

The Esperanto of the body

Entangled mobilities, gender and ethnicity in the transnational salsa circuit

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by

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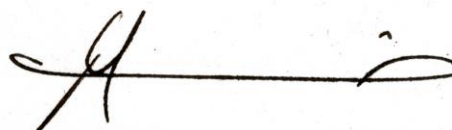
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Le doyen
Pierre Alain Mariaux

Abstract

Through the entry point of salsa dancing, this study explores the circulation of people, imaginaries, dance movements, conventions and affects from a transnational perspective. In particular, it examines the negotiations of gender and ethnicity and analyses the transnational careers of salsa dance professionals. It develops a theoretical framework to study “the salsa circuit”, taking into account the embodied doings of salsa dancers as well as “regimes of mobility” and individuals’ different positions in a transnational field.

The research rests on a qualitative, multi-sited study with the hitherto neglected group of salsa dancers, including multiple research phases over a period of three years between 2013 and 2016. The short-term embodied ethnography took place at salsa congresses, in salsa studios and during salsa holidays in cities in Europe and Cuba, as well as online (mainly on Facebook). In total, 36 semi-structured, problem-centred interviews were conducted with female and male salsa dancers.

This thesis draws on an interdisciplinary approach, mobilising theoretical frameworks developed in diverse research fields within the social sciences, such as research on migration and (im)mobility, tourism, ethnicity, gender, affect, as well as dance, music and art. It suggests that the crossing of such diverse fields can help to overcome some of the theoretical and methodological limits of existing research. It argues that a transnational perspective combined with an (im)mobilities approach can fruitfully be integrated into the analysis of dance- or art-related “worlds” to enhance the understanding of the shaping of such transnational social fields, including an awareness of globe-spanning power relations. It also contributes to ongoing methodological debates within migration and mobility studies, notably on the “de-ethnicization” of research designs, by selecting salsa dancers by their presence at events rather than a specific “ethnic” or nationally defined category. The thesis develops the notion of “entangled mobilities” to account for the differentiated access to mobility and the importance of social capital and imaginaries in this process.

This study relies on an analysis that ranges from the intimate gendered and ethnicised/racialised moves on the dance floor to the cross-border mobility of salsa dance professionals, and it thereby contributes to a deeper theoretical and empirical

understanding of gendered and ethnicised/racialised transnational processes. Notably, it explores from a micro-sociological perspective how salsa dancers renegotiate gendered and ethnicised/racialised practices in embodied ways and demonstrates the different salience of these two categories. It also explores the “affective labour”, networking strategies and accumulation of what is identified as “salsa capital” of salsa dance professionals in the construction of transnational careers in order to go beyond celebratory accounts of salsa as the *Esperanto of the body*. As this thesis demonstrates, research on spatial mobility and transnational networks through the prism of dance allows for alternative perspectives on social organisation, transnational encounters and global inequalities.

Keywords: Mobility; gender; ethnicity; salsa dance; entangled mobilities; transnational circulation

Résumé

Au travers d'une étude sur la danse salsa, cette thèse s'intéresse à la circulation de personnes, d'imaginaires, de mouvements de danse, de conventions et d'émotions dans une perspective transnationale. En particulier, elle met en lumière les négociations de genre et d'ethnicité et elle analyse les carrières transnationales des danseurs et danseuses de salsa professionnel.le.s. Elle développe un cadre théorique qui permet d'étudier le « circuit de la salsa », tout en tenant compte des pratiques incorporées des danseurs et danseuses, des « régimes de mobilité » et des positions différentes des individus dans un champ transnational.

Cette recherche se base sur une étude qualitative et multi-située menée en plusieurs phases entre 2013 et 2016 auprès de danseurs et danseuses de salsa. Une ethnographie incorporée de courte durée a été réalisée lors de congrès de salsa, dans des studios de salsa, pendant des voyages de salsa dans des villes d'Europe et à Cuba, ainsi qu'en-ligne (principalement Facebook). J'ai conduit un total de 36 entretiens semi-structurés et centrés sur un problème avec des danseuses et danseurs de salsa.

Cette thèse s'appuie sur une approche interdisciplinaire et mobilise des cadres théoriques développés dans des champs de recherche divers au sein des sciences sociales, tels que les recherches sur les migrations et les mobilités, sur le tourisme, sur l'ethnicité, le genre, l'affect ainsi que sur la danse et sur l'art. Elle défend l'idée que l'articulation de ces différents champs de recherche permet de dépasser certaines limites théoriques et méthodologiques des recherches existantes. En effet, une perspective transnationale combinée avec une approche en terme d'(im)mobilité peut être intégrée à l'analyse des « mondes » de la danse ou de l'art et conduire à une meilleure compréhension de ces champs transnationaux, sans négliger les relations de pouvoir globales. Cette thèse contribue également aux débats méthodologiques au sein des études des migrations et des mobilités, notamment en ce qui concerne la « des-ethnisation » des designs de recherche. En effet, les danseurs et danseuses de salsa au centre de ce travail ont été choisis en raison de leur présence lors des événements plutôt que sur la base de catégorisations « ethniques » ou nationales. Cette thèse développe la notion de « mobilités enchevêtrées » pour saisir l'accès

différencié à la mobilité et l'importance du capital social et des imaginaires dans ce processus.

Cette étude développe une analyse qui part des mouvements intimes genrés et ethnicisés/racialisés sur la piste de danse et s'étend à la mobilité transfrontalière des professionnel.le.s de la danse salsa. Ce faisant, elle contribue à une meilleure compréhension théorique et empirique des processus transnationaux genrés et ethnicisés. En particulier, elle explore dans une perspective micro-sociologique comment les danseurs et danseuses de salsa négocient, d'une manière incarnée, des pratiques genrées et ethnicisées/racialisées et montre l'importance variable de ces deux catégories. Elle analyse le « travail affectif », les stratégies de réseautage et l'accumulation de « capital salsa » des professionnel.le.s dans la construction de leurs carrières transnationales afin d'aller au-delà des récits de la salsa comme *Esperanto du corps*. Comme cette thèse le démontre, la recherche sur la mobilité spatiale et les réseaux transnationaux à travers le prisme de la danse offre une perspective alternative sur l'organisation sociale, les rencontres transnationales et les inégalités globales.

Mots-clés: mobilité ; genre ; ethnicité ; danse de salsa ; mobilités enchevêtrées ; circulation transnationale

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Introduction

An ethnographic entry to salsa

It's a cold Saturday evening in February 2016 I am surrounded by small groups of people all heading towards the convention centre near the lake in the heart of Zurich. As I open the doors, I can immediately hear the rhythmic music drifting down the stairs. I pass beneath an arch of multicoloured balloons; this year the Salsafestival Switzerland celebrates its 15th anniversary (see Picture 1). In the entrance hall, people are queuing for their tickets (about 55 Euro for tonight), but I already wear the wristband I put on the day before, allowing me access during the whole festival: three party nights and the workshops during Saturday and Sunday.

I take off my coat and warm boots and change into a pair of dance shoes, made of soft black leather, with heels low enough to make it through the night but high enough for me to be considered a salsa dancer. Around me women and men are doing the same, changing their street shoes for dance shoes and getting ready for "the biggest Salsa party in Europe with 4+3 dancefloors", as tonight's party is announced in the festival programme. People remove their coats and jackets to reveal short dresses, black trousers combined with fancy shirts and suits appear. The dancers have followed the motto of tonight's party, "dress to impress", and the sportswear dominating the look at the daytime workshops has completely disappeared. I look around, as people arrive in small groups or couples. I spot a familiar face and greet him with a kiss on each cheek. Next to us I hear others doing the same, speaking English and talking about the last salsa festival where they met – was it in Rovinj (Croatia) last summer, in Berlin last autumn or in Krasnoyarsk (Siberia) this winter?

I leave my coat at the cloakroom and walk through the hall, passing the festival posters from the last 14 years, presented on big easels. The first is from 2002 and shows a dancing couple on red background, accompanied by this explanation: "Inspired by the Salsa Congress of Puerto Rico 4 Swiss Salsamusqueteers [sic] present the Salsa Kongress [sic] Zürich, the one with the 'K'." I walk up the stairs and take a look at the large roll-up posters announcing

future events in Bordeaux, Milan, Antwerp, London, Šibenik (Croatia), Düsseldorf, Sopot (Poland), Paris, Frankfurt, Maribor and Munich. There are also ads for Salsa Holidays in Mallorca and salsa schools in Zurich. On a table by the wall, printed flyers advertise all these festivals and more in: Limassol (Cyprus), Northwest UK, Monaco, St. Gallen (Switzerland), Vilnius, Frankfurt, Minsk, Warsaw, Graz, Prague, Kiev, Antalya, Rovinj (Croatia), Stuttgart, Marrakesh, Hamburg, Dubai and Lebanon.



Picture 1 Flyer Salsa Festival Switzerland 2016.

As I continue, the music gets louder and people rush up the stairs; it's almost 11pm and the shows start on time, as the organiser likes to stress. I enter the big hall upstairs and pass the (now closed) booths where dancers can purchase all

the dance shoes, CD and clothes they want during the day's workshops. I find myself immersed in a dressed-up crowd, feeling the excitement of a long dancing night ahead. Some people hold a drink, but most of them stand around the large wooden dance floor or have already formed a couple and started to dance: woman and man, often touching only with their hands, sometimes with a hand on a shoulder or their partner's back, they move quickly to the music, stepping forwards and backwards, changing place and turning around, flicking hair, smiling.¹ They dance together for one or two songs, then separate when the music comes to an end and reform new couples. After a well-known salsa song ends, the DJ changes the music and the attention turns to the huge stage installed on one side of the room where the host welcomes the first performers to the stage.

During the next hour, different dance couples and groups successively perform their choreographed shows, dressed in colourful costumes, and applauded enthusiastically by hundreds of people. The first performance is by an amateur group who won the *stargate-show* this afternoon, a competition for the thousands of aspiring salsa amateurs who want to perform on stage. They are followed by more complex, quick performances, including acrobatic lifts, with female dancers balancing over the heads of their male partners, swirling through the air and holding their pose on the floor in splits as the salsa music stops. Other dancers perform to pop and rock music; without touching each other they interpret their story. The last dance couple interprets Cuban music, and demonstratively wave with a Cuban flag when leaving the stage. At the end the public applauds, whistles and screams and all the performers come back, but not on stage: instead, they walk directly onto the dance floor where they invite individuals from the public to dance with them. The DJ plays several songs and soon the whole room is transformed into a sea of moving bodies.

I decide to look at the other rooms, all named for different music-dance styles: the big room next to the main stage is decorated with palm trees and a huge poster of old cars and colonial-style buildings – the *salsa Cubana* room. A bit

¹ For a video demonstrating salsa social dancing at a festival, see rebrand.ly/salsa-0.

further away I walk into a smaller room, named *salsa romantica*, next to the bachata room. I learn from the programme that there are more rooms downstairs: one for kizomba, and others for the *after party* that starts at 4am. Indeed, as I leave the party at 2.30am, there are still people arriving, taking off their coats and putting on their dance shoes.

(Edited Field note, 27 February 2016, Salsafestival Switzerland)

Why study salsa dancers? A personal journey

This entry into the field through a snapshot of a salsa congress is an invitation to an intellectual exploration of what I have come to term the “affective economy” of the salsa circuit. In the early 2000s, salsa festivals or congresses like the one described in this field note started to appear in urban centres all over Europe, North America, Australia and some countries in Asia (later also in Africa and South America), fuelled by event organisers and salsa entrepreneurs, taking up the successful model of the Puerto Rican Salsa Congress. In the following years, the partner dance has attracted ever more students circulating between the festivals, as well as taking dance holidays to what have come to be recognised as the birthplaces of salsa dancing: Cuba and New York, where dance holidays and dance studios proliferate. A new category of *salsa artists* started to circulate between festivals and dance studios, earning their living through teaching and performing.

Over the last few decades, salsa has acquired worldwide popularity and it is argued that salsa dance commerce forms the largest percentage of global social dance business (McMains 2009). Salsa dance’s commercialisation builds on a strong narrative of salsa as an inclusive *community* where people are united through their passion for salsa; as one dancer remarked, it is the *Esperanto of the body*.

When embarking on the journey of a doctoral thesis into the salsa circuit in 2013, I found that while the music and some local salsa scenes were a topic of scientific literature, the transnational circulation of dancers, dance moves and gendered representations in salsa had attracted astonishingly little interest from scholars. While there exists ample literature on transnational activities of migrants, musicians, religious groups or the so-called highly skilled, the mobile practices of

salsa dancers, as well as their gendered performances, had prompted little scientific exploration.

At first hesitant to choose what could be regarded as a frivolous topic for doctoral research, as well as a subject far from my former work on ethnicity in an immigrant society, I became more and more fascinated by the apparent tensions of the salsa circuit: its insistence on global connections between people across the world despite their highly unequal access to travel; the gendered performances in salsa dancing, seemingly at odds with any feminist sensibility; the celebrity cult around recognised *salsa stars*, reversing assumed power relations in post-colonial Europe. At the same time I wondered: was salsa just another case of neo-colonial or “cultural appropriation” of others’ practices by the West, through the exoticisation of “the other” (as Savigliano (1995) has put it for tango)? Did the commercialisation and sexualisation of the gendered dance moves lead to the reinforcement of harmful gender stereotypes? And, most of all: who were the dancers, who lived their lives travelling from event to event, particularly the highly mobile professionals who seemingly fitted none of the categories that migration or mobility scholarship has theorised?

These broad questions stood at the beginning of this research project. During the research process, I honed the questions to the most salient, following the reading of studies on similar phenomena, the inclusion of theoretical perspectives and the twists and turns of empirical research.

Framing the thesis

Through the entry point of salsa dancing, this study explores the circulation of people, imaginaries, dance movements, conventions and affects from a transnational perspective. In particular, it explores the negotiations of gendered and ethnicised/racialised representations in what I conceptualise as the salsa circuit, and analyses the transnational careers of salsa dance professionals.

This study suggests that research on spatial mobility and transnational networks through the prism of dance allows for alternative perspectives on social organisation, transnational encounters and global inequalities. In order to explore the multiple dimensions of salsa, this study draws on theoretical frameworks developed in diverse

research fields such as research on migration and (im)mobility, ethnicity, gender, dance, music and art, as well as affect and tourism. This interdisciplinary approach allows for a broad perspective on the phenomenon of salsa dancing and the ways it connects different people and places.

Notably, the thesis brings together two fields of study that are usually separated, thus bridging the gaps between migration and mobility studies and dance and art studies. It suggests that the crossing of such diverse fields of research can help to overcome some of the theoretical and methodological limits of existing research in both fields. It argues that a transnational perspective (Dahinden 2017) combined with an (im)mobilities approach (Cresswell 2006, 2010; Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013) can fruitfully be integrated into the analysis of dance- or art-related social fields to enhance the understanding of the shaping of such social fields, including an awareness of globe-spanning power relations (Glick Schiller 2015). It also contributes to on-going methodological debates within migration and mobility studies, notably on the “de-ethnicization” of research designs (Dahinden 2016; Wimmer 2009), by selecting salsa dancers by their presence at events rather than a specific “ethnic” or nationally defined category (cf Dahinden 2010).

The research rests on a qualitative, multi-sited study with the hitherto neglected group of highly mobile salsa dancers, including multiple research phases over a period of three years between 2013 and 2016. Semi-structured, problem-centred interviews and participant observation-observant participation were the primary research methods. The interviews were conducted with 36 male and female salsa dancers holding different positions in the salsa circuit, including salsa dance professionals, students and event organisers, with a variety of national origins. The short-term embodied ethnography took place at salsa congresses, in salsa studios and during salsa holidays in cities in Croatia, Cuba, Germany, Italy, Poland, Switzerland and the UK, as well as online (mainly on Facebook).

This study relies on an analysis that ranges from the intimate gendered and ethnicised moves on the dance floor to the cross-border mobility of salsa dance professionals (cf Cresswell 2006), and it thereby contributes to a deeper theoretical and empirical understanding of gendered and ethnicised/racialised transnational processes. It examines the ways ethnicity and gender are negotiated by differently

located individuals to go beyond celebratory accounts of salsa as the *Esperanto of the body*. It shows how the salsa circuit is shaped by global inequalities in terms of levels of access to travel and participation in festivals and develops the notion of “entangled mobilities”. The thesis explores the “affective labour”, networking strategies and accumulation of what I identify as “salsa capital” of salsa dance professionals in the construction of transnational careers.

Thesis outline

Part I of this study provides a theoretical, methodological and empirical introduction to the thesis. Chapter 1 introduces the epistemological and theoretical perspectives as well as providing a review of the literature on salsa, followed in Chapter 2 by a discussion of the methodology and the chosen methods to conduct research and analyse data. Chapter 3 consists of an empirical and contextual introduction to the salsa circuit, in terms of the “hubs” and circulating salsa students. Part II zooms in on the interactions of salsa dancers on the dance floor and in the workshop situation. Chapter 4 explores how salsa dancers negotiate “authenticity” and ethnicity, while Chapter 5 analyses how dancers are (un/re)doing gender on the dance floor. Part III addresses the transnational careers of salsa dance professionals, considering them in three phases. In Chapter 6, the first status passage of “becoming a salsa dance professional” is addressed, while Chapter 7 explores the ways in which Latin American salsa dancers access the European salsa circuit, and Chapter 8 focuses on how reputation is constructed inside the salsa circuit. These three chapters thus focus exclusively on what I have termed “salsa dance professionals”. The Conclusion reviews the main findings of the study and highlights the thesis’ contributions to contemporary academic debates. It also discusses the limits of the study and possible further research avenues.

A note on videos and photographs in this study

Although not the primary focus of interest of this thesis, visual content distributed through the internet plays an important role in the transnationalisation of salsa. In order to allow for visual impressions of the analysed interactions and to enhance the

written analysis with sound and (moving) images, I include photographs, pictures of festival flyers as well as links to short videos of salsa dance professionals, publicly available on YouTube. In order to guarantee the anonymity of my research participants, I selected videos of different dancers and do not include photographs that I took at salsa events. I also chose pictures that represent aspects I analyse in this thesis, taken by Steven Isaacs at different salsa events in Europe, and use them with his kind permission.



