hinder these efforts.

The quotation reference in Chapter 2 regarding definitions of a “true” salsero
evidences the German industry’s capitalistic demand for cultural authenticity. So-called
“real” Latin American salseros are the supply meeting the industry’s demand. Without
reference to the local (“pure”) salsa traditions of the Hispanic Caribbean, the German
salsa scene would have little credibility among its participants. The issue is more
intricate than mere stereotyping. To be fully integrated into German society, a genuine
Latin salsero must also adopt the German way. If Latin American immigrants are to
adapt and allow themselves to be integrated by adopting the customs and social practices
that define the German ethnic unit, can they also be fully authentic Latin American
salseros? An interesting explanation lies in the belief in elastic notions of the
construction of identity based on negotiating the ethnic and political demands of the
home and host cultures.

68 Der typische Latino, der typische deutsche, der typische Gringo, das sind alles Klischees. Solche Leute
gibt es, aber sie sind selten. Ich kenne viele Latinos, die Salsa und Merengue schrecklich finden und sich
tanzmäßig wie ein Holzklotz bewegen. . . . Allerdings: wir Deutschen werden niemals die gleiche
Spontanität, das gleiche Feeling für Salsa und Merengue entwickeln wie ein Latino, der mit dieser Musik
aufgewachsen ist und sie sich von klein an zu eigen gemacht hat! (Lücking) [The typical Latino, German,
gringo are all clichés. Such people exist, but they are rare. I know many Latinos who think salsa is terrible
and who cannot dance and have two left feet. . . . Nevertheless: we Germans will never develop the same
spontaneity, the same feeling for salsa and merengue that a Latino who grew up with this music and made
it his own from childhood can!]
Since salsa is in fact growing as a *German*-administered institution, is this not a form of cultural and social flexibility on the part of the translocal Latin American subject? Latin Americans who adopt salsa after their arrival in Germany are adding to their heritage a supposed tacit element of their inherent cultural identity. On a material and virtual basis, the German salsa business is primarily tailored to meet the needs of its German-speaking consumers. German salsa websites and their corresponding forums are overwhelmingly accessible in the German language. Workshops and congresses are also predominately in German. The undisputed presence of Germany’s official language within the country’s salsa institutions sends its globalized musical community a clear message. German language proficiency is “essential” to maintaining open communication with other German-speaking *salseros*. Furthermore, membership, or social acceptance in this “German” group is contingent upon adequate language skills also.

Although reading and listening proficiency in Spanish would be beneficial in understanding the lyrics of the majority of salsa songs, Germany’s *salseros* do not need to learn Spanish to experience salsa music and dance in their home culture. Still, salsa in Germany would not be transnational if it did not bring about intercultural awareness on behalf of the host. The German language will soon have to accommodate the cultural semantics associated with salsa culture. For this reason, German salsa “texts” (online marketing and advertisements) will always exhibit referentiality to the colonial and post colonial musical developments in the English- and Spanish-speaking Americas that provided the cultural material to construct salsa in New York during the 1960s and ’70s. Thus, there appears to be an unequal level of linguistic power in Germany’s salsa
industry. The Spanish prevalent in salsa songs is not crucial to maintaining open communication among Germany’s salseros. The country’s German-speaking salsa consumers face few linguistic barriers in understanding the marketing text available online. This power dynamic brings to mind Antonio Gramsci’s theory on hegemony: “…particular social groups struggle in many different ways, including ideologically, to win the consent of other groups and achieve a kind of ascendancy in both thought and practice over them” (Hall 48). The German language is ultimately the social text pushing the social balance in favor of the “German” salsa institution.

The fact that Germany’s civil population supports and validates salsa dancing by consuming it as a capitalistic commodity makes the process of cultural appropriation of supposed “Latin” practices apparent. There is a German way of experiencing and selling salsa. The consumption of salsa is a phenomenon of intercultural negotiation and salsa as a social text aids in understanding the genre’s worldiness (Aschcroft and Ahluwalia 3). Germany’s Salsabildung, therefore, is part of globalization’s social text that is written both online and on the dance floor of salsa locales. This industry is nonetheless German.

Edward Said’s concept of worldliness is a convenient ally for understanding transnational and multiethnic identities in contemporary German society, as it contains the loaded meaning of contentious issues of globalization: immigration, integration, acculturation, assimilation, and identity (re)construction and (re)negotiation. One could also connect the salsa dynamics in Germany’s multicultural society to Samuel P. Huntington’s commonalities rule. Perhaps one compromise to the German identity question could be: “peoples in all civilizations should search for and attempt to expand the values, institutions and practices they have in common with other people of other
civilizations” (Huntington 320). Huntington’s scholarly suggestions seem to counter Germany’s diligent and costly integration methods. On the one hand, legal residents in Germany are expected to establish a sense of belonging to the German geographical space as “both a center of meaning and the external context of [their] actions” (qtd. in Ehrkamp 349). The transnational salsa community supported by Germans and Latin Americans alike establishes the sense of place upon which identities can be constructed.

