

3 | Salsa Soundings

Puerto Rico and the Americas

FRANCES APARICIO

As early as 1978, Joseph Blum asked himself why salsa music, by then ‘such an immensely popular “ethnic” music, had been so thoroughly ignored by ethnomusicologists?’ (1978, 137). In his groundbreaking article, ‘Problems of Salsa Research’, published in *Ethnomusicology*, the premier journal in that field, he denounced the racial and class biases of a field that neglected ‘urban popular musics’ produced and consumed by minorities, whether African-American, Latinx, or both, while privileging Eurocentric approaches to the music of past and distant cultures. Blum, an ethnomusicologist himself, specifically pointed to the racist erasure of Afro-Puerto Rican rhythms and musical traditions in official Puerto Rican musical histories:

More specifically, when the music now called ‘salsa’, or more generally ‘Latin’, has been played, listened, and danced to by millions and millions of people for over 50 years, in Latin America, Europe, all over the U.S.A., and now in Africa, why is no positive mention made of salsa music in 99% of Spanish and American ethnomusicology? Why are there articles on how the pre-Columbian Indians carved their instruments in 15th-century Puerto Rico, but no mention of Cortijo, Celia Cruz, Tito Puente, and all the other musicians who are listened to everyday all over the hemisphere? (Blum 1978, 141).

Blum’s sensibility to the racist underpinnings of traditional Puerto Rican musical histories authored by elite scholars leads him to recognise the ways in which discourses of indigeneity functioned mostly to displace and to render inaudible the Black heritage of Puerto Rican urban music. When he states that ‘a Puerto Rican with a conga drum may be as threatening to some people as a Puerto Rican with a knife’ (143), Blum denounces the racial phobia informed by Whiteness and Eurocentric values that have structured academic disciplines such as ethnomusicology. This racism, to be sure, is a current iteration of the Creole and European sectors’ fears, which have existed since colonial times in the Americas, against percussive rhythms that made Blackness publicly audible and sonically present in the New World.

Today, Blum would be highly pleased to read the scholarship that has emerged since his courageous intervention. Ethnomusicologists,

anthropologists, cultural studies scholars, feminists, historians, sociologists, dance studies scholars, and journalists, among others, have contributed significantly to what is now a long critical genealogy of academic writing about salsa and Afro-Caribbean music. These analyses have acknowledged the multiple modes in which salsa music stands as an intervention, honouring the subordinated communities from which it emerged. This scholarship has documented the history of salsa music, examined its social, racial, ethnic, and gender meanings, analysed the music's oppositional yet contradictory politics in Puerto Rican New York during the 1960s and 1970s, and documented its transnational circulation from New York into Latin America, as well as, more recently, its eventual globalisation as background music to an international dance industry. Thus, the scholarship serves as a counter-narrative to the racist gestures of erasure that Blum denounced.

Given the longstanding homologies between Latinx subjectivities and salsa music, and its more recent globalisation, 'Salsa Soundings' will analyse the heterogeneous, contradictory, and shifting social meanings that this music has articulated since its inception in the late 1960s. Shifting from the Nuyorican-grounded urban masculinity and anti-colonial politics in its early years to the current globalised and neoliberal spaces of dance studios, I will explore how the sounds of salsa, as popular music, become sites for power struggles over cultural, racial, ethnic, and gender identities. By 2020, we have witnessed what Blum feared in his 1978 article: that salsa music may be considered 'a historical dead form' amid the possibility of 'a 90-year-old Eddie Palmieri playing his music in universities alongside a 150-year-old Eubie Blake? At which point what is now salsa would be used as background music for television shows, as happened to Jazz, and is even now happening!' (Blum 1978, 147). There have been, in fact, numerous television ads playing salsa music in the background, from Duracell battery ads to the highly popular show, *Dancing with the Stars*. It is uncanny that Blum would predict then the dominant process of co-optation and mainstreaming that has neutralised in so many ways the oppositional meanings of earlier salsa music. In a course about salsa music in Fall 2017, one of my students surveyed her college friends and social networks and asked them to define salsa and to identify what they associated with this music. Many of her respondents equated salsa music with *Dancing with the Stars*, an association and semantic shift that confirms the ways in which what was once an oppositional popular music is neutralised and transformed into mere spectacle. Blum was not far off when he acknowledged then the damage that results from 'cultural imperialism'. In this light, academic, journalistic, and

pedagogical interventions that re-member salsa music and that trace historically these shifts can be clearly hailed as politically liberatory and decolonial interventions.