Picture 2 Open air Party, Riga Salsa Festival 2017 (© Steven Isaacs).

PART I

A THEORETICAL, METHODOLOGICAL AND EMPIRICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE SALSA CIRCUIT

Chapter 1 Theoretical perspectives

In this chapter I discuss the epistemological background, key frameworks and concepts that inform my analysis, to lay the groundwork for a deeper theoretical introduction in each following chapter.

This thesis builds on an interpretive, constructivist perspective. I adopted this theoretical lens in order to “understand” the lived experience of the interviewees from their point of view (see Schwandt 1998). Drawing on ideas developed in a grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2006; Glaser and Strauss 1967), this research uses the premise that theory should be grounded in the data, which allowed new topics to emerge during the research process. To account for the disparate topics that emerged, I decided to not only work with one theoretical framework but to include a diverse set of theoretical concepts, thus transcending disciplinary boundaries.

In the analysis I navigated between different theoretical approaches and fields of study, from mobility and migration to art and “cultural production” to specific literature on dance and particularly salsa. Studies on salsa rarely theorise the dance in terms of the transnational connections, using the terms transnational, global or network as mere metaphors. Additionally, few studies on “global” worlds focus on the mobility of their participants, and this is therefore just taken for granted. This thesis argues that a transnational perspective combined with an (im)mobilities approach enhances our understanding of the shaping of these practice-based social fields, including an awareness of globe-spanning hierarchies and power relations. Migration research has often been criticised for its “methodological nationalism”, with its narrow focus on “ethnic” groups. An analytical focus and research design based on the common practice of salsa dancing is therefore promising, as it goes beyond culturalist explanations and looks at how actors actually negotiate gendered and ethnicised/racialised practices and identifications.

In the first part of this chapter I review the academic literature focusing explicitly on salsa dance, to point to the research gaps and illuminate the contributions this thesis makes in regards to this literature (1.1). I will then focus on the above-mentioned research fields to clarify my epistemological stance and its implications, particularly

regarding the transnational perspective (1.2), as well as the treatment of categories (1.3). In the last part I will discuss the ways I conceptualised my “field”, the salsa circuit (1.4). After this overview of the theoretical strands of this study, the research questions are formulated (1.5).

1.1 From identity politics to local ethnographies: writing about salsa

In her analysis of tango, Savigliano (1995) discusses the difficulties of writing about the origins of tango in the following way: “In reconstructing roots, issues of inclusion and exclusion are at stake: It is easy to forget one group’s participation and to exaggerate the protagonism of some others, and not always for innocent reasons” (32). Literature on salsa music and dance stresses the multiple influences that have led to the music and dance complex today called salsa. Among contemporary salsa dancers, salsa’s origins are still hotly debated, including several circulating “origin myths”. These shared origin myths stress one element over another, often depending on the personal preferences of one salsa style or the associations individuals are able to construct with their own family histories, indeed in a not completely “innocent” way. Such often highly essentialised arguments can be understood as a playful way of performing salsa ownership as a “marketing strategy” (see Pietrobruno 2006), or even as a mode of resisting the commodification of dance through Western organisations (see Boulila 2018). In this way, the origin myths circulating in the salsa world tell us more about the positioning strategies and the striving for credibility of contemporary salsa dancers than about the historical trajectories of the music and dance complex salsa. I therefore join Savigliano in her caution when writing about salsa’s “roots”.

Literature on salsa as well as broader studies on dance and nationalism have aptly demonstrated the ways dance has been instrumentalised in political projects of nation-building, as dance “is a powerful tool in shaping nationalist ideology and the creation of national subjects” (Reed 1998: 503). As dance historian and ethnographer Buckland (2006) states, “The use of dance as a symbolic political strategy in shaping a future society was particularly evident in the often integrated aims of research and

reconstruction in the institutes and state dance ensembles of Cold War Eastern Europe” (14). Studies have analysed how folk dances in European countries are related to “everyday nationalism” (eg Kalegoropoulou 2013 on Greece) and “nation-building” (eg Wulff 2003 on Ireland). Through bodily movement, social identities are communicated, formed and negotiated (Desmond 1993), which explains dancers’ sometimes strong insistence on salsa as the heritage of one particular country. Román-Velazquez (2002) noted that despite salsa’s stylistic variation,

academic writers and commentators have sought to categorise salsa as primarily Puerto Rican, Cuban, Latin-Caribbean or more broadly “Latin”. Trying to label salsa in such a way can be viewed as an attempt to claim it for a singular identity, to fix its rather fluid character and to limit its capability to be transformed as it travels (Román-Velazquez 2002: 212).

Due to all these reasons, in my research on salsa, approaching history proved to be particularly challenging, a point also raised by Mueller (2016) in his study on hardcore punk. Similar to the genealogies salsa scholars construct, he notes that “most research proposes a formal history of the subculture under study by articulating fragments of ‘native’ information into a logical, chronological account, conveniently forgetting that these sources are products of processes of negotiation” (Mueller 2016: 119). There exist numerous versions of salsa dance’s origins and excavating them would be a research project in itself, partly done by others (cf Hutchinson 2004, 2015; McMains 2015; Pietrobruno 2006). When starting to write this study, I considered not including any historical account or definitional issues of salsa so as not to reproduce a specific version and thus participate in the reconstruction of its history; instead, I would analyse the various origin myths offered by the interviewed dancers. However, as there exists a growing body of literature on salsa music and dancing, which includes the historical and socio-political context of its development and transnationalisation, I opted for a review of this literature that analyses salsa from a historical, musicological and anthropological perspective. By including a brief discussion of literature on salsa’s history and highlighting some of the key elements, I also prepare the ground for the further analysis of salsa dancers’ negotiations and position strategies in terms of

origin claims. This literature review on existing works also serves to identify research gaps that this thesis wishes to address.

I distinguish between two thematic strands of writing about salsa: the first includes literature particularly about music and dance as artistic forms and the question of how they emerged (1.1.1). The second body of (mainly ethnographic) literature tends to focus on localised salsa dance *scenes*² and negotiations of power relations in them, focusing on the question of how salsa interacts with specific local contexts (1.1.2). The last section of this chapter reviews some of the concepts discussed in the literature analysing so-called *Latin* dances and the ways they are represented from a critical, post-colonial perspective (1.1.3).

1.1.1 Salsa as a music and dance complex

As argued in the literature, the history of salsa is inextricably linked to colonial history: its Cuban precursors (*danzón*, *son*) were a result of the fusion of European couple dances and African percussive traditions (Pietrobruno 2006) “brought to the Caribbean through slavery” (Kabir 2013: 267). Salsa has a complex history of circulation between the Caribbean and the US, and its evolution is thoroughly entangled with that of other musical styles, such as jazz, R&B and rock (Morales 2003: 33) as well as with the development of the recording industry (Waxer 2002: 8). Migration movements and political conflicts, particularly the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and the following political and economic sanctions by the US, also shaped salsa’s development.

Salsa can be described as “a dance and music complex, meaning that its musical and corporeal expressions in actual circumstances are inextricably intertwined: only at the level of theory can the music and dance be separated” (Pietrobruno 2006: 33). As the term salsa is used as a signifier of both music and dance, in historical accounts the two are often mixed up. For analytical reasons I separate the two in this discussion, and will first focus on music and then on dance.

² I here refer to dancers’ emic use of the term *dance scene*, which may differ greatly in number of participants and dance offer. In many cases, such local salsa *scenes* represent hubs that are related to the salsa circuit.

Salsa music

Covering the most-cited influences of salsa's formation, dance scholar McMains (2015) characterises salsa music as "an updated take on Afro-Cuban dance music, developed by Puerto Ricans living in New York" (1). For some of today's dancers, New York therefore holds as the "place of origin" of their dance practice, although most dancers acknowledge other "roots" entailed in salsa's complex history.³ Historically, the term salsa has been used as a commercial label since the 1970s, largely propelled by Fania Records, a New York-based recording company formed in 1964, which promoted almost every successful salsa musician of the time (McMains 2015: 1). Yet the term did not remain unchallenged: many musicians are said to have rejected the label initially, and musicologist Peter Manuel (1995: 74) observes that the term salsa was often believed to be an artificial and commercial construct, designed to disguise the Cuban origins of the music. This "marketing trick" was thought to be necessary after the US government had declared an embargo on the import of all Cuban products, including music (McMains 2015: 52). Such historical conflicts about the naming and crediting of salsa music are echoed in today's dancers' negotiations about salsa dancing in the salsa circuit that I will discuss in this study.

Earlier studies about salsa focus particularly on salsa music and its historical emergence, highlighting its role in ethnic and national identity constructions.⁴ For the early years of its development in the US, according to research, salsa music was related to a political project of the affirmation and political consciousness of a working-class Latino identity in rejection of Anglo-centric assimilationism (Waxer 2002: 4). "Many early salsa fans were second-generation immigrants who, coming of age during or after the Civil Rights Movement, began to question their assimilation

³ I also witnessed salsa's strong links to New York when, in spring 2017, the Museum of the City of New York hosted an exhibition entitled *Rhythm and Power: Salsa and New York*. The museum displayed artefacts of musicians, video material of dancers and event posters – all indicating salsa's popularity in this city from the 1960s onwards.

⁴ For a thorough analysis of gendered aspects of salsa music and its development, see Aparicio (1998); for an analysis of salsa as Puerto Rican see Quintero-Rivera (1998); Waxer (2002) gathers several authors on the topics of the origins and newer places of salsa music production; Fuentes (2003) collects interviews with founding salsa musicians.

into American culture and turned to salsa as a means of reconnecting to their cultural heritage” (McMains 2015: 80). Washburne (2008) also argues that in the 1970s salsa was defined by its association with marginalised working-class Cuban and Puerto Rican immigrants in New York City, and soon came to encompass the experiences of working-class people throughout Latin America. This was also reflected in salsa lyrics, as Waxer (2002) suggests: “Significantly, salsa’s lyrics reflected the experiences of the Latino and Latin American black and mixed-race working class, and – in distinction to its Cuban antecedents – songs mirrored the violence and discontent of the inner city” (4).⁵ On today’s dance floors at salsa congresses in Europe, this so-called *salsa dura* (hard salsa) of the 1970s is the favourite music of many dancers (cf McClure 2015: 15). With the emergence of *salsa romantica* in the 1980s, a more lyrical and commercially successful style of salsa music, salsa became less politicised and more popular among a larger audience (Washburne 2008)⁶. Meanwhile, in Cuba, music developed in other directions, where first *timba* and then *salsa cubana* bands became popular, both musical styles including aspects of Afro-Cuban religion (Klette Boehler 2013).⁷ On today’s salsa festival dance floors, these three types of music (*salsa dura*, *salsa romantica* and *timba/salsa cubana*) are the most common styles. On such occasions, the live bands of the 1960s and 70s have been replaced by DJs playing recorded music, and live concerts at salsa dance venues are rare.

The studies discussed so far are mainly concerned with salsa as a musical form and the ways it emerged in a specific socio-political context. As should be clear from this discussion, salsa music is often described as being caught up (from its very beginnings) between a commercialised goal of finding new audiences and the often politically inspired “identity projects” of creating a common denominator for groups.

⁵ An example of *salsa dura* is Willie Colon’s *El Malo*: rebrand.ly/salsa-1. A contemporary band that plays the salsa style of the 1970s is Italy-based *La Maxima* 79: rebrand.ly/salsa-2.

⁶ An often played *salsa romantica* song during my research was Luis Enrique’s *Yo no se mañana*: rebrand.ly/salsa-3.

⁷ An example of a timba song is NG La Banda’s *El Tragico*: rebrand.ly/salsa-4; a song musicologist Klette Boehler (2013) classifies as timba, while stating that “*salsa cubana* has now become an established term in Cuba for a successor genre to timba” (8).

Salsa dance

Although it is difficult to write a coherent history of music, traces can be tracked down due to its materiality in the form of recordings and copyright claims. For dancing, the endeavour is even more difficult. When considering salsa's early genealogy, scholars of dance identify elements of both European and African legacy: the couple formation between a male and a female dancer touching one another is associated with European court dances (Daniel 2002: 43),⁸ while the isolation of various body parts such as hips and shoulders that move separately are associated with African movement vocabularies (Pietrobruno 2006: 32). Dance scholar McMains (2015), whose declared goal it is to demonstrate the participation of all social groups in salsa's development (at least the actors in the US), cites mambo as an important influence of contemporary salsa dancing, which for her is a result of the intermingling of elements of the following dances: "Cuban *son*", "American lindy hop", "Cuban rumba", "Puerto Rican *bomba*" and "African-American jazz" (32). Later on, throughout the 1990s, dancers and salsa dance professionals performing staged shows also borrowed from ballet, jazz, tap and hip-hop (McMains 2015: 327). Two of the above-mentioned dances are worth a brief discussion, as they will be mentioned in the analysis throughout this study: mambo and rumba.

One of salsa's most-popular origin stories, especially of the New York or "On2" style, comes from the mambo craze of the 1950s and particularly the Palladium ballroom, New York's most popular dance venue for Latin dance music at that time (McMains 2015: 30). The Palladium still today figures as kind of a "multiracial utopia" (Hutchinson 2014b: 30), as it paved the way "for interracial social interaction that would not be realized in other social sectors or geographic locations for decades" (McMains 2015: 42). The Palladium ballroom, open from 1947 to 1966, is thus often described as a space of integration, where racial and class boundaries were blurred during social dancing on the dance floor, with participants of Puerto Rican, Cuban, Italian, African-American, Irish and Jewish descent (McMains 2015: 39). Despite

⁸ For this reason, Boulila (2015) argues that contrary to images prevalent in the salsa circuit of salsa as a "foreign" and "exotic" practice, the "gender and sexual stereotypes at work in salsa should therefore be placed within a genealogy of European dance conventions and exoticising scripts" (134).

mambo's success and such idealising depictions, García demonstrates that in US media representations of the time mambo and its dancers were racialised: mambo was described as a “primitive African” dance, which needed to be “disciplined” into a socially acceptable product (García 2009: 177).



Picture 3 Flyer On2 Salsa Congress Milan 2014.

Such racist stereotypes from the discourse of African primitivism were in line with contemporary ideologies.⁹ Nevertheless, as Hutchinson (2014b) contends, the Palladium “remains in dancers’ memories as the mythic point of origin” (32) (see Picture 3).

Another often-cited “mythic point of origin” is Cuba, where several of the dances that merged into salsa are said to have developed, such as the casino (sometimes done in a circle, called *Rueda de Casino*), a dance now often taught at salsa congresses under the label *salsa Cubana*, and the *danzón*, son and rumba. The rumba in particular has been received with increasing popularity and accessibility among salsa dancers at congresses worldwide; as I observed, the festivals all scheduled workshops in so-called Afro-Cuban rumba. Rumba is a genre said to have developed in rural areas of Cuba, influenced by Spanish and Central/West African traditions (Daniel 1995). It has a complex history of colonial repression and stigmatisation, until its institutionalisation by the socialist government after the revolution of 1959.¹⁰ The inscription of rumba on the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2016 further accentuated its public recognition. Foreigners’ fascination with and interest in learning the rumba has led to it being more accepted in Cuba, yet its practitioners are still often racialised and associated with low social status (see Ana 2017). As I will demonstrate in Part III, for some contemporary Cuban dancers, knowledge and skills in rumba dancing are crucial in the process of

⁹ García (2009) stresses mambo’s transnational history and contemporaneity throughout the Americas. As he demonstrates, mambo was not only discussed as “foreign” in the US context, but in a similar mechanism in other cities throughout Latin America. For critics in Havana and Mexico City, mambo music and dance embodied US cultural imperialism and stood against their desire for a racially homogenised nation. “Ultimately, whether from the United States or Latin America, critics and others resorted to nationalist and moralistic rhetoric (‘pure,’ ‘vulgar,’ and ‘sexy’) as well as racist stereotypes (‘wild,’ ‘African tribes,’ cannibalism) to perpetuate the currency of the superiority of the white race and Eurocentric culture” (García 2009: 177).

¹⁰ The government institutionalised rumba and other Afro-Cuban practices in an attempt to serve its egalitarian agenda and erase racial inequalities (Daniel 1995), an agenda that has not been met yet, as studies of racism in Cuba amply demonstrate (see eg Clealand 2013).

accessing the (European) salsa circuit, where these embodied skills are highly valued.¹¹

In salsa dancers' origin myths, New York and Cuba both hold a special weight as places in which the dance practice supposedly originated. Yet other actors challenge such a linear construction of history (eg Hutchinson 2014a). As Mueller (2016) argues, historical accounts usually "come from people of higher status in the world under study, reproducing classical social biases such as white-, elite- or androcentric readings of the world" (120). For this reason I choose not to single out one history and present it as the most legitimate version, as this would attach more credibility to certain historical accounts. Hutchinson (2014a) also criticises a too-linear reading of salsa's history, dismantling the common narrative positioning salsa as a new style emerging in New York and later spreading throughout Latin America as only one version: "In fact, salsa was frequently experienced not as a break with but as a continuation of earlier dance practices" in countries like the Dominican Republic and Colombia (Hutchinson 2014a: 5). Salsa's formation can be understood in terms of a simultaneous development of salsa histories in different places; as in fact: "many people in disparate locations experience [salsa] as their own" (Hutchinson 2014a: 8).¹² It is in this understanding that I try to approach salsa and its history.

Salsa dance styles

In this thesis, salsa is used as an umbrella term for different salsa dance styles as practised in the transnational circuit and learned and taught in a studio or workshop context. As this thesis examines salsa dance professionals and the construction of their transnational careers in the commercialised field of the salsa circuit, I do not

¹¹ They are certainly not the first Cuban artists to travel to Europe to perform Afro-Cuban dance, as the literature on rumba performers in Paris in the 1920s demonstrates (see for instance Fernandez-Selier (2013) for an exploration of the rumba craze in 1927, see also Blanco Borelli (2016), who offers accounts of several Cuban dancers performing in other countries in the 1950s).