Even though salsa dancing as a social activity may not be essential to the German government’s agenda on the cultural integration of non-Germans, it can very well be utilized to understand how Germany’s civil population is learning about and co-mingling dance institutions with non-German cultures. This convergence is a cultural middle ground and Germany’s *salseros* transform the social practices in their cities into negotiated realities (qtd. in Ehrkamp 349). Germany’s interest in salsa is a social gesture in learning about the Latin “Other.”

In keeping with the perspective that Germans who practice salsa are delving into transnational manifestations of world culture, membership and collaboration within salsa’s institutions help German *salseros* establish a sense of community with their fellow dancers and friends. In the process, a sense of belonging arises. While one cannot go so far as to claim that a German salsa dancer necessarily loses his or her sense of belonging to the German cultural and political unit, one could in fact attempt to analyze the significance of what it means for a German to adopt one indicator of the so-called ‘Latin’ way: salsa dancing.

At this point in our analysis, the words of Edmond Jabès seem most fitting, “Der Fremde ermöglicht es dir, du selbst zu sein, indem er dich zum Fremden macht” [A
Enríquez Arana 86

foreigner allows you to be yourself in that he/she transforms you into a foreigner] (Heinrichs). It is now that Lücking’s forum discussion makes the word “heritage” clearer: salsa’s (erroneous) inextricable link to the notion of Latin Americans as “natural”-born salseros translates into putative “origin.” It is not so much an issue of “heritage” being culturally essentialist in tone, as it may mean the end of perpetual stereotyping, for it assumes that “Germans will never develop the same spontaneity, the same feeling for salsa and merengue that a Latino who grew up with this music and made it his own from childhood [could]” (Lücking). The cultural “Othering” of Latin Americans makes it possible for the host country to be what it is: German.

Yet, what happens when Germans become great salseros? Is that even possible? The plausible “could” compels Lücking to consider the possibility of the existence of authentic German salseros; yet, the word “never” is the pessimistic essentialist mentality that is keeping the Spanish-speaking salsa subject under the control of these social discourses of identity. Would that also mean that a “true” German who grew up in a salsa dancing community in Germany could some day biologically grow such a “feeling” for the spontaneity that only a real Latin salsero can deliver? It seems as though a humble German salsero would have to acquire his salsa skills in a lived context, that is, in a Spanish-speaking society in order to consider the genre heritage. Even then, would he or she have to also speak Spanish and acquire all the cultural “skills” that define a Latin American? Can one ever truly absorb the cultural makeup of over twenty Spanish-speaking countries? Do German salseros even desire to become part of Latin culture?

One cannot idealize this phenomenon. While there may be German citizens who suscribe

---

69 All translations from the German or Spanish into English are mine unless otherwise noted.
70 All translations from the German or Spanish into English are mine unless otherwise noted.
to the government’s criteria for Germanness, there are also those who in addition love "salsa."

As represented in selected advertisements in Germany’s salsa industry, claim and authority over salsa music is undoubtedly rooted in essentialism and seeks to establish connections to a geographical location of salsa. In essence, trans(local) cultural artifacts such as salsa cannot be easily defined, contained, or demobilized. Would a newly-baptized German salsero community embody as much exoticism and sensuality as an immigrant from the so-called "third world” that the West has created? These postulations give rise to the idea that the post colonial era is a magnified continuation of the colonial period. What would make an avid German salsero any different from the farfetched cultural presuppositions held in relation to Latin American salsa dancers? What do ‘true’ German salseros value more? Their belonging to German culture or their connection to their globalized musical community? Could it be that Germany’s local culture is purchasing membership into hybrid cultural activities? (How) can German salseros be completely German if they dance salsa?

The German salsa industry’s essentialist yearning for the genre’s local “origins” is fueling the creation of a capitalistic and putatively accurate paradise. Much like Latin American’s adjustment to the Germany way of adopting, adapting, and incorporating salsa into its societal structures (appropriating the genre), German salseros’ construction of a salsa place makes them members of this musical style’s translocal community. As we recall from Chapter 1, salsa as a cultural artifact sustains a “globalized or worldly musical community” (Waxer 5), that “rescue[s] a tradition that is larger than national and broader than ethnic” (Santos Febres 179). The salsa entities throughout the world,
particularly in Germany, reflect a hybrid musical culture. Latin American and German salseros are members in this music and dance culture. The socially-sanctioned junction and fusion between now-transnational Latin music and its German administration is the key to salsa music’s survival among German salseros.
CONCLUSIONS