Defining Salsa

Salsa music emerged in the streets of El Barrio in New York City during the late 1960s and beyond, described by Jorge Duany as ‘the music of the urban proletariat both on the island and in the Puerto Rican neighbourhoods of the United States’ (1984, 197). According to Chris Washburne, four critical factors led to the emergence of salsa: first, the breakup of diplomatic relations between Cuba and the United States in 1962 limited the influence of Cuban musicians and opened up opportunities for Nuyoricans in the music industry; second, the immense popularity of rock and roll in the Western world diminished the popularity of Latin music that, while reducing opportunities for Latinx musicians, also ‘prompted a new wave of experimentation as musicians sought to develop a new sound that would capture the next generation of audiences’; third, salsa music emerged as an artistic expression conjoined to the cultural nationalism of the times; and fourth, the demographic growth among Latinxs in New York guaranteed a vibrant, enduring, and dynamic audience of listeners and dancers (Washburne 2008, 15). Its foundational musicians were working-poor, second-generation Puerto Ricans from New York who grew up amid urban abandonment, under-schooling, and inner-city violence. Willie Colón (who recorded his first album at fifteen years old), Héctor Lavoe (who would later become an icon for Puerto Ricans on the island and on the mainland), and Eddie and Charlie Palmieri, among many others, began as local musicians who experimented with the stridency of urban sounds as an artistic expression of their racialised lives. They soon found themselves as members of the Fania musical label, family, and industry, and thus their music began to circulate not only as organic resistance in El Barrio but also as a commodity.

The label of ‘salsa’ itself – a contended commercial umbrella term that entails multiple styles of Afro-Caribbean musics and rhythms – has made it difficult to define its particularities. Yet, its wide boundaries also make the music much more adaptable for transnational and global crossings, as Marisol Berríos-Miranda has argued (2003, 2004, 2008). The syncretic and sonic amalgamations of salsa allow it to easily become localised or indigenised by different communities across the globe. This sonic flexibility

also explains its big popularity across Latin American countries, from Perú to Puerto Rico, from Brazil to Mexico, as many national communities there easily claim it and make it their own (Berríos-Miranda 2002, 27–9).

Indeed, the fact that so many sectors in the Caribbean, as well as national communities, have claimed salsa as their own has made salsa a site for competing nationalities. For instance, during the 1990s the long-term debates on whether salsa was Cuban or Nuyorican were quite common in various venues. While Christopher Washburne (2008, 20) quotes Johnny Pacheco's claim that salsa was a new version of old Cuban music, a stance shared by Tito Puente and Celia Cruz, other scholarly voices argue that Nuyorican salsa articulated a distinct style from previous Cuban forms (Berríos-Miranda 2002, 23–4). These claims argue against the Cuban-centric narrative, one visually performed in the Telemundo biopic of Celia Cruz's life, *Celia*, which maps salsa exclusively on to the body of Celia Cruz. In a scene about one of their visits to Venezuela, Johnny Pacheco states in a press conference: 'Celia is Salsa!' It is an equation that excludes the rich contributions of Nuyorican musicians and of so many other voices in the history of salsa by conflating it exclusively as one of its many styles, the *matancerización* that Venezuelan journalist César Miguel Rondón (2008, 86) writes about and that Celia performed so brilliantly within the salsa circuit.

While salsa music is easily conflated with previous Afro-Caribbean musical traditions performed to great popularity in New York, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, such as the *son*, mambo, the *cha cha chá*, and the rumba, salsa music departs from these social musical dance forms in its historical origins and in its political meanings and intentions. As Rondón writes in *The Book of Salsa* (2008, 15), 'Where once there was pomp, now there was violence. Things had definitely changed.' The oppositional politics of the foundational figures of salsa music clearly distinguish their harsh, urban sounds from the more socially inflected and entertaining dance musics that preceded salsa: 'This was music produced not for the luxurious ballroom but for hard life on the street.' (Rondón 2008, 16). Marisol Berríos-Miranda argues:

But what is salsa music, you might ask, and how does it differ from other Latin dance genres that preceded it? Salsa is a new sound developed by Puerto Ricans in New York in the 1960s, a dance music that borrows its forms, both musical and lyrical, from the Afro-Cuban *son*, *rumba*, *guaracha*, and *cha cha chá* and other Caribbean genres like the Puerto Rican *bomba* and *plena*. It grew in the barrios of New York, played mainly by Puerto Rican musicians who rearranged and

recombined Cuban and Puerto Rican musical genres. The salsa ensemble was inspired by Latin dance orchestras such as La Sonora Matancera, Tito Puente's orquesta, Tito Rodríguez's orquesta, Machito and his Afro Cubans, Orquesta Casino La Playa, Lito Peña y su Orquesta Panamericana (Berríos-Miranda 2004, 161).