¹² See for example Renta (2014) on salsa in Puerto Rico, Balbuena Gutiérrez (2014) on casino in Cuba, Waxer (2002b) on salsa in Colombia.

include what Borland calls “street, freestyle, or untrained salsa, which encompasses a geographically diverse set of dancing practices” (Borland 2009: 467).¹³

At today’s salsa congresses and in salsa dance studios, several salsa dance styles are taught and danced. They have some common features, which distinguish them from other dance forms. Salsa dancing is characterised not only by the already mentioned couple hold, the gendered convention of leader and follower, and the independent movement of body parts such as hips and torso. Salsa dancer and scholar Renta (2014) also points to the importance of improvisation, creativity and musicality as part of *sabor* (often translated as flavour), taking into account the “Latin-Caribbean cosmology on which salsa dancing is founded” (120). Indeed, salsa dancers often acknowledge improvisation, musicality and connection as criteria for competence in social dancing.¹⁴ Most salsa dancers recognise a basic set of steps and figures as being salsa, while valuing creative adjustments and improvisation through individual dancers. Some of the mentioned elements are also important concepts in other dance worlds (such as connection in tango)¹⁵, but they are imbued with specific meaning in salsa dancing, as discussed in more detail in the analysis of Chapters 4 and 5.

For their adepts, salsa dance styles differ considerably and are used to distinguish themselves from other dancers. Technically speaking, salsa dance styles are either differentiated by the ways the two dance partners move on the dance floor or by the ways dancers interpret the rhythmical timing of the music (McClure 2015: 17). In

¹³ The focus on the salsa circuit (consisting of “studio salsa”) and its actors thus is clearly at the expense of salsa dance styles and individuals that are placed outside this circuit. Inside the salsa circuit, the notion of salsa is the common denominator of several styles of dancing. However, when I talked to older people in Cuba about my research project and used the term salsa, they refused to use this name and insisted on calling the dance casino.

¹⁴ Like other partner dances with a similar history, for example tango, salsa is not only performed as *social dance* but also on stages and in competitions. In order to judge dancers, specific aspects of salsa dancing have been codified, often relying on established criteria in ballroom competition. Dancers and scholars have criticised these codification processes as being based on “Europeanist aesthetic values” (Renta 2014: 129) and in particular the canon of ballet that influenced ballroom dance (see Pietrobruno 2006). In contrast to these findings, during my research at salsa events and in salsa studios, Afro-Cuban dance forms were highly admired among salsa dancers, as discussed throughout this thesis.

¹⁵ *Connection* is an important concept in tango, described as “becoming one body with their partner, one organism moving in synchrony to the music” (see Davis 2015a: 65).

cross-body or *line* salsa dance styles (including LA-style, New York-style and what is in Europe termed Puerto Rican-style), dancers change place in a linear movement, while in *salsa Cubana* dancers move in a circular way.¹⁶ The basic step (short-short-long) is the same in all styles, but the moment dancers move forwards or backwards may happen on the first and fifth or second and sixth beat of the bar. Before starting to dance on a dance floor at a congress, a new couple will therefore often ask each other “on one (On1) or on two (On2)?”, to make sure they step back (follower) and forward (leader) at the same time, and avoid bumping into each other because both step forward at the same time. Due to salsa dance’s development and marketing, the different ways of dancing to salsa music are also named after geographical locations: New York-style (and Puerto Rican-style) salsa is linear, often in On2 timing; LA-style salsa is linear in On1 timing; Cuban-style salsa is circular and usually On1.¹⁷ At congresses and particularly at competitions, the very fast Cali-style or Colombian-style salsa is also present, but less than the aforementioned styles. During my research I also observed a lot of mixing of these salsa styles with other dances, such as salsa–flamenco, salsa with hip-hop or just “salsa fusion”.¹⁸

1.1.2 Local ethnographies of salsa dancing

The second strand of literature on salsa developing over recent years is mainly comprised of ethnographies of localised salsa dance *scenes* in various places. It is mainly concerned with questions of salsa dance’s local adaptation in cities across the US, the Caribbean and Europe. Studies focus on how dancers in different places relate to salsa, in terms of ethnicity, race, class and local identity politics. The edited volume *Salsa World: A Global Dance in Local Contexts* (Hutchinson 2014a), for

¹⁶ In the following video, a New York-based dance instructor explains the difference between the salsa styles called Cuban, LA and New York. While his account is rather male-centred, it nevertheless gives an impression of the different dance styles: rebrand.ly/salsa-5.

¹⁷ For the purpose of this study, this simplified presentation of the different salsa dance styles suffices. For a discussion of this classification system, see Hutchinson (2014a: 9) who argues (among others) that it risks obscuring historical connections between locations. See also McMains’ (2015) analysis of how the different locally developed salsa styles merged into one “global congress-style salsa”.

¹⁸ For an example of salsa fusion, see rebrand.ly/salsa-6.

example, collects case studies of various aspects of salsa's "global" spread in the US, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, France, Spain and Japan.

Building on theorists of "cultural globalisation" (see eg Appadurai 1990, Robertson 1992, Hannerz 1996), several authors of localised salsa ethnographies are led by the question of how globalisation creates distinct practices and identities for people dancing salsa in these particular places. Skinner (2007), for example, examines salsa dancing in three cities (Belfast, Hamburg and Sacramento), to show how salsa is transformed and adapts to local contexts and how dancers use salsa to express identities and emotions. He discusses salsa in Belfast as "segregated" between Protestants and Catholics, and as "multicultural" and "cosmopolitan" in the two other cities. Skinner (2007) observes the globalisation of salsa teaching and merchandise, which for him shows

that salsa has become a cultural product, one navigated by cosmopolitan artists and musicians, one relying on an international market economy and the existential needs of the public with time on their hands (Febres 1997: 177), a disposable income in their pockets, and seeking activities in which to come together, express their emotions, fulfil their fantasies and proto-narratives (Appadurai 1996), and to affirm self-identity in our late-modern world (Giddens 1991). (Skinner 2007: 488)

Building on Hannerz (1996), he describes salsa dancing as a "decontextualised" knowledge, a "mobile skill" that can be carried and "recontextualised" in a new setting (Skinner 2007: 498). As Skinner (2007) argues, in this process emotions have become a commodity "explored and exploited by salsa promoters and instructors" (500).

My findings in the European salsa circuit echo Skinner's discussion of salsa dancing as a modern leisure pursuit that allows what he calls "cosmopolitan artists" to make a living while their "addicted" students in North American and European cities "follow their passions" and "pursue the identities of their imagination" (Skinner 2007: 503). At the same time, this study adds to the understanding of how salsa instructors construct their careers, and shows the ways in which these are considerably shaped by "regimes of mobility" (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013) and

social capital as well as the class-based, gendered and ethnicised/racialised logics of the salsa circuit.

Most studies on salsa dancing focus their analysis on the experiences of or interactions between salsa students (eg Bock and Borland 2011; Borland 2009; Bosse 2013; Garcia 2013; Papadopoulos 2003). Bosse (2008: 46), for example, explores salsa and ballroom dancing in central Illinois, focusing on “cross-cultural borrowing and the ways in which new dance styles are generated”, thereby also examining the “refashioning of identity” for its practitioners. As she describes, white North American salsa newcomers in particular explained their wish to learn salsa dancing with references to a metaphorical, alternatively racialised self (Bosse 2008: 58). Drawing on Gans’ (1979) concept of “symbolic ethnicity”, Bosse describes salsa dancers’ wish to “get ethnic” (Bosse 2008: 60), to obtain the positively valued aspects of “Latin American ethnicity” through the performance of salsa. “Latin American culture” was hereby understood as a monolithic entity; it was associated with strong familial and community ties, a “living” culture of salsa music and dance, and being physically and sexually relaxed (Bosse 2008: 59). Such depictions could be read as the wish for “consumption” of the thus created “other” and white North Americans’ desire for a so-called Latin American ethnicity. However, in her discussion, Bosse nuances the picture, presenting dancers’ wish to engage in salsa as an “affirmation of the existence of an exotic self”: “They desired to construct for themselves an alternative sense of self that they perceived to be more ‘vibrant’ or ‘alive,’ more physically integrated, and more sexually attractive. But there existed no language and few conceptual categories for such a construction of their own, largely unmarked identity” (Bosse 2008: 60). Bosse’s analysis is supported by other authors, who argue that salsa dancers in Europe embrace dancing “for its exotic appeal” (eg Escalona 2014) and their desire to perform what Schneider (2013: 558) calls “traditional gender identities”. While a few of my interviewees started salsa dancing due to similar motivations, the majority of participants had other motives, as the discussion in Chapter 3.3 will demonstrate (for a similar argument see also McClure 2015: 28).

Several studies dealing with salsa dancing also focus on gendered aspects of dancing, while some authors analyse particularly gendered dimensions, such as Wieschiolek (2003), Skinner (2008), Borland (2009), Schneider (2013) and McClure (2015). Some of the cited authors mainly focus on women's experiences of dancing and thus take an (often implicit) perspective of women's studies. While this perspective is framed by earlier feminist interests in "the politics of pleasure" (Gotfrit 1988), due to their focus, these studies leave male experiences underexplored. Furthermore, some of the studies tend to assume egalitarian gender relations in the countries where the studies focus and contrast them with the gendered structure of "imported" salsa, thus ascribing unequal gender relations to the supposed origin "culture" of salsa. While this study builds on the related literature, it seeks to develop an understanding of gendered processes encompassing male and female experiences and going beyond explanations of salsa's gendered roles through a recurrence to "foreign culture". In Chapter 5 I will discuss more of the relevant literature.

The already cited books by McMains (2015) and Pietrobruno (2006), along with the cited articles are among a growing body of literature to focus on the local spread of salsa in specific urban centres.¹⁹ Local salsa ethnographies are also written from a more critical perspective, which attests to salsa's erasure of certain dance practices (see Balbuena (2014) on the commercialisation of Cuban casino) and bodies through its highly heteronormative discourses (see Boulila (2015) on lesbian salsa spaces).

Most of the cited ethnographies of local or national salsa *scenes* deal with salsa as a dance practice and/or dance students, their emotions, identifications and motivations to embrace salsa dancing. Primarily concerned with salsa in a specific local context, these ethnographies are less interested in the perceived "non-local" salsa congresses (cf Kabir 2013). Though some of them acknowledge the existence of a transnational salsa circuit (such as Skinner 2007), most of the above-mentioned authors do not further investigate the transnational relations between dancers based

¹⁹ See Román-Velázquez (2002b) on London; Puccio (2000) on Toulouse; Wieschiolek (2003) on Hamburg; Papadopoulos (2003) on Frankfurt; Pušnik and Sicherl (2010) on Ljubljana; Schneider (2010) on Sydney; Bock and Borland (2011) on New Jersey; Gagné (2013) and Iwanaga (2014) on Tokyo; Llano (2014) on Barcelona; Escalona (2014) on Paris; Quayson (2014) and Carwile (2017) on Accra.

in these various places, nor the professional careers developing in the circuit (an exception is McMains 2015). In a review of Hutchinson's edited volume (2014), Fraser Delgado (2014) points to this omission, stating that "nowhere is there a sense of what it feels like to live along the global circuit for those instructors and performers who boast on their Web sites that they have visited 60 countries or more. A separate study of the global network itself is called for" (108).

While it is not the goal of this thesis to give a historical account of the developments of the "global network", it addresses some elements of the transnational careers of the mentioned salsa dance professionals. Thus, though building on the cited existing literature on salsa dance *scenes*, this study adds several hitherto underdeveloped aspects, namely a focus on salsa congresses, an analysis of the transnational careers of salsa dance professionals (including the question of who has the possibility to access transnational mobility to participate in the salsa circuit), their social capital in terms of (transnational) social networks as well as negotiations around the gendered and ethnicised/racialised logics underpinning the affective economy of the salsa circuit.

1.1.3 The cultural politics of dance: the exoticisation of *Latin* dances

As briefly demonstrated above with the two examples of mambo and rumba, dancing bodies have often been associated with a specific group of people and dance has often served as a site for the negotiations of gendered, racialised, class-based and national identity projects (Buckland 2006). Historical and critical scholarship on dance has demonstrated the significance of "dance as a site of considerable political and moral anxiety" (Reed 1998: 506) since the colonial era. For instance, colonial administrations were keen to reform or ban dances (Comaroff 1985), as they perceived indigenous dance practices as a political and moral threat (Reed 1998). In this line of thinking, Western dance practices were often seen as superior and contrasted with "primitive" dance practices (which prompted the US anthropologist Kealiinohomoku in 1983 for an argument to look at ballet as an "ethnic dance"). Interested in "the politics of dance" (Reed 1998; Cresswell 2006), scholars have indicated the power relations imbued in the categorisation of certain dance practices

or dance moves (see Cresswell (2006) for an analysis of how in early 20th century London forms of dance considered to be “American” were labelled as degenerate and the ways corporeal mobility was regulated in attempts to create an “English” style of ballroom dancing).

Drawing on these historical analyses, scholars also indicate the continuing importance of colonial images in the evaluation of and fascination with certain dance forms: numerous studies on dance deal with the topic of “exoticisation”. As they demonstrate, historically in Europe, non-European dances were often sexualised and represented as different from European dances: “Exoticization takes many forms, and the representation of the exotic Other, especially women, has been an important feature of both dance performances and visual representations of dance since at least the 18th century” (Reed 1998: 509). Exoticisation is often discussed related to so-called *Latin* dances, which are represented as particularly “hot” or “passionate” in their commercialised versions abroad (see for instance Savigliano 1995). Listing Argentinean tango and Brazilian samba, Hutchinson (2009) also argues that “few parts of the world are defined by dance in the same way and to the same extent as Latin America” (378). Dance has thus played an important role in the construction of Latin American national imaginaries, on site as well as abroad, a process highly interrelated with the history of colonialism and exotification (Hutchinson 2009).

Salsa is by far not the first “global dance craze” associated with Latin American countries, as the already cited examples of the rumba and the mambo as well as the ample literature on tango (Davis 2015a; Savigliano 1995; Törnqvist 2013) suggests:

Twentieth-century American social dance history is rife with Latin dance “crazes,” short-lived periods of frenzied obsession with hip-centric dances from Argentina, Cuba, or Brazil. For at least a century, starting with the tango craze of the 1910s and extending through the rumba, samba, and conga crazes of the 1930s into the mambo and cha cha crazes of the 1950s, past the lambada craze of the late 1980s, and onto the salsa craze at the turn of the millennium, Anglo-Americans have practiced dances borrowed from their Latin American neighbors. (McMains 2016: 480)

In this process, some of these dances were codified and adapted to the standards of the “ballroom industry” and then distributed in classes, books and performances, as McMains (2016) writes, a process clearly driven by economic motives.²⁰ In the process of commodification, elements associated with “Latinness” were particularly accentuated: the “Latin” section of ballroom dances is characterised by a “fetishized focus on movement of the hips” (McMains 2016: 481). Furthermore, competitors of “dancesport Latin”²¹ at ballroom competitions use self-tanning products – a practice with obvious “racially charged” effects (McMains 2001: 55). McMains therefore argues that the popularity of these dances is often based on harmful representations and stereotypes of Latin Americans as, among other attributes, passionate and sensual, but also dangerous and criminal – in short, emotionally uncontrolled. McMains (2016) analyses these stereotypes as serving “to justify not only North American superiority over Latin America, but also to reinforce ethnic hierarchies within the United States” (482).

The commodification and exoticisation of so-called Latin dances is also critiqued in Savigliano’s (1995) analysis of *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*. As the author demonstrates, in order to render tango dancing acceptable for a European audience, it had to be reshaped. Herein, dance masters in early 20th century Paris played a key role; they standardised the dance and simplified its improvisational characteristics into a morally acceptable set of steps, “a choreographic transformation suited to French manners and good taste” (Savigliano 1995: 122). Savigliano details the complex lives the tango has led in Argentina and in the cultural capitals of London, Paris and Tokyo, arguing that tango has been commodified for “imperial consumption”. In her analysis, Savigliano (2010: 138) distinguishes between two groups of contemporary tango dancers: the European and North American “exoticizers” and the Argentinean “exotic others”.

²⁰ Ballroom dancing can be traced back to professional dance associations established in the UK and the USA in the 1870s (Pietrobruno 2006: 117).

²¹ The five dancesport competition dances categorized as “Latin” are rumba, cha-cha, samba, paso doble, and jive. Despite their origins in Afro-Caribbean and Latin social dance practices, these social ballroom dances were popularized and defined by the English Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing throughout the mid-twentieth century (McMains 2001: 55).

Taking a critical stance regarding the postcolonial critique of exoticism in tango, Davis (2015a) proposes to adopt a more empirically grounded approach and actually demonstrates how “exotic/erotic fantasies and desires of both Argentineans and their visitors are mobilized in complicated ways” (Davis 2015a: 169). In this way, Davis (2015a) shows that exoticisation is a mutual process and an integral feature in the “transnational encounters” on the tango dance floor (175).

An important ingredient of exoticisation is “passion”, as feminist and postcolonial scholars such as Savigliano have argued. As Davis (2015b) writes, feminist scholarship has been challenging “scientific authority that gave precedence to reason, objectivity, and value neutrality over emotions, subjectivity, and political engagement, thereby opening up space to explore embodied experience as a source of knowledge and a resource for a passionate and partisan feminist politics” (6). The “affective turn” in the social sciences in particular argues not to ignore sensory experiences in social analysis. However, as Davis (2015b: 6) continues, feminist scholars have been less concerned with “how passion feels or what it means in people’s everyday lives”, and they rather “tended to be interested in the ways passion is linked to power and how restrictive social norms and dominant hierarchies and exclusions get played out at an affective level” (cf Pedwell and Whitehead (2012) for a similar argument).

Departing from her own frustration with the one-sided feminist and postcolonial informed analysis of tango, Davis (2015b) draws precisely on the contradictions between *politics* and *experience*. She therefore uses a more empirically grounded approach to study dancers’ passion for tango, exploring what it means for the people doing it (Davis 2015a: 15). She suggests developing a reflexive approach to passion, “one that uses the embodiment of passion as an affective, sensual attachment with political implications as a site for exploring the contradictions and entanglements, the constraints and the possibilities that are part of any activity which is pleasurable intense and fervently desired, yet unsettling and perhaps even profoundly disturbing” (Davis 2015b: 17). This theoretical perspective is particularly useful in order to understand the affective dimensions of the practice of salsa dancing.