PERSPECTIVES ON THE FUTURE OF GERMANY’S SALSA SCIENCE

The geographical mobility of transnational cultural practices as fads or contributions to local popular culture makes it necessary to address the sustainability of Germany’s globalized salsa community. In addition, the level of popularity of salsa in Germany’s cities requires a theoretical explication for how the construction of German salsero identity can be substantiated. In citing Étienne Balibar in *Caribe Two Ways*, Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel champions the concept of a “fictive ethnicity”\(^{71}\) both in the creation of both national discourses of local identity and translocal ones:

> I apply the term ‘fictive ethnicity’ to the community instituted by the nation-state […] No nation posses an ethnic base naturally, but as social formations are nationalized, the populations included within them, divided up among them or dominated by them are ethnicized –that is, represented in the past or in the future as *if* they formed a natural community, possessing of itself an identity of origins, culture and interests which transcends individual and social conditions. (31)

The topic of ascribing ethnic associations to the salsa community in Germany raises the question of collectivizing social practices as representative of cultural groups. Salsa music in Latin America had already been ethnicized and represented abroad as a part of an “identity of origins.” The genre is almost exclusively associated with this region, that itself spans over twenty nation-states each with its respective ethnic and social diversity.

\(^{71}\)One could also raise the question of salsa’s “fictive sexual” dimension, another aspect worth further examination.
Salsa identity in the Federal Republic, then, is not dependent on the creation of a nation state but does show that Germany is a nation of nations. Thus, the level of German leadership in the salsa scene and Latin American consumerism evidences that “un país está lleno de otros países, y [...] uno nunca es totalmente representativo de su [nación]” [“a country is filled with other countries and one is never completely representative of one’s nation”] (qtd. in Martínez-San Miguel 26). While the current capitalistic world order cannot sustain a state for every political or ethnic group that exists, it can sustain globalized musical communities such as the case of Germany’s salsa scene.

Alternatively, Latin American enclaves are the social reality of multiethnic nations such as Germany. Immigration weakens and strengthens national discourses of German identity. The salsa culture being bought and sold in the Federal Republic’s urban and virtual places is a contribution of Latin American ethnic enclaves. As social and economic leaders of the salsa industry, German salseros’ sense of belonging within this dancing community incorporates them into the very cultural group that is seen as geographically and ethnically essential to the genre. In short, German salsa participants and consumers form part of the non-static, malleable version of the imagined Spanish-speaking salsa world. Just as Latin Americans are expected to acquire the German language, German salseros also acquire a certain level of Latin American culture. Ultimately, however, German salseros have made salsa their own (appropriated it); Latin Americans are cultural emissaries and liaisons ‘invited’ to vouch for this institution’s authenticity and consequently its credibility and marketability.

72 All translations from the German or Spanish into English are mine unless otherwise noted.
In this manner, the salsa experience is a compound for cohesion between one element common to German and Latin American cultures: dance. Ultimately, salsa dancing in Germany’s urban centers is an unofficial opening of internal borders facilitated by enclaves engaging ideologies that brand the non-German “Other” and construct German *Leitkultur*. This dynamic allows for the existence of cultural hybridity in salsa as a social practice. Even though misconstrued salsero identity may make Latin Americans Germany’s postcolonial subject, the scene’s German participants are the dominant players in creating a sense of community and belonging to this cultural practice. German *salseros* are becoming what salsa signifies: “co-author[s] with the author of the [social salsa] text, and co-composer[s] of” (Bendix 145) the globalized musical community in Germany.

Salsa identity and, consequently, German marketing of the genre as ethnically Latin American integrates remote, yet very unequally-known places in the Spanish-speaking world into the German salsa industry (Martínez-San Miguel 31). The sense of community among Germany’s salsa dancers “… permite referir[se] al proceso de definición de una especificidad cultural social o étnica que produce una ilusión de coherencia y unidad entre un grupo de personas” [refers to a process by which to identify that is cultural in tone, social or ethnic specific, which creates an illusion of coherence and unity among a group of people”]⁷³ (Martínez-San Miguel 27). The transnational German salsa community has a cultural impact on the individuality of its members. The coherence cited by Martínez-San Miguel illustrates a process by which a salsero’s identity can be reconceptualized based on shared experiences within a social institution.

---

⁷³ All translations from the German or Spanish into English are mine unless otherwise noted.
taking place within national borders. Are German lawmakers really in control of the Federal Republic’s National Integration Plan?

Identification with a salsa population is perhaps far from the type of integration sought by the German government. Should the addition of salsa dancing to the German cultural repertoire be interpreted as the disintegration of clearly-defined German identity? Advocates of set ideals for the civil incorporation of non-Germans may question the appropriation of salsa music and dance by Germans. This could perhaps lead to the breakdown of the utopian idea of homogeneous German cultural unity because German salseros are engaging in practices not part of the historical German tradition. Nevertheless, this socially-sanctioned institution cannot go unnoticed by Germany’s leaders.