Thus, while salsa was 'inspired' by the large Latin dance orchestras from Havana, New York and San Juan, Puerto Rico, and these large 'ensembles' are precisely one of its defining characteristics, it is also true that for the second-generation Puerto Rican musicians growing up in poverty and urban abandonment, the early sounds of salsa music articulated ethnic, racial, class, and gender reaffirmations based on their experiences as dispossessed colonised subjects.

Sonically and rhythmically, salsa is 'an amalgamation of Afro-Caribbean musical traditions centred around the Cuban son' (Duany 1984, 187). The polyrhythmic nature of salsa arrangements is rooted in the syncopated clave rhythm from Afro-Cuban musics, that is, in the tensions between a 3- and a 2-based rhythm played against each other. This distinct trademark connects it to the Cuban *son*. Other sonic elements include the call-and-response structure of its songs, the strident and extensive use of brass and percussion, the primary roles of the trombone (a style attributed to Eddie Palmieri's music and to Willie Colón's performances), and diverse musical influences from jazz and other Latin American and Caribbean musical traditions (*ibid.*). While salsa may not be technically considered a 'musical genre', it is clearly singular in some of the musical values and aesthetics that salseros strive for: in addition to the clave, the aesthetics of the musical phrasings, the collective memory of the improvised *sones*, and the quality of a musical performance that achieves '*afinque*', that is, when 'everything in the band is locked to perfection' (Berríos-Miranda 2002, 33), structure the aesthetics of salsa music. Thus, the timbales, congas, and bongos aspire to 'develop a rhythmic lock . . . so that sounds almost like a single instrument' (30). Salsa singers are also well known for their talents in improvising, what is called *sones*. Thus, Ismael Rivera was labelled 'el *sonero* mayor'. While song lyrics usually spoke about the struggles of the poor, the music was also for dancing. Challenging common-sense notions among cultural studies scholars who argue that popular culture can never be oppositional or too radical, Nuyoricans, Puerto Ricans, and other Latinx Caribbean audiences have never felt the need to reconcile the pleasures of dancing with the oppositional politics of salsa lyrics, rhythms, and sounds. Their bodies dance to anti-colonial

rhythms and melodies by reaffirming their ethnic, culture, race, and class subjectivities through the liberatory pleasures of their moving bodies.

The Anti-colonial Politics of Salsa

If salsa music has been described as a 'cultural expression of Latino consciousness and unity' (Padilla 1989, 29), that sense of communal ties among Latinxs was not only the result of a market led by Fania Records, but also the social meaning of the dialectics between the industry and 'the socially conscious musicians' (Padilla 1989, 31) whose sonic work not only allowed their listeners to identify with the homeland but also established a continuity with the past. The utopian texture of salsa music is best illustrated in Rubén Blades and Willie Colón's 'Siembra', a song and album that sowed a sense of hope among the new generations and became the most sold salsa album in history. Blades's legacy of producing songs that served as fearless critiques of Latin American society through race, class, and anti-imperial lyrics proves that, in fact, popular music can be radical and truly oppositional as a text, even when distributed as a commodity and as a product of a market. Contradictorily, however, Blades himself also embodied the White elite male from Latin America who represented the potential for salsa to become hegemonic, Whitened, and mainstreamed. His role in León Ichaso's 1985 film *Crossover Dreams*, despite its moralistic ending against crossing over as a musician, may be uncoincidentally emblematic of these contradictory values.

The Nuyorican moment, led by the foundational figures of Héctor Lavoe and Willie Colón, encapsulates the anticolonial textures of salsa music. This moment, beginning in the late 1960s and ending by 1980, produced some of what we now consider '*salsa clásica*' in a nostalgic turn to that stridently oppositional sound. The egregious colonial conditions for Puerto Ricans in New York at the time, who witnessed the decline of manufacturing jobs, urban redevelopment programmes, neglected buildings and living spaces, and under-schooling, among many other inequalities, frame the ways in which salsa music articulates with violence. The urban violence of El Barrio in its spatial geography is sounded through the strident percussive rhythms and the primary role of the trombones and trumpets. In salsa, El Barrio and the street are a topos for authenticity and 'cultural rootedness' (Washburne 2008, 110). Within this discursive framework, the violence inserted in the normative gender identities of musicians such as Lavoe and Colón easily follows. The 'hyper-masculinity' of men of colour in El Barrio