As this discussion demonstrates, on the one hand, a perspective informed by postcolonial theory is necessary to dismantle ongoing constructions of “others” in contemporary dance practices, thus perpetuating “colonial appropriation”, which variously reinforced “stereotypes of mystical spirituality and excessive sexuality” (Reed 1998: 509). However, on the other hand, such a perspective may be too narrow to grasp the actual experiences of various people, and to understand why they engage in passionate (and arguably problematic) practices. Therefore, while taking into account the cited literature on dance practices, this thesis also sheds light on how dancers negotiate and think about their dancing, hereby taking into account dancers of various nationalities, gender and class backgrounds. In this way, this study shows how dancers themselves engage with and negotiate images of “exotic others” and cultural “authenticity”.

1.2 Researching circulation from a transnational perspective

The circulation of people and affects is one of the main lenses through which I approach the salsa circuit. This section briefly revisits the reflections from the field of (transnational) migration studies relevant to this study, namely the development of a transnational perspective as an epistemological stance based on the critique of “methodological nationalism” (1.2.1). It also presents recent conceptualisations of (im)mobility in the heterogeneous field of mobility studies, which take into account several forms of human movement in one theoretical framework, a claim also made by the anthropology of dance (1.2.2).

1.2.1 Towards a transnational perspective

The spatial circulation of people has been a topic in social science for a long time, and (transnational) migration studies in particular have theorised about the cross-border movement of people. During the 1990s, a new framing of the circulation of persons was introduced into the academic discourse on migration: the notion of transnationalism, which refers to a condition of “multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states” (Vertovec 1999: 447). Early scholars of transnationalism in migration studies argued that, contrary to

classical assumptions in assimilation theory, “transmigrants” became rooted in their new country while maintaining ties to their countries of origin, making home and host society a single arena for social action (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992, 1995). Concepts such as “transnational social space” (Faist 2000; Pries 2001) and “transnational social field” (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Blanc-Szanton 1994) were coined to account for social relationships that are sustained across borders. In my conceptualisation of the salsa circuit, I draw on reflections of these scholars.

The transnational approach challenged many other hitherto unchallenged assumptions about migration. Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002) criticised the “methodological nationalism” present in much social science research. Their influential article disclosed parallels between nationalist thinking and the conceptualisation of migration in social sciences, arguing that “nationally bounded societies are taken to be the naturally given entities to study” (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002: 304). The borders of the nation-state are taken as a “natural” unit of analysis, and researchers adopt a “container model of society”, equating society with the nation-state. However, such a view naturalises nation states so that “every move across national frontiers becomes an exception to the rule of sedentariness within the boundaries of the nation-state” (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002: 310). Migrants thus appear to challenge the isomorphism between people and nation. Studies on transnational migration allowed new perspectives on space and borders, going beyond such idealist visions of a unity between the state and the population located in its territory. In this way, as Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002) argue, studies examining the connections between transnational migrants and other actors are able to “carry us beyond the static, reified and essentialized concept of community and into the study of migrants and non-migrants within social fields of differential power” (324).²²

Since the introduction of transnationalism into social science, a vast array of scholarship has blossomed. Some studies emphasise that not every migrant is “transnational” (Portes, Guarnizo, and Haller 2002), while others bring into light the

²² Building on this critique, Schulze (2015: 53) draws an analogy and speaks of a “methodological subculturalism” in research on subcultures.

existence of territories of circulation (*“territoires circulatoires”*) that do not follow the borders or logics of nation-states but have their own hierarchies and forms of sociality (Tarrius 1993). Contemporary approaches argue for a transnational perspective as an epistemological lens rather than a theoretical framework (see Dahinden 2017; Glick Schiller 2015). Dahinden describes this as:

adopting an explicitly de-nationalized epistemological stance and concomitant methodologies in order to investigate and theorize cross-border social phenomena by non-state actors. Such cross-border phenomena are understood as the outcome of particular processes which are embedded in multi-layered structures (political, economic, social) at simultaneously local, national and supranational scales and the agency of non-state actors (Dahinden 2017: 1482).

Adopting a transnational perspective thus includes the analysis of the importance of the power of nation-state categories in shaping actors' identities and their surrounding structures (Dahinden 2016). A transnational perspective is suited to overcome the “nation-state- and ethnicity-centred epistemology” (Dahinden 2017) for which migration and integration research has been criticised (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002; Wimmer 2009). At the same time, by including the importance of nation-states as “units of governance and governmentality” (Glick Schiller and Meinhof 2011: 25), it goes beyond what has been described as a too naïve understanding of “global flows” in some approaches to cultural “globalization” (Heyman and Campbell 2009). It is in this sense that this study applies a transnational perspective to better understand the formation of the salsa circuit. Accordingly, I use the transnational perspective as a lens, “a way of looking at social reality without being trapped in taken-for-granted assumptions” (Moret 2015: 36).

Adopting a transnational perspective has not only epistemological and theoretical but also methodological implications. The “methodological transnationalism” (Amelina and Faist 2012) adopted in this multi-sited study is discussed in Section 2.1.1. In their outline of a transnational approach to study what they call cultural processes (such as musical creation), Glick Schiller and Meinhof argue that such an approach can include within the same analytical framework:

(1) persons with a history of movement and connection, irrespective of their place of settlement; (2) those who are part of a place but legally considered as peripheral to it including persons without accepted documentation including short-term labour contract workers, asylum seekers, “expats”, retirees and returnees; (3) persons of migrant background, and (...) (4) persons who are classified as “natives” who share social relations with persons in the other three categories. That is to say: a transnational social field analysis of the relationships between migration and cultural production allows most of us to be encompassed within a single analytical lens (Glick Schiller and Meinhof 2011: 25).

In line with this reasoning, this study looks at various actors engaged in the production of the salsa circuit. In this way, this study follows the call for a de-migranticisation (Dahinden 2016) of research on people on the move.

1.2.2 Movement on different scales: (im)mobilities, dance and affect

Another field of study that deals with the movements of people, and also objects and information (Sheller 2011), is the vast and diverse field of mobility studies, which aims to bring together different types of movement into a single analysis. Similar to the transnational perspective discussed above, it challenges the tendency of the social sciences to treat stability as normal and mobility as problematic (Urry 2007), and criticises the “sedentary bias” (Sheller and Urry 2006). Furthermore, empirical studies from a mobilities perspective question “the taken for granted bonds between people, place, and culture” (Salazar and Smart 2011: ii).

Over recent years, the “mobility turn” or “mobilities paradigm” has entered migration studies (Faist 2013) as well as studies on artists’ practices (see eg Martiniello, Puig, and Suzanne 2009). However, the celebratory vision of mobility, emphasising movement and change, has also been criticized (see eg Faist 2013). Scholars have pointed out that mobilities need moorings (Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006) and that “we need to keep notions of fixity, stasis, and immobility in mind” (Cresswell 2010: 29). Cresswell (2010) therefore proposes an approach to study the “politics of mobility”, which emphasises how mobilities are both productive of and produced by unequal relations of power. In a similar vein, Glick Schiller and Salazar (2013) develop a “regimes-of-mobility” framework: “The term ‘regime’ calls attention

to the role both of individual states and of changing international regulatory and surveillance administration that affect individual mobility” (189). Drawing on such reflections on the production of mobilities and immobilities, this study not only follows salsa dancers’ celebratory narratives of mobility but also looks at the difficulties and experiences of being stuck and the advantages of rootedness.

In a transnational social field, the question of who is able to travel becomes a marker of class. Glick Schiller and Salazar (2013) state that class has often been defined based on differential access to a range of resources: “A regimes-of-mobility approach can challenge us to expand this understanding so the ability and legal right to travel become one of the criteria by which class is defined and class privilege upheld” (196). In this way, class is defined not only by an individual’s access to economic means but also in terms of their legal status and ability to travel.

Taking up a second important argument of mobility studies, this thesis brings together different forms of mobility: mobility ranging in scale from the micro-movements of dancing bodies to the politics of global travel (cf Cresswell 2006). It approaches questions related to the cross-border mobility of differently positioned people from an entry point of their common bodily practice of salsa dancing. A transnational perspective combined with an understanding of (im)mobilities allows consideration of the usually separated forms of cross-border mobility of “migrants”, “mobile Europeans” and “tourists” as well as a micro-analysis of moving bodies in gendered and (at times) ethnicised/racialised dancing.

Focusing on the movement of human bodies is nothing new for the anthropological study of dance, although it is a relatively recent field of study. As dance scholars often argue, the study of dance had long been neglected by academia, wherein the “mind-body dichotomy inherited from the Platonic-Cartesian tradition, as well as a long-standing bias towards the verbal as a key to human thought” (Neveu Kringelbach and Skinner 2012: 5) may have played a key role. Similarly, scholarship in line with what has been termed the “affective turn” in the humanities and social sciences (Bakko and Merz 2015; Clough 2007) has argued for the importance of (bodily) experiences instead of representation in the analysis of the social. As Clough (2008) observes, “the turn to affect did propose a substantive shift in that it returned

critical theory and cultural criticism to bodily matter which had been treated in terms of various constructionisms under the influence of post-structuralism and deconstruction” (1).

Over the last few years, several scholars in the fields of the anthropology of dance and dance studies as well as sociology have addressed topics at the intersections of the two forms of human movement: travel in geographical space and micro-movements on dance floors (Bizas 2014; Farnell 2010; Davis 2015a; Marion 2010; Wilcox 2010; for an overview see Neveu Kringelbach and Skinner 2012). In their introduction to an edited book entitled *Dancing Cultures: Globalization, Tourism and Identity in the Anthropology of Dance*, Neveu Kringelbach and Skinner (2012: 9) state the particularly anthropological perspective on dance practices: “As anthropologists, we are interested in tracing the flows and movements of dance, its social significance as well as its carriers such as migrants and tourists”. This thesis links the study of the embodied meaning with the study of carriers of salsa’s “transnational moves” (Pietrobruno 2006). Hereby it also draws on the “turn to affect” (Clough 2008) to account for the importance of emotions.

Scholarship in the field of “affect studies” has theorised processes of the circulation of emotions, such as Ahmed (2004), who delivers a fine “analysis of affective economies, where feelings do not reside in subjects or objects, but are produced as effects of circulation” (8). Although highly diverse in their understandings of what affect is or can be, theories of affect have attempted “to go beyond the dominant epistemological parameters of the linguistic turn” (Bakko and Merz 2015: 7).²³ In particular, researchers have challenged the scientific superiority of reason over emotion (Pedwell and Whitehead 2012). While some scholars thus position the interest in affect as “novel and groundbreaking”, others argue that “feminists have always been engaged with questions of affect, emotion, and feeling” (Davis 2015b: 6). Furthermore, the rhetoric of newness risks omitting “feminist histories of knowledge production” (Pedwell and Whitehead 2012: 117). For example, scholarship on service and care industries has analysed the effects of the commercialisation of the intimate

²³ Building on the work of philosophers Deleuze and Guattari (1980), affect is often defined as referring “generally to bodily capacities to affect and be affected or the augmentation or diminution of a body’s capacity to act, to engage, and to connect” (Clough 2007: 2).

life through concepts such as “emotional labour” (Hochschild 1983) and “affective labour” (Ditmore 2007), as I will further discuss in Chapter 6.

1.3 A constructivist understanding of social categories

According to an interpretive, constructivist perspective, lived “reality” is constructed by social actors. As Schwandt (1998) specifies: “That is, particular actors, in particular places, at particular times, fashion meaning out of events and phenomena through prolonged, complex processes of social interaction involving history, language, and action” (222).

My research participants often held clear and essentialist ideas regarding “culture” and ethnicity, gender and roles inside the salsa circuit. Building on a constructivist epistemology, as a researcher I was interested in the ways these categories came into being, how individuals participated in creating the categories, and in which situations they were mobilised. Contrary to some studies that conceptualise dance as the expression of a specific cultural or “ethnic” group, I started from a vision of salsa dancing as a social practice, and thus the idea that salsa has to be constantly (re)made as Latin or Cuban (or “global”, as we will see). However, the salsa circuit is undeniably a highly gendered and heteronormative social space. This section discusses my theoretical framework in relation to ethnicity, gender and other social categories. I will first address the criticism of “groupism” (1.3.1) and then clarify my use of these notions, which evoke different meanings in different studies (1.3.2).

1.3.1 Against “groupism”: a relational understanding of ethnicity, race and gender

Since the 1980s, in the social sciences in general and anthropology in particular, scholars have criticised the tendency to naturalise the association of culture with place (Appadurai 1990; Baumann 1996; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Wicker 1997) or, in other words, the idea of an isomorphism between a specific territory, an ethnic community or a nation and a culture (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). Similarly, Brubaker (2002) criticised the prevalent “groupism” in social science: the “tendency to take discrete, sharply differentiated, internally homogeneous and externally

bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental units of social analysis” (164).

Taking up these criticisms, and drawing on Barth’s (1969) work on ethnicity, scholars have developed a relational, interactive and processual understanding of ethnic groups and group boundaries (eg Jenkins 1994; Wimmer 2009), whereby ethnicity is approached as the outcome of specific processes of “boundary-making”. In this vision, ethnicity is not a “thing in the world” that explains how people behave but something that has to be explained itself (Wimmer 2009).

Taking into account the risk of “methodological nationalism”, Wimmer (2009) criticised the tendency of scholarship on migration to treat ethnicity as a self-evident unit of analysis. Instead of assuming group boundaries are based on ethnicity, scholars should thus look at the ways ethnicity is actually made important – or not. Wimmer (2009) suggests researchers should “de-ethnicize research designs by taking non-ethnic units of observation to see both the emergence of ethnic closure and its absence or dissolution” (262). Similarly, Dahinden (2016) discusses strategies to “de-migrantize” migration research through several approaches, one of them being the “reorientation of the unit of analysis” which entails a focus on larger segments of the population instead of the category of “migrants” (2217).

The present study takes these epistemological (and methodological) reflections as a starting point in the development and implementation of the research interest. Instead of focusing on the circulation of people based on their supposed geographical origin, I chose to “follow” salsa dancers that I met at specific events. Only in a second step did I look at whether (and how) ethnicity is mobilised and made important in salsa dancers’ strategies of positioning in the salsa circuit. In this process, ethnicity often intersects with racial classifications and representations.

I approach gender from a similar perspective, viewing it as the result of social interactions and following the idea of “gender as process” (Elliot 2016). As Elliot (2016) clarifies in a discussion of the relationship between gender and mobility: “Gender is not about observing how men and women move differently, but about a theoretical and methodological toolbox able to capture how socially, culturally, historically constructed relations between the sexes inflect the texture of mobility,

and vice versa” (76). To analyse the specific negotiations on the salsa dance floor, I draw on West and Zimmerman’s (1987, 2009) much cited approach of “doing gender”, as well as some of its developments (Hirschauer 1994, 2001; Deutsch 2007; Nentwich and Kelan 2014; Risman 2009). Addressing the gendered relationships in salsa dancing with a doing gender perspective has the advantage of switching the focus from the supposedly stable gender arrangements on the dance floor to the ongoing negotiations and activities of the gendered dancing, thus going beyond much of the literature dealing with gender in salsa.

This constructivist approach to ethnicity and gender leads to a focus on the ways in which actors in the salsa circuit are creating – or doing – salsa together (see Schulze 2015: 58).

1.3.2 “Authenticity”, ethnicity, gender and other categories in the salsa circuit

While the notion of “authenticity” is not as widely used in the salsa circuit as in other dance contexts (for instance Bizas (2014) reports that students of Senegalese sabar dance described their motivation to travel to West Africa as a search for authenticity), some research participants referred to “authentic salsa”. Lindholm (2008) attributes the quest for the authentic to modernity, bringing along the “erosion of a sacred hierarchy” (4), so that still today different forms of personal and collective authenticity are in great demand. From a constructivist stance, claims for authenticity can be approached as a part of actors’ discourse and not an “objective quality of the object” (Reisinger and Steiner 2006). Drawing on this understanding, I will analyse the ways in which salsa dancers mobilise the idea of authenticity related to either salsa’s history and a specific national context (in this study mainly Cuba) or a personal relation to salsa.

As already mentioned, among my research participants a highly naturalised and essentialist idea of categories was prevalent regarding gender (gendered roles in salsa dancing are usually referred to as “the men” do this, “the women” do that), ethnicity (“Cubans and Latinos are like this, Europeans are like that”), and roles inside the salsa circuit as related to status (*stars*, *salsa artists*, *beginners*, “good”

dancers, etc). These categories were rhetorically constituted by dancers, who often referred to themselves and others in these ways, sometimes deployed as “strategic essentialism” (Spivak 2012 (1988)) in order to stake claims and gain legitimacy in the salsa circuit. While understanding such categorisations as the result of social processes, in the analysis and written account I used (and thus (re)produced) the categories used by my interlocutors. In this way, I do not only speak of male and female dancers; in some parts of the thesis I use the emic²⁴ terms of *Latinos/Latinas*, *Cubans* and *Europeans* (or, in some cases *Eastern Europeans*), to analyse the ways actors actually engage in boundary-making between dancers and thus create these groups. However, it is important to keep in mind that these are not my categories, nor are they “objective” articulations of demographic “realities”. While the categories were often constructed as relatively stable, individuals moved between them and negotiated their meanings.

Furthermore, I distinguish between what I term “salsa dance professionals” and “salsa students” to describe specific positions inside the salsa circuit, despite the various ways the term “professional” can be defined, particularly in spaces of music and entertainment (see Gibert 2011). In the context of the salsa circuit, I use the status of professional to point to individuals who are able to accumulate considerable salsa capital and often are able to transform it into economic capital. In other words, I use the more encompassing category of professionals to include the acknowledged *salsa stars* as well as other dancers who teach and perform in the salsa circuit, often called *travelling artists*. However, the two categories are not always clearly separable: dance students may become remunerated teachers in some contexts, and professionals may take lessons with other dancers; the categorisations and identifications are thus always context-dependent and temporary.

²⁴ The notion of emic categories is used in anthropology to designate a perspective from within the social group studied (Headland, Pike and Harris 1990). In this thesis emic terms are highlighted through italics.