Iain Chambers and Néstor García can help one understand the inconsistencies salsa dancing as a social institution presents for the social, cultural and economic integration and adaptation of immigrants as well as for the survival of an imaginary German state: “… las pulsaciones contradictorias de un proceso de erosión territorial … produce identidades diaspóricas y vulnera las cartografías del imperativo nacional, al mismo tiempo que promueve los gestos más hostiles de los nuevos fundamentalismos nacionales” [“the contradictory pulsations of a process of territorial erosion … produce diasporic identities and weaken the geography of national discourses of identity all while promoting the most hostile ideologies of the nation”]74 (qtd. in Martínez-San Miguel 26). The above-cited quotation raises questions as to the success of Germany’s National Integration Plan. Germany’s level of maturity as a multicultural society shall prove crucial to arriving at a compromise. Moreover, can salsa music and dance survive the

74 All translations from the German or Spanish into English are mine unless otherwise noted.
trials and tribulations associated with incorporating the cultural heritage of translocal immigrants into any concept of German identity?

In other words, can hybridity be a viable solution for the dichotomy between the local and the global in maintaining German cultural and economic unity? The answers to these questions will depend on Germany’s future policies toward immigrants and their attitudes about their cultural practices. The Federal Republic has accepted salsa music and dance because its citizens have actively created an industry that sustains itself both economically and socially through pre-existing institutions such as Tanzvereine and dance schools. Our inability to predict the future enables multicultural societies to assume responsibility for peaceful coexistence, even at the expense of essentialism. In the end, globalization’s volatile offspring, (im)migration, will continue to complicate and confront national endeavors to create cultural purity and homogeneity: “Nuevamente, la [in/e]migración vulnera y fortalece el sentimiento nacional” [once again, (im/e)migration weakens and strengthens national discourses] of culture (Martínez-San Miguel 130). Germany’s salsa industry is taking note of this.

The greater question for the preservation of a transnational salsa community in Germany is whether or not it can survive another three decades in the German context as a Latin American style. Salsa’s translocal birth in urban New York, and past developments and transformations based on innovation and experimentation will ensure its survival and mobility. World variants of the salsa experience in Japan, Spain, Africa and Germany, and so on, will secure the genre’s survival as transnational survival in its respective societies. Even so, continued Latin American immigration shall serve as the local reference point for the authenticity of German salsa products.

75 All translations from the German or Spanish into English are mine unless otherwise noted.
Latin American *salseros* will surely have to adapt to the social structures and institutions created by a diligent and efficient German cultural unit dedicated to offering salsa as one of its most highly lucrative musical borrowings. Thus the question: What is compromised culturally and musically within salsa music and dance to secure its economic success and social acceptance? Salsa music in Germany has already lost a certain level of spontaneity as a social practice.

The genre’s mere commodification shows that although it does exhibit referentiality to its supposed “origins” in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, referred to by Germans as *Südamerika* (South America), translocal elastic identity politics are privileged over essentialist views of culture as biology and natural. Stuart Hall writes: “The past is not waiting for us back there to recoup our identities against. It is always retold, rediscovered, reinvented. It has to be narrativized. We go to our own pasts through history, through desire, not as a literal fact” (qtd. in Martínez-San Miguel 176).

In short, salsa is not pure, just as Latin American identity is not homogeneous. Latin Americans’ cultural connection to salsa is constructed and continually restructured; it is not owned by this ethnicity simply because it has a history of having co-founded the style. Simply put, salsa was created as translocal and its survival in the global arena is contingent upon this idea. Salsa’s transnationality in Germany, therefore, cannot be overlooked at the expensive of essentialist ideologies branding it authentic or genuine at any level.

Salsa’s instruction in Germany will continue to require knowledge of the German language and adaptability to the various institutions in which it is taught: dance schools, universities, discotheques, congresses, workshops and street festivals. Indeed, the
manipulation of the word “authenticity” will depend on either continued immigration from the “salsa world” in the Americas or the indefinitely continued practice of salsa in Germany. It will be interesting to see if salsa festivities will some day be as significant as celebrating German folklore has been. Germany’s salsa institutions are recording their own cultural history that itself shall be revisited reassessed and reconceptualized in the years to come.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Pérez Firmet, Gustavo. “I Came, I Saw, I Conga’d: Contexts for a Cuban-American Culture.” Everynight life: culture and dance in Latin/o America. Fraser, Delgado,


“SalsaDe: Click mal an.” *Salsa.de* 29 Feb. 2007 <http://www.salsa.de/2.0.html>.