is re-inscribed as ‘bad boys’ – as in Willie Colón’s first album in 1967, entitled *El Malo*, and in their song ‘Calle Luna, Calle Sol’ – and as outlaws. These artistic personae, which reproduce the pathological dominant discourses against those who live in poverty or who are underemployed, challenge the neoliberal tenets behind dominant expectations for productivity and citizenship (Negrón, n.d.). While, as Marisol Negrón argues, Colón and Lavoe marketed themselves as gangsters and bad boys, this urban masculinity was in itself a form of revolt against their status as ‘national abjects through the very performance and politicisation of abjection’ (Negrón, n.d.). While these images ‘play into racist stereotypes of violent Latino street culture’, El Barrio as a site of violence becomes a ‘tool of empowerment’ (Washburn 2008, 122). If Puerto Rican men like Colón and Lavoe ‘staged hyper-masculinity’ as a ‘central tactic in the negotiations of power between racialised subjectivities and dominant institutions’ (Aparicio 2002, 138; and quoted in Washburne 2008, 126), these gendered constructs served contradictory roles by contesting the colonial feminisation or emasculation of Latino men yet simultaneously reproducing urban violence as pathology. Clearly, the grounded masculinity that has framed salsa since its original Nuyorican moment has informed the systematic invisibility of women *salseras* since then. The patriarchal and masculinist structures of the music industry, coupled with the exceptionality of women like Celia Cruz, has led to the association of salsa mostly or only with male musicians and interpreters, yet remain contested by the rich, intergenerational female voices who have sang to salsa rhythms (see Aparicio 1998).

Becoming Pop: On Salsa Romántica

By the 1980s, the urban violence of the *salsa dura* from New York and other urban barrios across the Caribbean was transformed into what some call ‘*salsa monga*’ or *salsa romántica* and *salsa erótica*. Fania Records sales began to drop ‘substantially’ by 1979 and, as it ceased its production by 1980, it failed to adapt to the younger generations of Latinx listeners. Salsa production continued in New York and Puerto Rico, as Louie Ramírez and Isidro Infante experimented with merging salsa rhythms to rock and pop music (Washburne 2008, 23). By 1983, *Noche Caliente* hit the market, addressing a new format that ‘featured a milder and more tranquil sound with a slick and highly polished, pop-influenced studio production’ (24). While music producers capitalised on younger Latinxs as listeners and

dancers and on the vacuum left after Fania's demise, for many other listeners, including younger generations, *salsa romántica* represented the end of Nuyorican salsa. They felt, as many progressive scholars did, that *salsa romántica* had been intentionally produced to mute the strident, opposition sounds of *salsa dura*. While this was partially the case, it was also true that salsa was now being produced to cater to the needs of a younger, pan-Latinx audience whose dominant language may have been English and with a middle-class socioeconomic status. Clearly, many scholars, including myself, denounced this new variant of salsa as a way of neutralizing and muting the political valence of salsa from New York. Given the long history of Afro-Caribbean rhythms and sonic traditions of orality and music-making that performed resistance to colonial governments, slavery and forced labour, and racial violence, *salsa romántica* was not only dismissed by many progressive listeners and salseros, but it was also deemed as a pop-music version of the complicated and more exciting and dynamic sonic arrangements of the *salsa dura* of the 1970s. Washburne (2008, 31), in contrast, argues that *salsa dura* and *salsa romántica* shared some of the original tropes and strategies developed in the 1970s. Yet, *salsa romántica* also fused salsa with R&B, soul, and hip-hop, as the productions of Sergio George under Ralph Mercado attested. It is at this time that younger singers like Marc Anthony, La India, and Tito Nieves emerged.

Transnational Sounds: Salsa in Latin America

Rondón penned his foundational and unique salsa musical history, *El libro de la Salsa*, as a 'chronicle of the music of the urban Caribbean' (*crónica de la música del Caribe urbano*). Inserting New York City within the larger map of trans-Caribbean sonic flows and circulations, Rondón highlights the nuanced articulations between the local and the transnational in salsa. New York City's El Barrio becomes, then, another local site within the larger networks of sonic traditions and musical performances that constitute salsa music in the 1970s. The open nature and adaptability of salsa rhythms to other local variants gives way to myriad styles and adaptations. From Willie Colón's deployment of *jibaro* music, the Puerto Rican *cuatro*, and even *cante jondo* sounds from southern Spain, to the integration of the *gaita* rhythms in Venezuelan salsa, to cumbia-inflected salsa in Colombia, salsa music has the gift and potential to become a local musical expression for communities across the Americas.