1.4 The salsa circuit: beyond a spatially-bound framework

Since anthropology started to include topics such as circulation and “global flows” (Appadurai 1990), it has been “struggling to bridge the gap between localized, situational inquiry and the study of large-scale systems” (Mueller 2016: 103). Similarly to Mueller (2016), I was presented with the challenge of observing salsa dancers at a micro-level and developing a broader understanding of the transnational networks salsa dancers are engaged in. I thus had to develop analytical tools to mediate between situated ethnographic accounts and my macro-analysis, like Mueller (2016) who developed “alternative tools to bridge the gap between the collection of multiple, particular ethnographic accounts and the construction of a broader analysis of the quasi-global, networked agencement of hardcore punk” (101). Based on the emic notion of the *circuit*, and following Mueller (2016) and Kiwan and Meinhof (2011), I conceptualised salsa as consisting of a circuit with several hubs (1.4.1). I furthermore draw on Becker’s (1982) framework of “art worlds” and, complementary, Bourdieu’s (1993) theorisation of “fields of cultural production” (1.4.2), including Bourdieu’s theorisation of different forms of capital – from a transnational perspective (1.4.3).

1.4.1 Bridging theories of localised scenes and global flows: conceptualising the circuit

As already mentioned, literature interested in salsa in terms of its social environment often frames salsa as a localised “scene”. Such studies focus on salsa’s local adaptations, a perspective that often builds on a dichotomy between “global cultural flows” and “local culture”, which risks reifying singular geographic locations. This clear distinction between “the global” and “the local” as well as the related view of “culture” as clearly associated with “place” has several theoretical limitations that this study wishes to address. As anthropologists have argued for decades, the discipline’s focus on the local builds on a supposed isomorphism between ethnic groups and place (Barth 1969) as well as between culture and place (Appadurai 1996). Early globalisation scholars argued that the emergence of a “transnational

public sphere” has “rendered any strictly bounded sense of community or locality obsolete” (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 9).

How, then, can we think of salsa if not in terms of localised scenes nor as a “global flow” with no anchor in any local social, economic or political realities? And how are the different localized scenes connected? To describe salsa on a “global” scale, my interview partners used terms such as *scene*, *family*, *world*, *industry* and *circuit*. I opted for the emic notion²⁵ of the *circuit* to underline the importance of circulation in my conceptualisation of salsa: the circulation of people, the circulation of imaginaries, dance movements, conventions and affects, and (of less importance in this study) the circulation of music and dance videos as well as artefacts such as instructional DVDs and clothes (see Mueller 2016 for a similar analysis of circulating elements). People travel to take salsa lessons, participate in salsa events or teach and perform at the numerous events. In their encounters they build on and (re)produce a set of shared understandings of why they do what they do (imaginaries) and how it best should be done and felt (the conventions and affects). This thesis will look closely at the circulation of people, dance movements, imaginaries and affects, whereby I do not conceive of circulation as an abstract idea of flows but rather as inextricably and inseparably linked to local situations (cf Mueller 2016: 110).

As Urry (2003) argues, “social life is full of multiple and extended connections often across long distances, organised through certain nodes or hubs within which social life is formed and reformed” (157). In the case of the salsa circuit, these extended connections come together in hubs (see Figure 1).

²⁵ My conceptualisation of the salsa circuit should thus not be confused with the theorisation of “cultural circuits” by Stuart Hall and his colleagues at the British Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) (see for instance du Gay et al. 1997). Nor does it refer to another CCCS concept: the highly influential but also criticised notion of subcultures (for a review of the concept’s history and critique, see Schulze 2015).

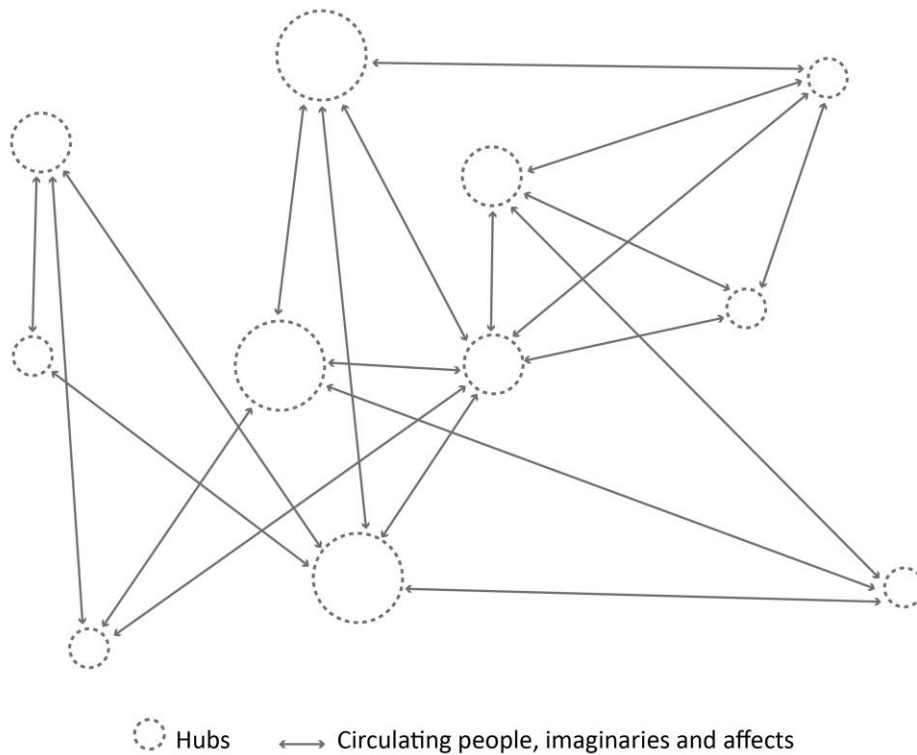


Figure 1 A conceptual map of the salsa circuit (adapted from Mueller 2016).

The salsa hubs should not be understood as physical geographical places but rather as the material actualisation of salsa, the moment salsa happens in a specific space.²⁶ Hubs can take various forms, such as a salsa event, a festival, a class at a salsa studio or a party at a salsa club, thus temporarily territorialising in specific places. Furthermore, situations such as an online discussion between salsa dancers on the topic of a convention can also be considered a hub.²⁷ In this sense, the different situations studied in this research project can be conceptualised as highly connected (see also Mueller 2016), reminiscent of post-structuralist philosophers Deleuze and Guattari's (1998 (1980)) notion of rhizome. The model of the rhizome points to a non-hierarchical organisation and is characterised as follows: "unlike trees or their

²⁶ In their study on African musicians, Kiwan and Meinhof (2011) also propose a "transnational and translocal network model" with several "key parameters", which they call hubs. However, my model differs in the conceptualisation of hubs as temporary rather than their more static notion of human or spatial hubs.

²⁷ The transnational field of salsa congresses thus has to be conceptualised adequately by including a vision that does not separate the virtual from the non-virtual, but includes the space- and time-spanning possibilities the internet offers (of course only for those who have access to the internet).

roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point” (23). This conceptualisation of the salsa circuit consisting of hubs highly connected through circulation is helpful in overcoming ideas of either localised scenes or global flows, as it allows for a relational perspective.

At the same time, the critics of some enthusiast depictions of global cultural flows have argued that there are limits to such idealist, non-hierarchical perspectives of social relations. Tsing (2000: 337) warns that a focus on circulation as the defining characteristic of the global mistakenly turns the attention to what circulates instead of to the conditions that allow circulation to take place. Mueller (2016: 120) also argues that such a non-hierarchical vision of the social world (in this case the salsa circuit) is insufficient when it comes to understanding hierarchies and unequal access to various resources (in short, power relations). Therefore the hubs and circulations constituting the salsa circuit have to be understood as being embedded in broader, globe-spanning political, economic and cultural power relations. As Glick Schiller (2015) writes: “In a multi-scalar analysis, local, regional, national, pan-regional and global are not separate levels of analysis but are part of mutually constituting institutional and personal networks of unequal power within which people both with and without migrant histories live their lives” (2276). Scholars of transnationalism argue that “the political borders of states do not delimit the world of the social, although the role of states is one important element in the analysis of power relations” (Glick Schiller 2015: 2277). Particularly when it comes to the circulation of people, current “migration regimes” (Amelina 2017) have to be taken into account when analysing the salsa circuit. The European migration system considerably shapes actors’ access to the salsa circuit, as I will demonstrate for the case of salsa hubs based in European countries. From the perspective of some dancers in this study, the salsa circuit is therefore separated into a specific European circuit or North American circuit, which they can only enter under specific circumstances (such as obtaining a visa). To account for these limitations, in some parts of this study I narrow the focus down to a specific European salsa circuit, whose boundaries align with Europe’s borders, thus rendering visible the structural

difficulties salsa dance professionals of different origin countries have to overcome in order to participate in the European salsa circuit.

1.4.2 Art worlds and artistic fields

To understand specific aspects of the salsa circuit, I found certain theoretical frameworks more useful than others: Becker's notion of "art worlds" (1982) was particularly helpful in analysing salsa dancers' organising of collective action in regards to specific conventions (see also Schulze 2015). His analytical framework allowed me to focus on people "doing things together" (Becker 1986) in Part II of this study. However, to account for the power relations and struggles in the salsa circuit, aspects of Bourdieu's framework of "artistic fields" (1993) and his theorisation of different forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986) were more helpful (see Part III). While Becker's (1982) notion of "art worlds" and Bourdieu's (1993) conceptualisation of "artistic fields" are often seen as complementary in terms of their strengths and weaknesses (Bottero and Crossley 2011), they differ considerably in their theoretical outlook. The resulting tensions between different levels of analysis point to the limits of a sole analytical lens, which I wanted to overcome by approaching the salsa circuit from different perspectives.

While Becker is often "criticised for insufficiently locating subjective experience within objective relations", Bourdieu's "emphasis on objective relations is said to neglect the subjective point of view" (Bottero and Crossley 2011: 100). In other words: while Becker's approach focuses on individual action, Bourdieu's framework is interested in social structural dynamics. Despite these differences, both analytical frameworks are used to study the relationship between "cultural creators" and their social environments, and both approaches have been taken up widely in works of sociology and anthropology of art and beyond. As numerous studies in other disciplines have demonstrated, ideas from these theoretical frameworks are fruitful to analyse any form of social organisation, independently of their thematic scope. Therefore, although drawing on a theoretical framework developed for the specific setting of artistic or cultural production, I do not approach salsa as an artwork or cultural product but am more interested in the theoretical perspectives on the social

organisation, namely the focus on networks, collective action and conventions (Becker 1982), as well as struggles and position-takings (Bourdieu 1993).

To summarise Becker's framework, the term "art worlds" denotes "the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produce the kind of art works that art world is noted for" (1982: x). Drawing on this understanding, I did not include only one specific category of actors into my analysis, such as the self-described *salsa artists*, but also included some of the other actors such as festival participants, DJs and event organisers. Furthermore, I draw on Becker's understanding of cooperation and look closely at some conventions of the salsa circuit, particularly conventions in terms of pedagogical techniques and "gender conventions" (Schulze 2015) in dancing as well as what I coined the "convention of tangible *salsa stars*".

While Becker's analytical framework has the advantage of stressing the importance of collaboration between all the participants of an art world over widespread popular beliefs of artists as individual creators, it has been criticised for its emphasis on consensus rather than conflict among artists and actors who control material and symbolic resources (see Crane 2015). In other words, the main criticism of Becker and interactionism more generally suggests that its focus on people doing things overlooks structural issues of power and resources (Bottero and Crossley 2011). Indeed, conceptualising salsa as an art world did not adequately address the question of power relations inside and outside the specific realm of salsa.

In a second analytical step, I therefore opted to include some aspects of Bourdieu's (1993) framework of "fields", to be able to analyse the specific strategies of actors in terms of the resources and capital at their disposal. Bourdieu's theoretical framework lays the groundwork to analyse the reproduction of social hierarchies. His notion of "field of cultural production" adds a focus on inequalities: "The literary or artistic field is a *field of forces*, but it is also a *field of struggles* tending to transform or conserve this field of forces" (Bourdieu 1993: 30, italics in original). In Bourdieu's analytical framework, cultural products and producers are located within a space of positions and position-takings. Actors struggle to defend or improve their positions, adopting "strategies which depend for their force and form on the position each

agent occupies in the power relations [rapports de force]" (Bourdieu 1993: 30). Actors thus develop strategies, consciously or not, which permit them to ameliorate their situation. The analysis of the artistic field is part of Bourdieu's wider theorisation of distinct social fields, in which a social field is defined as "a space of objective relations between positions defined by their rank in the distribution of competing powers or species of capital" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 114). In Bourdieu's view, numerous discrete and relatively autonomous social fields make up social space, such as the economic, artistic, intellectual and juridical fields (in his case in a national frame). As each field has its own logics, the actors' struggles and capital are differently valued in different contexts (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). However, Bourdieu's notion of distinct fields has been criticised for its narrowness (Lahire 2001, see also Moret 2015). I therefore do not restrict my analysis to "social fields" but also include other contexts, which encompass "less strictly bounded and defined social environments and hierarchies" (Moret 2015: 186). Accordingly, I do not analyse the salsa circuit in terms of a national bounded field, as the next section discusses.

1.4.3 Bourdieu's theorisation of capital in a transnational context

Bourdieu's theoretical framework is based on the assumption that social inequalities are a product of the accumulation of several forms of unequally distributed resources. Enlarging the Marxian understanding of economic capital, Bourdieu conceptualises economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital as related (and sometimes convertible) forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986).²⁸ In this thesis I build on Bourdieu's capital approach, taking into account its limits and adding a discussion of a specific salsa capital.

Following Bourdieu, economic capital can be immediately and directly converted into money and may be institutionalised in the form of property rights. In the salsa circuit, economic capital is highly important and at the same time downplayed by

²⁸ While drawing on aspects of Bourdieu's theoretical framework (mainly his capital approach), I do not employ other elements of his theory, for instance the concept of habitus. The latter has been criticised as being incompatible with parts of Bourdieu's very own writings, namely his "practical theory", emphasising interactions between individuals (for a further development of this argument, see King 2000).

most actors. Although often being a prerequisite for the access to the salsa circuit (in form of dance lessons, travel costs and entry tickets), as well as the return for dance professionals' work, dancers and organisers often insist on doing what they do only "out of passion for salsa, not for the money". According to Bourdieu (1983), this "inversion of the logic of the larger economy of the society" (311) is specific to the field of cultural production.

Bourdieu distinguishes three states of cultural capital, of which one is particularly important for this study: institutionalised cultural capital. Cultural capital in its institutionalised state corresponds to academic qualifications such as formal degrees and certificates. This objectification of cultural capital "makes the difference between the capital of the autodidact, which may be called into question at any time, [...] and the cultural capital academically sanctioned by legally guaranteed qualifications, formally independent of the person of their bearer" (Bourdieu 1986: 247). Many of today's salsa dance professionals have degrees in various dance forms, such as "contemporary", "folkloric" or "urban" dance, which may be important in some circumstances. However, contrary to Bourdieu's statement above, in the salsa circuit a dancer's authority may be called into question despite formal qualifications, as the construction of "salsa capital" relies on them only in specific circumstances.

The third form of capital Bourdieu defines is social capital:

the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a "credential" which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word (Bourdieu 1986: 248).

The understanding of resources embedded in social networks as a form of capital is particularly helpful in the analysis of salsa dance professionals' careers. A dance professional with close ties to many event organisers will have a larger volume of performance and teaching opportunities than dancers with low social capital. Moreover, as Bourdieu states, social capital demands relational efforts; as I will demonstrate in detail in Part III of this thesis, social capital has to be acquired and

maintained through processes of “networking” (Schapendonk 2015) and it is highly relevant in all stages of the career-building process.

Furthermore, as Bourdieu argues, once accepted and valued by others, the three types of capital already described may become symbolic capital. Bourdieu’s work (1993) on an economy of symbolic goods also inspired my understanding of the relational field of salsa as an “affective economy”. As demonstrated throughout this thesis, salsa dancers negotiate their positions in the salsa circuit drawing on various resources. The notion of an affective economy points to the importance of the affective experience of salsa dancing as a driving force of the salsa circuit, as further discussed in Chapter 3.

While Bourdieu’s capital approach has been highly influential in social analysis, it has also generated criticism pointing to its limits in several regards. An important critique states its inability to account for change of the social order (Calhoun 1993, King 2000). In Bourdieu’s framework, an actor’s chance of challenging the social order is linked to his or her social position. Therefore, instead of negotiating change, actors tend to reproduce the social order. While Bourdieu’s perspective focusing on reproduction is insightful in certain aspects, I will also mobilise other theoretical perspectives that allow me to address how salsa dancers are challenging the social structure, notably a doing gender and a boundary-making approach (see Part II).

A second criticism is particularly important for this study: Bourdieu’s “blindness” in terms of nation-states (Nowicka 2013; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002), and particularly “the methodological nationalism and overall neglect of migration and transnational mobility inherent in the original theory” (Dahinden 2017: 1483). Several authors have attempted to “transnationalise” theories of capital (see for instance Erel 2010; Meinhof and Triandafyllidou 2006; Moret 2015; Nowicka 2013). As these authors show, particularly in the process of migration and mobility, “the symbolic value of individuals’ resources may vary enormously depending on where they are evaluated, i.e. in the place of origin, the place of residence or other national or regional contexts” (Moret 2015: 186). To analyse the transnational practices of cultural actors of migrant background in European capital cities, Meinhof and Triandafyllidou (2006) coined the notion of “transcultural capital” to account for

“the strategic use of knowledge, skills and networks acquired by migrants through connections with their country and cultures of origin which are made active at their new places of residence” (202). They suggest a potential link between all three forms of capital, which migrants may mobilise in order to maximise their options. While being more or less sceptical about the ways the symbolic value of individuals’ resources is recognised after a migration, all these authors share the assumption of context-dependency of Bourdieu’s capital theory and enlarge it respectively. As all these authors have demonstrated, when taking into account the criticisms, elements of Bourdieu’s theoretical framework are well suited to analyse many aspects of transnational phenomena.

To sum up, the conceptualisation of salsa as a circuit with specific hubs, including a theoretical framework drawing on Becker’s and Bourdieu’s approaches, permits the analysis of salsa from a transnational perspective.

1.5 Research questions

The main aim of this thesis is to develop a framework to study the salsa circuit, in order to better understand the circulation of salsa dancers and salsa imaginaries from a transnational perspective. Based on the presented theoretical background and the discussed literature on salsa dance, including the identified research gaps, it addresses three sets of research questions.

A first set of questions is interested in the formation of the salsa circuit and its underlying logics:

- How is the salsa circuit structured and integrated into a larger web of globe-spanning power relations?
- Which imaginaries of salsa and salsa dancers circulate in the salsa circuit?
- What motivates salsa students to participate in the salsa circuit and which role does the embodied experience play?

A second set of questions addresses the ways gender and ethnicity/race are negotiated in embodied ways, focusing on “conventions” of the salsa circuit:

- In which ways are ethnicity, race and “authenticity” mobilised and negotiated?
- How are gendered and ethnicised conventions in salsa (re)produced?
- In which ways are salsa dancers doing, redoing and undoing gender and ethnicity?

A third set of questions focuses on the professional careers some salsa dance professionals develop:

- How are professional transnational careers in the salsa circuit constructed?
- How is access to the salsa circuit regulated?
- How is reputation constructed and maintained inside the salsa circuit?
- How is social capital mobilised in the construction of a transnational career?
- Which resources and gendered and ethnicised position strategies do salsa dance professionals mobilise to construct successful careers?

Chapter 2 Methodology and methods

This chapter outlines my choice of methodology and the development of my research methods, in line with the epistemological and theoretical perspectives discussed in Chapter 1.

This study builds on a qualitative, interpretive and constructivist approach. Therefore, the research process has been guided by a methodological approach inspired by grounded theory (Charmaz 2006; Glaser and Strauss 1967). This approach “prioritizes the data and the field under study over theoretical assumptions” (Flick 2014: 137). Theories are “discovered” (Glaser and Strauss 1967) or rather “constructed” (Charmaz 2006) in the research process, and are grounded in the empirical data. Characteristic of a grounded theory approach is a circular research process, involving a close link between collection and interpretation of data and the selection of empirical material (Flick 2014: 139). This study builds on a constructivist understanding of the process of data collection. As Charmaz (2006) argues: “We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices” (10). In this sense, my experiences as a white, female, Swiss national, trained in social anthropology, working in a research institute on the wider topic of transnational circulation, and with an interest in music and dance, shaped not only the choice of this research topic but also the ways I engaged with theoretical concepts, perspectives and the questions I asked during this process (Davis 2018a). Taking into account that knowledge is always situated (what Haraway (1988) terms “feminist objectivity”), the present study encompasses the interpretations I acquired through a thorough reading of the various perspectives contained in my observational notes and interviews, building on extant methodological reflections and established methods.

The field of the salsa circuit necessitated a specific set of methodological moves, between field sites, the virtual world and dance floors, and between participant and observer. This chapter describes the ways I constructed my field (2.1), conducted short-term embodied ethnography of salsa events (2.2) and carried out semi-structured, problem-centred interviews with dancers (2.3). It discusses the

challenges I faced and the strategies used to move around them. It also describes the steps I took to interpret and analyse the data (2.4). Doing qualitative research always raises ethical questions, which were treated in compliance with ethical guidelines standard in social sciences.²⁹ Considering ethical issues to be important in every stage of the research, I address the questions of informed consent, confidentiality and my status between an insider and an outsider throughout this chapter.

2.1 Constructing “the field”

How can people who are in circulation and constant movement be studied? Being interested in salsa dancers who form part of the salsa circuit, I was presented with the challenge of a research “field” in constant circulation. In order to start my fieldwork I therefore had to make choices in terms of entry points into the circuit as well as the construction of the field itself. To adapt to this constantly moving field and catch my research participants, a classical anthropological approach including long-term fieldwork was hardly practicable. Referring to anthropology’s longstanding tradition of long-term fieldwork, Salazar, Elliot, and Norum (2017) state: “a discipline which builds its epistemology around one’s immersion in a single place (over a period of a year or more, usually) can hardly be well suited to dealing with translocal connectivities and flows – at least not without some creative reimagining and innovation of this epistemology” (6). I thus had to use some “creative reimagining” and draw on more recently developed approaches to construct my field and develop mobile research methods.

One entry into the field is through events, as proposed as a possible way to overcome the shortcomings of the already discussed “groupist” research designs (see eg Bessin, Bidart, and Grossetti 2010; Hertz 2009; Salzbrunn 2017). Salzbrunn (2017: 4) argues that an epistemological and methodological entry through the event allows renewal of social science approaches to migration (and religion), as it shifts the focus from an *a priori* defined group to the plural affiliations of present individuals. Similarly, in a discussion of anthropologists’ preoccupation with “the local” (as a

²⁹ See isa-sociology.org/en/about-isa/code-of-ethics (accessed 27 August 2018).

territorialised notion) Hertz (2009: 219) proposes to focus on the event, which points to a “series of recognisable acts happening in a specific time-space” (my translation). Drawing on such an understanding of the importance of events, I adopted a multi-sited research design and chose several “field sites” – including several of the hubs of the circuit (conceptually defined in Chapter 1), namely salsa congresses, dance studios and an organised salsa holiday – in a process that I discuss below. This section discusses the underlying assumptions guiding the choice of a multi-sited research design (2.1.1), before turning to the detailed construction of my “field” (2.1.2).

2.1.1 Multi-sited research

In anthropology, the idea of researchers following their object of study and a “move out from the single sites” (Marcus 1995: 96) have been discussed explicitly since the 1980s.³⁰ Since then, scholars adopt Appadurai’s (1986) proposition to follow “things in motion”, and Marcus’ (1995) invitation to trace the people, the thing, the metaphor, the plot, story or allegory, the life or biography or the conflict. “Strategies of quite literally following connections, associations, and putative relationships are thus at the very heart of designing multi-sited ethnographic research” (Marcus 1995: 97). In this sense, the connections between the chosen sites are important, as Hannerz (2003) states: “The sites are connected with one another in such ways that the relationships between them are as important for this formulation as the relationships within them; the fields are not some mere collection of local units” (206).

These attempts to conceptualise a methodological approach to grasp the connectivity between geographically distant places (instead of focusing on the classical ethnographic one-sited field) have also been taken up from scholars in studies on the mobility of people (eg Mazzucato 2009; Richter 2012; Tarrius 2001). An important point of discussion raised in transnational studies of migration is the question of spatiality (see Faist 2004; Pries 2008). In a relational understanding of

³⁰ Nonetheless, earlier ethnographies often included “multi-sited” research, eg the famous example of Malinowski’s *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (see Salazar, Elliot, and Norum 2017).

spatiality (see Massey 1994), space is considered as “a contingent and historically changeable nexus between material artefacts and social actions, which is created, represented and appropriated by social actors” (Amelina and Faist 2012: 1714). Amelina and Faist (2012) therefore suggest that researchers of empirical migration studies should “study actors’ strategies of space formation and space appropriation” (1714), through multi-sited ethnography and mobile methods. As they argue, researchers should adopt a “methodological transnationalism” to study “transnational mobilities and transnational formations by avoiding a nation-state-centred methodology” (1708). As argued in Chapter 1, existing literature on salsa is often focused on local adaptations of the “global” dance and thus studies tend to be based on what can be termed a “methodological localism” (see also Mueller 2016). I therefore considered it particularly insightful to use another approach to study salsa dancers’ circulation and meaning making. Adopting a multi-sited approach allowed me to focus on the connections between geographically distant phenomena.³¹ Indeed, for the salsa dancers I talked to, the question of where they were dancing (the locality) was far less important than, for example, the quality of the dance floor, the skill of their dance partner or the reputation of the other dancers and invited salsa instructors present (see Hertz (2009: 217) for a similar argument in relation to night clubs).³² Salsa events take place in strikingly similar formats wherever they happen to take place. Taking the importance of actors’ construction of space into consideration, I thus conceptualised my different “field sites” as “one geographically non-contiguous space” (Hage 2005). As Hage (2005) notes: “To do so is to make a choice of emphasizing those global relations and the circulation of goods, communication, money, people and emotions that occurs within them” (467). I thus chose a multi-sited research design because I was interested in the “global relations and circulations”, putting my emphasis on previously less researched aspects of

³¹ However, this is not to say that transnational connections cannot be studied while remaining in one place, nor that a multi-sited research design automatically leads to a theorisation of transnational connections.

³² Location plays little part with the notable exceptions of Cuba and New York, which both hold a special status on dancers’ imaginary “salsa map”, due to their historical association with salsa and the “authenticity value” constructed around them.

salsa, particularly the phenomenon of salsa congresses. Obviously, this choice represents a limitation in terms of the importance of actors' embeddedness in specific localities and the concrete material and social contexts, a point raised by several critics of multi-sited studies.

As sceptics of multi-sited ethnography have argued (eg Candeia 2007; Hage 2005), multi-sitedness may dilute ethnographic "depth" when compared to more classic ethnographic work in one site. For me, this challenge became particularly visible when I decided to include salsa events in Havana in my field. How much knowledge of local contexts was needed to understand the data collected in Havana? And which emerging topics should be included in my research design and sample? I soon realised that an ethnography of the salsa tourist space in Havana with a deeper understanding of its workings would require a different study of itself. At the same time, some information on local contexts seemed indispensable to understand dancers' relationships. Redrawing the limits and theoretical interest of my study as well as including some literature discussing context information proved helpful in the interpretation of these data.

Choosing a multi-sited research approach based on a relational understanding of space does not imply a negation of the lasting impacts of nation-states and their borders. On the contrary, during the whole research process I observed the ways in which the mobility of salsa dancers (in the circuit highly celebrated and normalised) had to be acquired, particularly by Cuban dancers. Linking the multi-sited research approach with a theoretical regimes-of-mobility framework allowed me to focus on the immobilities and non-granted mobilities as well, and thus to integrate some aspects related to local and national contexts into the analysis.

2.1.2 Mapping the "field sites", choosing the events

Marcus (1995) calls multi-sited ethnography "an exercise in mapping terrain" (99), and Hannerz (2003) reminds us that "ethnography is an art of the possible" (213). It is in this sense that I constructed my multi-sited "field" gradually developing new insights and following newly arisen opportunities (Hannerz 2003: 207).

As has been argued in a methodological discussion about Marion's (2005) ballroom dance research at the main sites of competition (Marion 2005 and in response Frederik 2005 and Skinner 2007b), a research methodology focusing on a large number of dance events entails the risk of giving "a false sense of what the competitive dance field actually consists of and the terms of membership contained therein" (Frederik 2005: 19). Mirroring the already cited debate about "the depth" of multi-sited research, this argument points to the limits of a research design focusing solely on events.³³ A research methodology combining several research strategies, such as tracking dance students and instructors, including different sites as well as the researcher's own body into the research process, as proposed by Skinner (2005), seems more promising. In line with my research topic I therefore chose to combine several research strategies. However, while this approach seems fruitful in order to study dance worlds, it entails practical challenges I had to deal with, as detailed below.

Inspired by scholars using "mobile methods", I initially had the idea to literally "follow" specific salsa dancers through different settings, physically travelling with them to better understand the meanings and experiences of their *travelling*. Due to several practical reasons this use of "co-mobile methods" was only possible to a limited extent: dancers' changing plans and my own professional situation as a teaching assistant did not allow for spontaneous travels nor longer trips during term time.³⁴ In her methodological discussion of research with highly mobile artists, Lipphardt (2015: 63) mentions similar challenges related to mobile research designs, including the necessitated coordination, flexibility and not least financial costs of such research endeavours. I therefore decided to concentrate on meeting dancers (salsa students and salsa dance professionals) at specific events, whereby salsa festivals proved to be a highly fruitful context. In this way, I could meet many dancers at one time to conduct interviews and was even able to meet (some)

³³ I would argue for the importance of adjusting the chosen methodology to one's research interest. For instance, studying dancers' (im)mobilities is not the same as exploring membership in a localised dance studio.

³⁴ On another level, the use of a sort of "co-mobile methods" proved highly fruitful, namely in dancing with research participants, which will be discussed below.

research participants several times. Facebook also allowed me to “follow” dancers’ travels virtually and when I had the opportunity to participate in a dance holiday to Havana, organised by one of the interviewed dancers, I included this dance trip as part of my research.

During my research process I started to re-centre a part of my research on the transnational careers of salsa dance professionals, a conceptual move which could account for dancers’ cross-border mobility without me actually following them. The focus on individual salsa dance professionals’ careers also allowed for a better understanding of the salsa circuit through the prism of individual dancers’ careers (for a similar methodological argument see Kiwan and Meinhof 2011). Through this combined research strategy including several approaches of tracing people and biographies (Marcus 1995), or in this case careers, I was able to grasp different perspectives and aspects of the salsa circuit, thus taking into account the limitations of a multi-sited and mobile research design.

Starting in 2013 and over a period of three years I conducted short-term multi-sited fieldwork in several phases at ten salsa festivals in six European cities (see Table 1). I also interviewed chosen dancers in their dance studios in Zurich, Geneva and London in between festivals. In addition, I undertook two research trips to Havana in January 2014 and in August 2015 for a total of five weeks. I also included social media and particularly Facebook as a research “site”.

I chose the festivals in terms of their size, to include smaller and bigger events, as well as in terms of the featured dance styles. To allow for an understanding of change I went to two congresses more than once (Zurich and Berlin). I started with a congress I had easy access to due to my former involvement in salsa in Zurich (see below) as a preliminary field site in 2013. I then chose the subsequent congresses based on their size and the actors I wished to meet. The sometimes long intervals in between fieldwork allowed me to go over the data collected before that point and choose the next steps to take, on the basis of a “theoretical sampling” as developed in a grounded theory approach (further discussed in Sections 2.3.2 and 2.4.1). Their dates, the availability of flights and accommodation as well as the funding I was able

to obtain for specific events also influenced the selection of festivals and the two longer research trips to Cuba.

Table 1 The main research sites/events.

Event	Date
Salsafestival Zurich	22–24 February 2013
Mambo (On2) Festival, Munich	5–7 July 2013
Salsa Convention St. Gall	21–22 September 2013
Salsa Congress Berlin	4–6 October 2013
Dance schools, Havana	12 January–2 February 2014
On2 Salsa Congress, Milan	9–11 May 2014
Croatian Summer Salsa Festival, Rovinj	25 June–1 July 2014
Salsa Congress Berlin	2–6 October 2014
El Sol Salsa Festival, Warsaw	6–10 November 2014
Salsafestival Zurich	20–22 February 2015
Dance holiday, Havana	30 July–13 August 2015
Salsafestival Zurich	26–28 February 2016

An important characteristic of my field sites was their short-term character. Hannerz (2003: 210) points to the importance of temporary and sometimes short-lived sites in much contemporary ethnography (see also Pink and Morgan (2013) on short-term ethnography). In the present study, this was particularly the case of salsa congresses, which Kabir (2013) characterises as “ephemeral, itinerant, and non-local” (266). These events start on Friday in the afternoon and end on Sunday night or Monday morning with all guests departing. I experienced research at these events as extremely intense as I had to switch between various roles and research methods with practically no time to rest. At the same time, this intensity was also visible in the collected data. Knoblauch (2005) proposes the concept of “focused ethnography” to account for precisely the intensity of data such short-term ethnography may generate: “The short time period covered is compensated for by another type of

intensity: focused ethnographies are typically data intensive” (16).³⁵ My engagement with the salsa circuit encompassed more than just the short-term fieldwork, as I continued to take classes in my home town, maintained contact with other dancers and followed salsa debates not least through social media over an extended period of three years (for a similar point see also Pink and Morgan 2013).

Social media, particularly Facebook and YouTube videos, form integral part of the salsa circuit; I thus had to extend my ethnography from the events to the virtual space of the internet, which also became a field site of its own. Kozinets (2006) labels this approach “netnography” and defines virtual ethnography as “ethnography conducted on the Internet; a qualitative, interpretive research methodology that adapts the traditional, in-person ethnographic research techniques of anthropology to the study of online cultures and communities formed through computer-mediated communications” (135). Being engaged in a netnography had the advantage that I was able to stay “in the field” during the longer breaks between events. On the other hand, it is time-intense and generates an enormous amount of material, so I decided to use this material as background information and only included particularly relevant quotations and parts of discussions in my observation notes. These notes thus formed part of the analysed material.

The field of study hence included salsa events in several European cities, salsa studios, a dance holiday in Havana and, to a lesser degree, the internet. It also included my own body as the next section specifies, addressing the ways I conducted research at these events.

2.2 Dancing through the field: salsa ethnography

To better understand the workings of the salsa circuit, the ways specific hubs came into being and the practices of dance professionals and salsa students during such events, I conducted short-term ethnography at salsa events in European cities and Havana. I did not confine myself to observing practices but also participated in

³⁵ The short-term character of festivals is also addressed in scholarship on festivals. Picard and Robinson (2006) argue that festivals share similarities with tourism, as “a transitory phenomenon” and “limited in space and time” (3).

various degrees in the field (2.2.1) and included aspects of embodied research (2.2.2), all of which presumes the researcher's reflexivity in terms of her positionality (2.2.3).

2.2.1 Participant observation/observant participation

Participant observation is a prominent method in qualitative research to gain access to "what people do". It is defined as "the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the researcher setting" (Schensul and LeCompte 1999: 91). Such immersion raises several ethical questions; this section discusses my position as an insider-outsider, the ways I negotiated access to the field by taking several different roles, how these roles influenced my observations and how I gained informed consent from research participants.

My membership role in the salsa circuit had to be constantly renegotiated and oscillated between being an insider and an outsider, reminiscent of what Dwyer and Buckle (2009) term "the space between". Although I had previous experience in salsa dancing in local schools and at parties in Zurich I had never before participated in salsa congresses. This meant that my status as an insider in salsa in Zurich switched to the status of an outsider: although I had acquired a certain (embodied) knowledge and skills in moving in salsa spaces, the congress experience presented a whole new field for me. Based on the classic argument of anthropology, the researcher's distance may be fruitfully mobilised as a heuristic tool to analyse unknown phenomena. Indeed, the newness of salsa congresses was helpful in providing me with an outsider's perspective; simultaneously, my former involvement in salsa as a regular participant at local salsa events allowed for a specific way of participation.