Ironically, as Lise Waxer has written, the ‘importance of Venezuela and Colombia as international sites of salsa activity has been given scant recognition in the main body of salsa research, which has concentrated on developments in New York City and Puerto Rico’ (2002, 220). The strong emphasis on the social, racial, and ethnic meanings that salsa has produced for US Latinxs and Nuyoricans did ignore the early circulation of these sonic traditions and rhythms in Latin America, most notably Venezuela and Colombia. If as early as 1966 ‘Llegó la Salsa’ was ‘the first salsa recording ever made by a South American salsa band’ (Waxer 2002, 219), in Caracas, by the 1980s and 1990s, salsa music had become ‘strongly localised’ in numerous countries in Latin America. During the 1980s, when I taught at University of Arizona, I was happily surprised at a group of young journalists from Perú who had come to visit the United States to follow the presidential elections that year. At a social gathering at my home, they all started dancing to Rubén Blades’s ‘Pedro Navaja’ and sang the lyrics by heart in unison. They told me as well about the *salsódromos* in Perú’s coastal areas, dancing venues that allow Perúanos to enjoy salsa music before or after swimming at the beach. From my limited vantage point as a US Latina, I was not aware at the time of the immense popularity that salsa has enjoyed among working-class Latino-Americanos. It is no wonder that Rubén Blades defined salsa as ‘urban folklore’ in Latin America.

Rather than judging these transnational crossings as a loss or impoverishment of salsa’s powerful social meanings in New York, terms like ‘relocation’, ‘translocal’, and ‘reterritorialisation’ attempt to reclaim the social meanings produced in the intersection of culture and geographical territories. While salsa outside of New York and Puerto Rico may challenge the national meanings that Puerto Ricans have listened to in salsa, it is also imperative to remember that the local and the global are not always an either/or logic, but that both exist together. As a Puerto Rican college student once wrote for a salsa course I taught in 2017, ‘I always believed that ALL salsa was Puerto Rican’, yet she also acknowledged that she did listen to salsa produced in Venezuela and Colombia.

Caracas and Cali became international sites of salsa activity – that is, production, festivals, concerts, and performances – by the mid-1970s and mid-1980s, respectively. According to Waxer, Afro-Cuban popular music, in particular Rafael Cortijo y su Combo, were already popular in the 1950s in Venezuela and Colombia, so this factor paved the way for salsa to be fast accepted in those two countries. As Rondón has also argued, analogous social conditions among working-class communities constituted shared

experiences across the Caribbean region (2008, 28–40). Migrations from rural to urban centers led to the creation of listening communities among working-class families, workers, and musicians. After long weeks labouring, consuming salsa for entertainment in small clubs, neighbourhood parties, or family celebrations allows workers to feel a sense of cosmopolitanism (Waxer 2002, 222). This worldliness through musical and sonic traditions is also documented in the ways in which Afro-Caribbean sailors brought the sounds of salsa from other ports to Colombia and Venezuela. Radio programmes and record-collecting also played a major role in the dissemination and increasing popularity of salsa in Caracas and Cali. During the 1970s, university students and Marxist intellectuals from the middle class began to consume salsa as a way of connecting to, and honouring the working-class. Salsa is embraced as ‘an authentic sound of the people’ (Rondón quoted in Waxer 2002, 226). By the mid-1980s, Cali was considered the ‘world salsa capital’ and its association with working-class communities had expanded. Salsa now was part and parcel of the leisurely sounds in the well-to-do homes and clubs that emerged as a result of the cocaine economic boom. If in the 1970s salsa was still considered the music of marginal sectors in Colombia – sailors, brothels, and Afro-Colombianos – a decade later it had become indigenised by incorporating local rhythms into its repertoire. Oscar D’León and *Dimensión Latina* in Venezuela, Joe Arroyo in Colombia, and numerous other regional and local ensembles, such as *Grupo Niche* and *Guayacán*, find great success among Colombians across all social sectors, performing ‘a rich variety of genres and styles’ (Waxer 2002, 241). While the music’s popularity unified Colombians, social distinctions were embodied and performed in the various dance styles that surfaced in Colombia. It proves unsurprising, then, that the eventual global circulation of salsa music diminished it to serving as background music and rhythms for an ever-growing Latin music dance industry.