Negotiating access to salsa congresses provided a first lesson about the salsa circuit. Considering ethical standards in qualitative research, particularly the issue of unintentional covert observation, I usually announced myself to congress organisers before the event to ask for permission to do research at the festival in question. The responses varied, with some organisers just accepting and others giving interested feedback and supporting me by providing me with a room to conduct the interviews. In the beginning of my research I tried to gain access to such events as a non-paying

researcher but I received only negative answers. This difficulty in accessing my field was thus my first lesson about the “rules of the game” (Bourdieu 1980b): there are certain conventions that everybody has to comply with. Respecting the logic of the salsa circuit also meant that I had to take the usual approach of participants, by paying the entry fee for the weekend or by volunteering for the festival. The latter was proposed to me by several organisers, whenever I told them that I was a researcher and wished to do research at their event. I thus tried both ways, which allowed me to gain different experiences related to different degrees of participation in the salsa circuit.

As a volunteer at one festival, I was responsible for the smooth processing of workshops in one room, at another I sold entry tickets in the lobby and sold dance shoes at a festival stall. At another festival I was invited to write an online review. All these activities provided me with a sense of the necessary workings and the organisational aspect of festivals, as well as access to dance professionals and festival participants who addressed me differently once they perceived me as an insider due to my “staff-badge”. I took notes of all these useful insights during such days or on the following day to keep track of these interactions. However, such work also necessitated time, which is precious especially in such short and intense fields as weekend-long festivals. Organising interviews was difficult for several reasons and balancing my researcher role with my engagement as a volunteer made it even more challenging. I thus decided to volunteer at some festivals in order to gain the insider perspective, and to pay the entry fee as a participant for the others so that I could schedule my own time and do interviews whenever a dancer was available.

A second challenge I faced was related to the methodological difficulties presented by the salsa events’ short-term character. Doing research at salsa congresses presented unforeseen challenges in terms of its intensity and physically demanding character. While reactions to my research project often generated amused comments about its “fun” character, a salsa festival is also a highly intense field for a researcher: “Research on site at a dance festival is actually hard work (while indeed being fun)”, as Kabir (2016) writes in her reflections about dance festival research. Indeed, after the first three-day event during which I had tried to participate in as

many dance classes as possible during the days, attend the show block and parties during the nights, plus interview dancers whenever they were available, I felt completely overwhelmed and exhausted. In short, I quickly realised that it was impossible to take on all these roles at the same time and try to observe everything. I therefore soon started to focus on specific aspects and processes that were particularly relevant for my study, which Spradley (1980: 34) terms “focused observation”: besides the general organisation of the salsa event, its participants and general logics, I was particularly interested in the ways dance professionals present themselves and their dancing in front of their students. I therefore chose to focus on the workshop situations, during which salsa dance instructors teach different levels and styles of dancing and interact with their students. After having obtained an oral consent from the workshop instructors, I participated in some of the workshops, while observing others with my notebook at hand, which allowed me to focus more on how things were said and demonstrated.

Access to festival participants proved to be easier to arrange than to dance professionals and I used any occasion to conduct informal ethnographic interviews with salsa dancers, while participating in workshops, spending time in the lobby of the hotels and joining dancers for lunch and dinner breaks. Such discussions provided me with background information about salsa festivals, the participants and the ways they perceived their dancing as well as the salsa dance professionals themselves. I also got to know some of my interview participants on such occasions. Throughout the research I tried to announce myself as an academic researcher and ask dancers for their consent to participate in the project.

I applied similar ethical standards for my research on Facebook. To address the tricky question of informed consent in online research, I used a special Facebook account, called “Joanna salsaresearch”, including a short explanation of my research project and interest in salsa dancers’ activities online. Facebook is the most important medium to exchange information about festivals, and is also used for advertising by salsa dance professionals. Using the same tool for my research, I opted for a tool “tailored as closely as possible to the specific issues, participants, and technological modalities” that I was studying (Garcia et al. 2009: 73). I thus observed

dancers' Facebook accounts and online discussions. In the one case in which I wanted to cite a longer statement made on Facebook, I contacted the person and thus gained informed consent to literally cite the material in this study.

Debates on the degree of the researcher's participation in a given field (and particularly in the anthropology of dance) have led to scholars arguing for a position of "observant participation" (Daniel 1995) rather than anthropology's more classic "participant observation" (see also Skinner 2010: 111). In this study, my position oscillated between the two poles, at moments pointing more towards the observation and at others more towards the participation, particularly in moments of dancing, as I will discuss in the next section. These methodological moves, a combination of different degrees of participation and observation, allowed me to have access to different embodied, verbalised and observed experiences and interactions (such as doing gender and ethnicity), and to gain a broader perspective of the ways salsa dance is commercialised and taught in the transnational salsa circuit.

2.2.2 Embodied research

Paralleling the "affective turn", a growing number of scholars in dance (Apprill 2005; Crosby 1997; Ness 1992; Sklar 2001), martial arts (Robitaille 2013) and sports (Wacquant 2004) have argued for a reintroduction of the researcher's own body into the research process. This recognition of the researcher's body as a tool in the research process is discussed in the literature as "dance ethnography" (Crosby 1997; Sklar 2000), "carnal sociology" (Wacquant 2004) or "embodied ethnography" (Wade 2011). These approaches vary considerably in their focus, ranging from the study of the senses to the experiences of movement as part of a wider cultural context. Phenomenology-inspired approaches are interested in studying sensation itself (see eg Ness 1992; Novack 1990). Sklar (2000), for example, writes: "While it has been traditional practice to erase the researcher's body from the ethnographic text, "subjective" bodily engagement is tacit in the process of trying to make sense of another's somatic knowledge. There is no other way to approach the felt dimensions of movement experience than through the researcher's own body" (71).

Other dance ethnographers propose a research methodology that uses the researcher's "embodied knowledge" as a key research tool, awarding it equal standing with theoretical knowledge (Crosby 1997: 75). Crosby (1997) states that a "unique ethnographic voice" can "arise from a dancer's way of knowing and meaning-making" (67). Similarly, the sociology of the body à la Wacquant (2015) emphasises the researcher's apprenticeship of or involvement in a bodily practice in order to generate data and acquire another type of knowledge. In his discussion of "enactive ethnography", Wacquant (2015) states: "Methodically deploying one's body as an intelligent instrument of practical knowledge production speeds up the acquisition of basic social competency – the operant capacity to feel, think, and act like a Whatever among the WhatEVERs" (7). While some dance ethnographers, phenomenology-inspired approaches and the cited "enactive ethnography" are convinced of the necessity of researchers' embodied experiences to write a meaningful ethnography of the bodily practice in question, this approach has also been questioned as resulting "in too limited a personal view, running the risk of becoming self-indulgent" (Buckland 2010: 340). Therefore, in this study, I used a combination of an embodied research strategy with participant observation/observant participation and semi-structured interviews, which proved particularly fruitful, as a single focus on either the dancing or the interviews would not have allowed me to generate the insights required for this research. Hutchinson (2009) makes a similar point, arguing that "the subjective experience of the dancer often throws the objective observation of the ethnographer into question, though taking the two views together is necessary for understanding dance as both a visual art and a corporeal sensation" (385).

Taking part in dancing activities (mainly workshops and parties) and acquiring a certain skill level in different salsa dance styles was a helpful research strategy in several ways.³⁶ First, it allowed me to understand the effects of different pedagogical techniques and to experience "how it feels" to dance salsa, or in other words, to learn "a dancer's way of knowing" (Crosby 1997). In her discussion of dance ethnography,

³⁶ I had taken several salsa classes and acquired an intermediate level of salsa dancing (as a follower) before I started the research for this project. I was therefore able to participate in most of the workshops in the role of the follower.

Crosby (1997) reports how she developed shared meanings with her fellow dancers through her own bodily movements. Similar to the process of apprenticeship Crosby describes, I developed a sense of what many dancers had told me: that connection between dance partners and improvisation were key aspects of competence in (social) salsa dancing. As I developed an understanding of these concepts through my own moving body, it contrasted clearly with some theoretical arguments, particularly in terms of the gendered roles. For some of my research questions, I therefore used my own embodied experiences as a critical departure point for further exploration with other dancers during the interviews (for a similar strategy, see Törnqvist 2013: 248; see also McClure 2015). My personal experience thus necessarily informed my understanding of the salsa circuit, but this specific and highly subjective experience was not the focus of this study. Instead, my embodied experiences and emotional engagement were mobilised as a mode of inquiry, which helped me to gain new insights and develop my theoretical reflection.

A second and related advantage of developing and using dance skills myself became particularly clear at specific interview moments, in which my interviewees got up and started dancing to illustrate a point they were making, for example in explaining the difference of salsa styles. Wulff (2013) accounts for the same experience in her study with ballet dancers, and explains: “dancers are trained to talk with their bodies” (166). Though I had to find strategies to “translate” this “body talk” into spoken (and later transcribed) words during the interview, my own involvement in dancing meant that I could understand what dancers were referring to. Furthermore, dancers recognised what Wulff (2013) describes as a “dance sensibility in my body” (174). The salsa dancers knew that I was dancing myself and thus built on this common understanding of embodied knowledge.

A third advantage of my dancing was that I could use it as a methodological tool: it proved a successful strategy in approaching interview participants, particularly festival participants at events but also salsa holiday participants and teachers during my two stays in Havana. In this way, the shared dancing experience not only offered a convenient and conventional mode of getting in contact with research participants, but the dancing, a form of “embodied collaboration” (Chrysagis and Karampampas

2017: 11), was also helpful in building rapport and creating a sense of connection. As Skinner (2010) argues in a methodological discussion of what he terms “dance interview”: “Because we had danced, there was a commonly shared notion – or assumption – between us that we knew each other” (118). Obviously salsa’s gendered roles proved to be a limitation to this approach, as I almost exclusively danced with male dancers during salsa workshops and parties. My skills in leading were too basic to invite other (female or male) followers to dance with me (see more on the gendering of leader and follower roles in Chapter 5). Despite this limitation, participating in workshops and at parties as a salsa dancer enabled me to meet and discuss with female dancers between two dances. I found it a beneficial approach to participate in workshops to get a sense of the classes in the role of a female follower, to then reflect on this particular role and later to discuss aspects of this experience in the interviews.

2.2.3 Reflexivity and the politics of location

As anthropological debates on the researcher’s positioning and reflexivity have highlighted, doing participant and embodied research demands enforced reflexivity. As the researcher is inevitably part of what is being studied, she is involved in the production of knowledge. The researcher’s social positioning thereby influences the access to specific insights but less to others.

Therefore, the last point I wish to discuss here is what feminist activist Rich (1986) termed the “politics of location”. Explaining this now popular concept in gender studies and beyond, Davis (2018a) remarks: “Everyone is located somewhere and our locations invariably shape not only how we view the world, but how the world views us” (641). In a research encounter between the researcher and the research participants, both parts are located socially. The literature suggests discussions of asymmetries in research encounters along the lines of gender, class, ethnicity or race, as well as nationality, sexuality, age, ability or religion. Accordingly, in feminist studies, the power relations are usually seen to be asymmetrical in favour of the researcher. However, as Ryen (2004) notes, in some interview settings, it can be the inverse, in her case when doing “elite interviews with businessmen in big companies”

(233). Doing research in the salsa circuit required the navigation and acknowledgement of a complex set of locations: in addition to the positioning asymmetries, there is a specific status hierarchy inside the salsa circuit that proved influential in the ways I was perceived by my interviewees.

Evidently, my encounters with salsa dancers were shaped not only by my gender and ethnicity but also by my different roles inside the salsa circuit, oscillating between salsa student/dancer, event volunteer, and observer/interviewer. Dancers reacted differently when they perceived me as a (female) salsa student, a member of an event organisation or a researcher. These different roles also provided me access to different groups of actors. This became particularly clear to me when an event organiser reacted in very different ways when he saw me in a workshop at one event and then saw me standing behind the organisation desk of another event, when he suddenly showed more interest in me. The prevalent distinction between salsa *artist* and salsa *student* also influenced the ways I could (or could not) access salsa dance professionals who are often endowed with high symbolic capital and presented as *stars*. In the context of a salsa congress, this meant that in interview situations, these individuals perceived me as one of their students, a status position endowed with low symbolic value, reminiscent of Ryen's (2004) "elite interviews".³⁷ Dealing with the status hierarchies inside the salsa circuit, and negotiating access to (the experiences of) self-proclaimed *stars* therefore proved more complex and less straightforward than I had imagined before starting the interviews. I first needed to establish rapport with interviewees.

Acknowledging my location also entailed critically reflecting on the ways my own (privileged) position influenced the research project as a whole and the relationships I built during the study. As Davis (2018a) states, it is important to acknowledge how "identifications and affiliations come into play in a particular research context" (641). As a white Swiss national working at a university I had access to travel in ways some of my research participants never could. The Swiss passport allows for visa-free

³⁷ Dancers thus presented themselves and their stories in the ways they would use for a salsa student. For example, one dancer started to teach me about the history of salsa, and another gave me an account of his biography using exactly the same words written on his personal website (the specific "narrative habitus" (Lipphardt 2015) of artists is further discussed in Section 2.3.3).

travelling to almost any country and although I was not a grant-supported PhD student, I was able to obtain funding for parts of the travel costs,³⁸ and was able to cover the remaining research costs thanks to the salary of my part-time job as a teaching assistant at the university.

As a young, blond, female European I was approached in specific ways in the salsa circuit, which granted access to certain insights (such as the follower role in dancing) and limited access to others. This was the case particularly during the research in Cuba. Due to ethical reasons of taking an equal approach to all my research participants, I had decided to access the Cuban salsa schools in the same way as most of the European salsa events: in the role of a paying student-and-researcher. This role allowed me to access a specific group of actors, mainly other European salsa tourists, and I thus gained insights into the salsa tourist experience, as I was perceived and approached as one of the affluent, female European (salsa) tourists in Havana (for a similar point see also Törnqvist 2013: 250). For example, I was approached several times on the street and invited to take salsa lessons; I also discussed the role of “taxi-dancers” and the way they engaged with tourists with other salsa tourists. These experiences allowed for insights I would not have made without my embodied engagement in salsa during the research. In contrast, the experiences of dance professionals in Cuba were harder to access, not only due to my limited knowledge of Spanish, but also due to our unequal access to mobility and economic capital, which further accentuated the “local/tourist” divide. This “encompassing and resilient identification of any foreigner as tourist” (Simoni 2016: 23) informed the kind of access I had to Cuban dancers. On my second research stay I therefore chose another strategy, by “following” a ten-day organised holiday group, during which I was able to build up rapport with a small number of dance teachers – through my embodied participation in the group – and in a second step ask for an interview, a strategy that was more adapted to the nature of the field in Havana.

³⁸ Thanks to several research grants (from the Office of Equal Opportunity and the Donation Funds of the Swiss National Science Foundation at the University of Neuchâtel, as well as the Graduate School Gender Studies at the University of Bern), I was able to cover some of the travel and accommodation costs.

As this discussion illustrates, the researcher's (privileged) multiple and embodied locations shape the encounters during the research and the project as a whole. My fieldwork notes therefore contain observations of and emotional responses to specific encounters during the research process, which I incorporated in the analysis by treating them as data for my research. In this way, I included a reflexive stance about my position during the research process, the analysis and in the writing of this text.

2.3 Conducting qualitative interviews

This study builds on observation notes as well as different types of interviews, ranging from the already mentioned open ethnographic interviews to semi-structured, "problem-centred interviews" inspired by Witzel (2000). To better understand dancers' own viewpoints on their careers, the strategies they employed to improve their situation and the ways actors in the salsa circuit make sense of and give meaning to their doings, I conducted qualitative, semi-structured interviews. While Parts I and II of this thesis are based on the observational notes and interview material, Part III on salsa dance professionals' careers builds exclusively on the transcribed interview material.

This section presents a discussion of the interview guides (2.3.1), the sampling strategy and a summary of the interview participants (2.3.2) as well as a discussion of the challenges faced and ethical questions raised in the interviews with salsa dancers (2.3.3).

2.3.1 Semi-structured, problem-centred interviews

Before I met the research participants, I prepared an interview guide for semi-structured, problem-centred interviews (Witzel 2000), an interview type featuring an open question in the beginning with ad-hoc questions to elaborate on mentioned topics followed by a set of pre-established, more specific questions focusing on a topic. This interview type was best suited to my field with its time restrictions, as it allowed me to combine a less structured part, in which interviewees could develop

their “salsa biography”, with pre-formulated questions regarding their own perspectives on certain aspects of salsa.

I developed two different interview guides (see Appendix I), one for what I came to term “salsa dance professionals”, focusing on questions around their career, and another for salsa event participants (“the students”), focusing on their involvement in salsa and questions of gender and ethnicity, with some overlapping parts and additional questions for event organisers. I adapted the interview questions to the interviewee and circumstances of the interview, including for example observations I had made during an earlier workshop with that individual. I used the guide during the interviews as a reminder of important topics and the themes I wished to cover, what Witzel (2000) calls a “background film”, while allowing new topics and questions to emerge. After every interview I wrote a postscript, including new insights that occurred during the interview and observations regarding the interview situation. These postscripts were later used as memos and thus formed part of the analysis.

I usually conducted one formal interview with every dancer, which allowed me to include a variety of trajectories, career paths and perspectives. In three cases I was able to meet salsa dance professionals twice, which let us continue the interview after an interruption and discuss some points further. On two occasions dance professionals insisted on doing the interview as a couple. I thus conducted the interview with two participants, following the same guide as the one for individual interviews. The setting of a couple interview had the disadvantage of time pressure; furthermore, some questions remained unaddressed, as the dancer’s partner was present. However, as Bjornholt and Farstad (2012) argue, doing joint couple interviews also has advantages. In both cases, the dancers were partners in life and dance, so it allowed me to observe the interactions between interviewees, which was insightful in terms of gendered roles in a dance couple (for example, it made me realise the extent to which female dancers were responsible for the marketing, while male dancers were responsible for the teaching). The interview length varied from 50 minutes up to two hours, but for reasons related to the availability of dance

professionals, the interviews with this first group of actors were usually shorter than the ones with salsa students.