Salsa Globalised

If, in Latin America, salsa is performed as urban folklore and entails a working-class cosmopolitanism in historical continuity with the Afro-Caribbean sounds of the 1950s and 1960s, in more distant geocultural sites, such as London and Japan, salsa assumes different social values and is thus ‘dislocated’, distanced from its original local meanings and history in the Latinx United States and the Caribbean. How, then, do we make sense of

salsa within British culture and society? What resignifications does salsa experience when performed by and to listening communities unfamiliar with Latinx cultures? How does salsa change in its new geocultural spaces? As Shuhei Hosokawa argues, 'processes of globalisation, of which music is a prime example, cannot be discussed in the abstract but rather demand a precise articulation of the particularity of the contexts in which they occur' (2002, 291). While salsa has been performed and consumed in countries throughout Africa, Asia, and Western Europe, scholars have particularly noted its resignifications in London and Japan.

Patria Román-Velázquez's analysis of the 'routes and routines' of salsa and people's circulation in and out of Latin clubs in London (2017, 65) suggests that while salsa has been marketed, promoted, and distributed in Europe through record shops, promotions of bands, magazines, and disc jockeys, as well as sponsored by embassies and clubs, it has also been differentially accepted depending on the club and audience associated with it. Román-Velázquez's analysis of four different Latin clubs throughout London point to the ways in which salsa, associated with Latin jazz and Cuban music, are constructed as more elite, elegant, and legitimate for mainstream listeners. Clubs such as Club Bahía and Bar Cuba aspired to create a sense of respectability by attracting more elite and elegant listeners than those associated with the more racialised and criminalised Puerto Rican and Colombian audiences. Thus, different venues catered to specific audiences in order to make profit, remain popular, and avoid police raids. By constructing salsa music as part of a larger genealogy of respectable sounds, these clubs protected themselves from being racialised by the British police and general community.

Simultaneously, however, the sounds of salsa throughout London produce spaces of segregation, as salsa music increasingly becomes commodified as background rhythms for social dancing by non-Latinxs. As Román-Velázquez documents in her interviews with non-Latinx dancers of salsa music, many Europeans avoid going dancing to the clubs with a large Latin patronage. As an Israeli woman, Lily, commented: 'I don't go there because there are mainly Latin people' (2002, 279). As a counternarrative, Diego Medina, also interviewed by Román-Velázquez, criticised the ways these respectable Latin clubs catered only to non-Latinxs who consumed Latinx sounds, food, and drinks while disdaining Latinx peoples themselves (280). Thus, the 'power relations' cemented in this circuit of Latin clubs reveals the racialisation of Latinx communities that is part and parcel of the simultaneous consumption of salsa music in its global circulations, while Latinx individuals resist these venues and critique said practices of segregation.

Salsa in Japan is most clearly embodied in the Japanese salsa orchestra, Orquesta de la Luz. Since the mid-1980s, Orquesta de la Luz unsettled the long-held discourses of authenticity and cultural nationalism that salsa originally held for Puerto Ricans in particular. Many Puerto Ricans reacted to their success by dismissing them as another iteration of colonial dispossession; yet, it is imperative that we understand the social meanings that salsa music has embodied for the Japanese. As Hosokawa argues, in Japan the consumption of salsa has also led to its displacement as the sounds have been abstracted from the context of the Nuyorican original culture (2002, 291). Yet, this displacement takes place within performances by Orquesta de la Luz, who perform salsa in a 'simulacrum' of sorts that perfectly reproduces, in detailed ways, the original bands, musical styles, dancing choreographies, singing, and outfits that they so assiduously imitate. For Japanese listeners, Orquesta de la Luz depoliticises the music from its earlier, anticolonial values, yet inserts salsa sounds within the larger discourses of 'exocentricism' in Japan. In brief, given the country's 'relative ethnic homogeneity' (300) and its long struggle with Western musics and cultural traditions, 'Japanese audiences are especially receptive to Japanese musicians performing exotic music' (301). Orquesta de la Luz has capitalised on the new location of salsa in world music as well as reclaiming the *salsa dura* from New York and refraining from performing *salsa romántica*. While there are contradictory tensions in the ways that the Japanese perform salsa music, Hosokawa concludes that this 'production of difference resulting from a cultural hierarchy that places a high value on appropriating foreign objects without allowing any contamination by Japanese elements' (307) is 'a characteristic feature of Japanese modernity' (307). In brief, Orquesta de la Luz reveals more about the Japanese modern condition than about Latinx commodification.

Dancing to Salsa Music

A critical form of global circulation for salsa music is its role as background rhythms in dance studios all over the world. From clubs in Los Angeles, where Cindy García has examined the emerging 'hierarchies of Latinidad' (2013, 1–19) among Latinx immigrants, to dancing studios and classes in Canada, Australia, and Germany, salsa music is now limited to a minimal role as mere rhythm that guides non-Latinx dancers to new hierarchies of bodily movements that restructure gender politics as well as social class, ethnicity, and race. In Montreal, Shennagh Pietrobruno writes about how salsa dancers reproduce gender inequality by constructing salsa music as

'foreign' (2006, 75), as an 'illicit' activity (175) divorced from daily life for Montrealers. While non-Latinx couples unsettle the traditional, heteropatriarchal values of gender traditions in salsa dancing through women dancing together, it is also true that Montreal dancers also perform 'stereotyped heterosexuality' (171) as females become 'an object of spectacle' (172). In Australia and Germany, dominant gender roles are considered 'sexy' (Schneider 2013, 554) and female dancers sexualise themselves through clothing. Women also dance with each other, thus displacing the leading role of men. The ways in which local dancers, whether Latinx or not, unsettle the dominant gender politics of traditional salsa dancing, at times 'queering' them, reveals the shifting and perhaps more liberatory meanings that salsa music acquires in its globalizing circulations. However, global dancing lessons resolutely mute the sounds of resistance and oppositional gestures of salsa music, distancing the music from its collective, communal meanings that continue to be performed in vernacular spaces of dancing, as Berríos-Miranda (2017, 37) argues. If 'la sala' (the living room) becomes a space for dancing as 'a community of feeling', dancing to salsa, for many Latinxs displaced from the spaces of the clubs, clearly continues to be a performance of healing from racism and alienation and a reaffirmation of belonging.

Conclusion

At an academic conference some years ago, I made a passing comment about the 'death of Salsa' as a music of resistance, particularly illustrated in the passing of the many outstanding salsa foundational singers and musicians, such as Tito Puente, Celia Cruz, Héctor Lavoe, Charlie Palmieri, and many others. In response, a colleague in the audience questioned my remark by alluding to younger salsa groups that continue to reclaim *salsa dura* in the new millennium. Clearly, while reggaeton, bachata, trap, and rap continue to overshadow the popularity of salsa music during the 1980s and 1990s, particularly among younger generations, salsa music will continue to play a major role in the collective memory of younger Latinxs. As Rondón's (2008) last chapter, 'All of the Salsas' attests, salsa music will continue to live as long as we, its aficionados, and consumers as well, never stop listening to it and sharing it with younger listeners. As a music of the past, which is now becoming memorialised in museums – such as the Museum of the City of New York in 2017 – we continue to remember it as a sonic tradition of anticolonial liberation. Or, it can be produced for

more sinister political effects, such as in President Nicolás Maduro's radio show *La hora de la Salsa*, an instance of the heterogeneous politics to which salsa can be strategically deployed. As long as journalists, scholars, ethnomusicologists, and musical fans continue to engage with salsa, we will continue to keep the sounds alive and relevant in a world that increasingly needs liberation through music. In 2020, as the United States recovers from what was the increasingly authoritarian regime of former president Donald Trump, our communities call for musical practices that reiterate the anti-colonial and liberatory sounds that salsa has so eminently articulated since the 1970s.

References

- Aparicio, Frances R. 2002. 'La India, La Lupe and Celia: Toward a Feminist Genealogy of Salsa Music: Global Markets and Local Meanings'. In Lise Waxer, ed., *Situating Salsa: Global Markets and Local Meanings*. New York: Routledge, 135–60.
- Aparicio, Frances R. 1998. *Listening to Salsa: Gender, Latin Popular Music and Puerto Rican Cultures*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press.
- Berrios-Miranda, Marisol. 2002. 'Is Salsa a Musical Genre?' In Lise Waxer, ed., *Situating Salsa: Global Markets and Local Meanings in Latin Popular Music*. New York: Routledge, 37–64.
- Berrios-Miranda, Marisol. 2003. 'Bailando Salsa en la Sala, Cómo Aprendimos a Bailar y a Vivir'. *Annual Meeting for the Society of Ethnomusicology, Miami, Florida, October 4*.
- Berrios-Miranda, Marisol. 2004. 'Salsa Music as Expressive Liberation'. *Centro Journal*. 16, no. 2, 158–73.
- Berrios-Miranda, Marisol. 2017. 'Bailando Salsa en la Sala: How We Learned to Dance and to Live'. In Derrick Leon Washington, Priscilla Renta, and Sydney Hutchinson, eds., *Rhythm and Power: Performing Salsa in Puerto Rican and Latino Communities*. New York: Centro Press, 31–45.
- Berrios-Miranda, Marisol and Shannon Dudley. 2008. 'El Gran Combo, Cortijo, and the Musical Geography of Cangrejos/Santurce, Puerto Rico'. *Caribbean Studies*. 36, no. 2, 121–51.
- Blum, Joseph. 1978. 'Problems of Salsa Research'. *Ethnomusicology*. 22, no. 1, 137–49.
- Duany, Jorge. 1984. 'Popular Music in Puerto Rico: Toward an Anthropology of "Salsa"'. *Latin American Music Review/Revista de Música Latinoamericana*. 5, no. 2, 186–216.
- García, Cindy. 2013. *Salsa Crossings: Dancing Latinidad in Los Angeles*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

- Hosokawa, Shuhei. 2002. 'Salsa no tiene fronteras: Orquesta de la Luz and the Globalisation of Popular Music'. In Lise Waxer, ed., *Situating Salsa: Global Markets and Local Meaning in Latin Popular Music*. New York: Routledge, 289–311.
- Negrón, Marisol. n.d. *Made in "NuYoRico": Salsa as Cultural Sign and Commodity in New York and Puerto Rico*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. Book manuscript.
- Padilla, Félix M. 1989. 'Salsa Music as a Cultural Expression of Latino Consciousness and Unity'. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*. 11, no. 1, 28–45.
- Pietrobruno, Sheenagh. 2006. *Salsa and Its Transnational Moves*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Román-Velázquez, Patria. 2002. 'The Making of a Salsa Music Scene in London'. Lise Waxer, ed., *Situating Salsa: Global Markets and Local Meaning in Latin Popular Music*. New York: Routledge, 259–88.
- Román-Velázquez, Patria. 2017. *The Making of Latin London: Salsa Music, Place and Identity*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Rondón, César Miguel. 2008. *The Book of Salsa: A Chronicle of Urban Music from the Caribbean to New York City*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Schneider, Britta. 2013. 'Heteronormativity and Queerness in Transnational Heterosexual Salsa Communities'. *Discourse and Society*. 24, no. 5, 553–71.
- Washburne, Christopher. 2008. *Sounding Salsa: Performing Latin Music in New York City*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Waxer, Lise. 2002. 'Llegó la salsa: The Rise of Salsa in Venezuela and Colombia'. In Lise Waxer, ed., *Situating Salsa: Global Markets and Local Meaning in Latin Popular Music*. New York: Routledge, 219–45.

Further Reading

- Aparicio, Frances R. 2018. 'Sounding the Image and Imaging the Sound: Marc Anthony's *Vivir mi vida* and *Salsa Romántica*'. In Pablo Vila and Héctor Fernández L'Hoeste, eds., *Sound, Image and National Imaginaries in the Construction of Latin/o American Identities*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 207–20.
- Colón-Montijo, César, ed. 2015. *Cocinando suave: Ensayos de Salsa en Puerto Rico*. Caracas, Venezuela: Fundación Editorial El Perro y la Rana.
- Washington, Derrick L., ed. 2017. *Rhythm and Power: Performing Salsa in Puerto Rican and Latino Communities*. New York: Centro Press.
- Lapidus, Benjamin. 2021. *New York and the International Sound of Latin Music, 1940–1990*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

- Lipsitz, George. 2007. 'Salsa: The Hidden History of Colonialism'. *Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 211–37.
- Salazar, Max. 2002. *Mambo Kingdom: Latin Music in New York*. London: Schirmer Trade Books.
- Valentín-Escobar, Wilson. 2001. "Nothing Connects Us All But Imagined Sounds": Performing Trans-Boricua Memories, Identities, and Nationalisms Through the Death of Héctor Lavoe. In Agustín Laó-Montes and Arlene Dávila, eds., *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York City*. New York: Columbia University Press, 207–34.

Discography

- Anthony, Marc. 2013. *Marc Anthony 3.0*. Sony Music Latin.
- Barretto, Ray. 1973. *Indestructible*. Fania Records.
- Blades, Rubén, and Willie Colón. 1978. *Siembra*. Fania Records.
- Colón, Willie, and Héctor Lavoe. 1967. *El Malo*. Fania Records. LP 337.
- El Gran Combo de Puerto Rico. 1983. *La Universidad de la Salsa*. Combo Records.
- Fania All Stars. 1971. *Live at the Cheetah*, vols. 1 and 2. Fania Records.
- Pacheco, Johnny, and Celia Cruz. 1974. *Celia and Johnny*. Fania Records.
- Palmieri, Eddie. 1969. *Justicia*. Tico Records.