Most of the interviews at salsa congresses were conducted in English. Interviews outside the festival context and informal interviews during the events were also conducted in (Swiss) German, French and Italian, as those were the languages I spoke at the beginning of the project. While having only basic knowledge of Spanish at the beginning of the project, I studied Spanish during this research and felt confident enough to conduct some of the interviews in Cuba in Spanish. Nevertheless I realised my linguistic limits, particularly during observations in Havana, when dancers were making jokes.

2.3.2 Sampling and interview participants

Implementing the theoretical reflections presented in Chapter 1, I chose the research participants for this study based on an entry through salsa events. Through this sampling strategy I was able to include a range of situations and diverse people in terms of origin, ethnicity and dance style and thus avoid “groupist” (Brubaker 2002) interpretations. However, I did not aim to generate a representative sample. Instead, the interview participants for this study were selected step-by-step, drawing on a theoretical sampling approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Following this approach, cases are chosen based on their relevance rather than their representativeness (Flick 2014: 173). “Theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. This process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory” (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 45). I thus selected research participants “according to their (expected) level of new insights for the developing theory” (Flick 2014: 171) during the process of collecting and interpreting the material. Inspired by a grounded theory approach, the research process was informed by a back-and-forth movement between data analysis and sample development. Cases were selected considering the criteria of maximal variation in the sample (Becker 1998), in terms of different positions in the salsa circuit, including salsa dance professionals at different levels of

their career, dance students and, to a lesser extent, event organisers. Furthermore, based on the theoretical assumptions discussed in Chapter 1, cases were varied in regard to gender and nationality/origin country. As with all qualitative research projects, practical issues and the criterion of convenience also played into the sampling strategy: for example, I did the first round of interviews with three dancers I had already met before starting this study, mobilising previously existing contacts thanks to my own preliminary involvement in salsa.

In later phases of the project the choices were more theoretically informed, as I tried to maximise the variation and also to include individuals that were usually presented as being outside the salsa circuit: the tendency of “groupism” is not only present in studies on migration or “ethnic groups” as discussed above, but also in studies on so-called “subcultures”, as Schulze (2015) has demonstrated. Just taking a supposed “transnational community” of salsa dancers as a starting point for research therefore bears the risk of a reification of group boundaries and homogenisation of the group. I tried to counter this risk by including dancers based in Cuba, who had fewer possibilities to participate in the salsa circuit. As already discussed, the languages I speak also influenced the sampling, as I decided to conduct all the interviews myself, and thus focused on dancers speaking English, German, French, Italian or Spanish. Therefore, English- and German-speaking dancers are overrepresented among the interviewees.

With a sampling strategy including such diverse cases and axes of differentiation and a field as open as the salsa circuit, there exists a latent danger of dispersion in too many different directions, a phenomenon researchers of intersectionality (Villa 2010) and “superdiversity” (Meissner 2015) have also noticed. I was thus presented with the difficulty of deciding when to stop doing interviews. Glaser and Strauss (1967: 61) suggest the criterion of “theoretical saturation” for judging when to stop integrating further cases. As Flick (2014) summarises: “Sampling and integrating further material is finished when the ‘theoretical saturation’ of a category of group of cases has been reached (i.e., nothing new emerges any more)” (172). While I found this criterion

helpful in regard to some of the analysed aspects of the field, it was less applicable to others.³⁹

A total of 36 interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed. Table 2 specifies the interviewed dancers' positions inside the salsa circuit, while the table in Appendix II provides more information about the interviewed dancers as well as the interview situation: dancer's age, country of birth, their primary location at the time of the interview, as well as the language of the interview.

Table 2 Interview participants' position in the salsa circuit.

	Salsa professional	Holiday or festival participant	Organiser
Female	12	5	2
Male	11	5	1
Total	23	10	3

The salsa dance professionals include full-time dancers and instructors at different stages of their career, with a range of educational backgrounds (some with a professional dance education, others without) and based in Europe and/or Cuba. Additionally, some of them teach in their own salsa schools and are thus also studio owners, while others are freelancers. The festival and holiday attendees were experienced salsa dancers, some of whom teach and perform salsa occasionally. Dancers ranged in age from their twenties to their mid-fifties. The interviewees' origin countries included countries in Europe, the Caribbean, North America and Asia. The interviews were transcribed in their original language, and I translated the quotations after I had chosen them for further exploration in the text. All names are pseudonyms and throughout the analysis I have changed personal details as well as places and countries to preserve anonymity.

³⁹ I thus followed Becker who, building on Garfinkel (1967), argues that "social science is, after all, a 'practical activity,' which is to say, among other things, that the work has to get finished sometime" (Becker 1998: 75).

2.3.3 Challenges and ethics in interviewing salsa dancers

Gaining access to and organising interviews with salsa dance students was rendered easy through their willingness to talk in length about salsa dancing, a thing they love to do. Davis (2015a: 53) has noted the same for her study with tango dancers. Preliminary discussions with an event organiser, on the other hand, made me again realise the importance of a certain exchange logic for some actors in the salsa circuit: he wanted to exchange an interview for information I (supposedly) had about preferred dance styles among salsa students. As I was unable to give him the requested statistical data, he declined an interview. To avoid further (mis)understandings of my research project, I tried to reframe the way I approached potential interview partners, which proved successful. However, accessing *travelling artists* and particularly interviewing them for more than an hour proved more challenging; a fact related not least to the status asymmetries described above. Additionally, during the events, salsa dance professionals were often in a hurry, had to teach a workshop, give a private lesson or rehearse for a performance, and sometimes found it difficult to make time for an interview. I thus changed strategies: doing the interviews on the last day of the event or in the evening, after the teaching was over, proved helpful. I also met some of my interview participants outside of the festival context, when practical considerations allowed, for example in a dance studio or café in Swiss cities or during a longer stay in London. Finally, I had to accept the limited time dancers were ready to offer me and decided to include interviews in my analysis that are sometimes shorter and lacking some information.⁴⁰

Dance professionals are accustomed to being filmed or interviewed for various reasons during a festival. Interviews present an opportunity for dance professionals to narrate their own successful story and reaffirm their acknowledged position in the salsa circuit through a performance of a public persona. Particularly in the beginning

⁴⁰ Due to the time constraints in the interviews with salsa dance professionals, I decided against a systematic investigation of ego-centric networks. This interview type would have allowed for a closer exploration of the ways dance professionals build social networks and mobilise resources through their relationships with others. Instead of the time-consuming tool of a network interview guide with a name generator and a name interpreter (see Dahinden 2005), I opted for an inclusion of some questions about dancers' relationships with various actors inside the salsa circuit.

of my research project, I felt that dance professionals were telling me a tailored version of their successful career, including very positive accounts of their mobile lifestyles, for example. Although I emphasised that I was also interested in the hardship the constant travelling could represent, dancers rarely mentioned difficulties and instead kept repeating the “tale of mobility” as equivalent to success. Following a similar observation, Lipphardt (2015) discusses the specific “narrative habitus” of the highly mobile artists she interviewed. As she claims, in professional fields in which mobility is highly valued and related to artists’ status, there are specific ways to speak about this mobility (Lipphardt 2015: 65). Because artists’ narrations in interviews serve their self-presentation as public persona, they spoke in the same ways in the research interview, and only after several slightly frustrating interview experiences did I realise that my questions remained unanswered due to the representation of mobility as measuring a dance professional’s success among the specific group of people I interviewed. Furthermore, as artists have to maintain their public image, they sometimes fear that the interview could lead to personal details being spread to a wider public – what Lipphardt (2015: 66) describes as the dilemma of public image.

I thus had to find ways to circumvent this dilemma and engage dancers in telling me less standardised versions of their careers. Clarifying from the very beginning which type of interview I was doing was helpful, specifying not only the duration but also the wider context of the study as an academic research project. I thus insisted on its difference from other types of interviews.

Wulff (2013) had to deal with a similar difficulty in her study on famous writers and she used a similar strategy to interview writers who were “on guard”. As she writes, she has “to make them understand that I will be ethical when I write and not discuss sensitive personal or professional circumstances such as declines in careers or failing to win prizes after having been short-listed” (Wulff 2013: 168). In this study, I also guaranteed the anonymity of every research participant, including pseudonyms and the change of personal details, which could lead to an identification of the respective dancer. After these additions, the interviews became more focused on the personal

stories than the public persona, and most of the salsa dance professionals I asked agreed to give me an interview on these terms.

Finally, interviews are interactional encounters: “Each interview context is one of interaction and relation, and the result is as much a product of this social dynamic as it is the product of accurate accounts and replies” (Fontana and Frey 2005: 699). The “results” of interview situations, namely the data on which the further argument is constructed, thus “emerge” from an interaction between a researcher and a research participant. Hence, the researcher is part of the production of knowledge, which is always situated. During the interviews and also the data analysis I tried to take into account the specific situation of the interview, for example under time-pressure at an event, and the way I was perceived by others, including the politics of location discussed above.

2.4 Analysing data

The field notes together with the transcribed interviews formed the basis of the data for this study. These data were produced and constructed by the researcher in the field, as described by Charmaz (2006: 10). To organise, analyse and interpret this material, I chose an approach inspired by grounded theory analysis (Charmaz 2001, 2006; Glaser and Strauss 1967) and “thematic coding” (Flick 2014), extended with a theoretically driven reading of the emerging codes. I thus combined a first, data-driven inductive analysis with a second, more deductive approach to my empirical data (see Bilge (2009) and Moret (2015) for a similar discussion of a “two-step hybrid approach” to data analysis). This section details the ways I proceeded in the data analysis (2.4.1), explicating the multiple steps I took to arrive at the written presentation of my interpretations (2.4.2).

2.4.1 Codes and categories

To analyse the data, an inductive approach was used in a first step, inspired by grounded theory methods. I wanted to understand salsa dancers’ logics and meaning and thus let categories “emerge” from my data. Due to grounded theory’s back-and-forth movement between fieldwork and analysis, I was engaged in “memo writing” as

a first analytical step throughout the research project. Memos are used to join data such as illustrative interview excerpts with first interpretations and provide the foundation for the written study (Charmaz 2001: 687). These early interpretations were also the basis on which I decided what to include next in my study, as discussed above.

Once the fieldwork was finished, I started to organise and group the complete data with the help of codes, using the computer software MaxQda. Here coding is “understood as representing the operations by which data are broken down, conceptualised, and put back together in new ways” (Flick 2014: 404). In a first phase of “open coding” (Strauss and Corbin 1990; what Charmaz (2006) terms “initial coding”) I used “in vivo codes” taken from interviewees’ expressions. For example, in one of my first interviews, the interviewee spoke about her “passion” for salsa, and this became the code for all dancers speaking about “magic moments” and emotional attachment to their dancing practice. I also used “descriptive codes” (Saldaña 2009: 3) to summarise the primary topic of an excerpt, such as “learning salsa”, which was the code for all passages in which someone talked about their learning experiences. Though this first coding step was mainly done using an inductive logic to let codes “emerge”, it is important to keep in mind that “our analysis and interpretation – our study’s findings – will reflect the constructs, concepts, language, models, and theories that structured the study in the first place” (Merriam 1998: 48). The coding researcher is not a *tabula rasa* (see also Witzel 2000) and I also included “constructed codes” (Flick 2014: 406), which built on the read literature, as well as the theoretical and analytical interests of this study, and thus encompassed pre-existing theories; nevertheless, these codes were used to qualify processes that were emerging from the data. As an example of this last type of code, I coded all quotations talking about the ways dancers became “hooked” and changed their lives due to salsa with the code “conversion story”, a notion borrowed from Quayson (2014) (see Chapter 3).

In a second coding phase, I grouped several codes together to form more abstract “coding families” (Glaser 1978) or “categories” (Saldaña 2009). I thus organised similarly coded data into categories because they shared some characteristics. For

example, the category “performing authenticity” comprised codes such as “learning salsa”, “teaching” and “salsa dance origins”. These categories were then used to build the structure and construct the argument of this study. In this process, I relied not only on the coding software but also used large sheets of paper, coloured pens and sticky notes to draw mind maps,⁴¹ and to arrange and rearrange the categories and their codes.

2.4.2 Writing and interpreting data

The grounded theory-inspired, mainly inductive approach to coding thus allowed me to identify emerging categories and themes in the data. However, coding and reorganising my data in this way had one shortcoming: after the two coding phases I found myself with my data all “broken down” and segmented. In the transversal analysis I had lost the overarching picture of salsa dance professionals’ career patterns. To overcome this limitation in the process of analysis, I opted for a deepening analysis of single cases, exclusively based on the interviews with salsa dance professionals – which eventually became the foundation of Part III of this study. Moret (2015) describes a similar difficulty after the use of theoretical coding, arguing that “this transversal analysis had made me lose sight of my respondents’ individual trajectories and biographies as coherent wholes” (87). While she employed a “biographical case reconstruction method” that fitted the types of interviews she had conducted, I reanalysed the interviews with salsa dance professionals on the basis of the procedure of a “thematic coding” (Flick 2014). Hence writing became an important tool in the analysis. I thus produced short descriptions of each case, including a “motto of the case” (a statement typical for the interview) and a reconstruction of each dancer’s careers. Contrary to the first method, this approach helps to “preserve and elucidate the relations between meanings that the respective person presents concerning the topic of the study” (Flick 2014: 425). Following this approach, a common “thematic structure” of analysis

⁴¹ Figure 1 in Section 1.4.1 is the result of such drawing, based on Mueller’s (2016) call to use modelling tools “to move beyond ethnography’s predominantly verbal and scriptocentric tradition” (98).

was established, which allowed comparison between the biographical elements and career trajectories of salsa dance professionals. I was thus able to grasp each interview separately as a case and to better understand salsa dance professionals' practices and their meanings.

During this case-by-case reading of the careers, I established the thematic structure of three status passages: becoming a salsa dance professional, access to the European salsa circuit, and building up reputation. As this approach was an important step in the development of my analysis, I decided to retain this logic for the presentation of my findings in the writing of this study. The empirical part of this study thus includes a presentation of the reconstruction of the careers of three salsa dance professionals (as well as a transversal discussion of three status passages, meaning specific elements in those careers, in more detail). I deliberately selected three key individuals whose cases represented particularly rich information. I chose to portray these three dance professionals because they each embody one of the categories of dance professionals made relevant in the circuit (*Latino*, *Cuban* and *European*). Furthermore, the chosen stories and experiences illustrate very well those of other salsa dance professionals and were therefore prominently included throughout the analysis of Part III.

Once the material was coded with the two described methods, I started to write first drafts of chapters, still exclusively grounded on my interpretation of the material. Revising these early drafts became an important step in the analysis, as it was mainly in this writing process that I used existing concepts and theories to look at my data from another perspective. As Charmaz (2006: 154) suggests, this writing and rewriting helps to bring out implicit arguments and critically examine the relations between codes, as well as to make links with extant literatures. The presentation of my arguments was thus developed in the writing process, which became part of the analysis. This process was characterised by a back-and-forth movement between the construction of the text, my data and extant literature and concepts. In other words, the first inductive interpretation of my data was followed by a second, more deductive reading (through writing), as I included the theoretical concepts presented in Chapter 1.

Including such a theoretically-driven reading of data and thus imposing specific analytical categories onto the data may seem at odds with more inductive research methodologies, a difficulty Bilge (2009) discusses for the use of “intersectionality” in her inductive research. She proposes to combine both approaches by dividing the analytical process into two levels, a first “data-oriented inductive approach” and a second “theory-oriented deductive approach” (Bilge 2009: 5). In a similar way, only in a second step did I analyse aspects of the cases through the lens of Bourdieu’s capital theory and a regimes-of-mobility approach, thus introducing analytical elements not always mentioned by my research participants, yet which still influence their experiences. By looking at the careers diachronically and through a specific theoretical perspective, the importance of structuring elements became more visible, such as unequal access to certain resources and thus different opportunities for career development.

This multi-step analysis, including several methods of coding, inductive and deductive logics, computer software and colourful sticky notes as well as different writing techniques at different stages, led to the interpretations presented in this study.

Chapter 3 The salsa circuit: an empirical introduction

This chapter offers a contextual, empirically grounded and descriptive introduction to the salsa circuit, which sets the background for the analysis in the subsequent chapters of this study. As already described in Chapter 1, I conceptualise the salsa circuit as consisting of several hubs, related through the circulation of people, imaginaries, dance movements, conventions and affects. Taking this definition of the salsa circuit as a starting point, this chapter sets out to present the salsa circuit in terms of its hubs and its circulation. Drawing on my data as well as the available literature, it first introduces the formation of the salsa circuit from a European perspective, which is often glossed over in studies on salsa (3.1). Second, it delivers a descriptive account of two of salsa's hubs – the salsa congresses and the space of salsa tourism in Havana – which both formed important entry points into the salsa circuit during the empirical research for this study (3.2).

The third part of this chapter focuses on the empirical data, analysing the circulation of people and a specific imaginary of salsa (3.3). It describes one group of the circulating actors, whose interest and economic capital keep the salsa circuit going: the self-declared *salsa addicts* (salsa students and festival participants). It analyses the imaginary of salsa as the *Esperanto of the body*, which builds the common ground for today's salsa dancers and forms part of salsa's "affective economy", a notion I develop below.⁴²

3.1 The formation of the (European) salsa circuit

As the discussion of the literature on salsa dance in Chapter 1 shows, salsa's "transnational moves" (Pietrobruno 2006) have led to it being an urban phenomenon with the establishment of salsa dance studios, dancing nights and congresses in many cities in North America, Europe and parts of Asia. Most literature discusses the development of salsa dance in North America, leaving aside

⁴² Throughout this thesis I will use the notion salsa dancer to include all people dancing salsa, regardless of their status in the salsa circuit. When a distinction between professionals and non-professionals is made, I use the term salsa dance professionals or instructors for actors of the first category, salsa students or festival participants for the latter.

alternative routes and circulations of salsa and its dancers. This chapter therefore considers the salsa circuit from a European perspective, as one possible alternative. As it argues, the European salsa circuit is of major importance for many of the new salsa dance professionals, or *travelling artists*, including dancers born in Cuba (see Picture 4).

I will first turn to the establishment of local salsa scenes in European cities (3.1.1) before discussing ways salsa became a profession through its commercialisation (3.1.2).



Picture 4 Flyer Salsa Festival Hamburg 2013.

3.1.1 Salsa studios and local *salsa scenes*

Wieschiolek (2003: 122) describes a “salsa boom” in Europe during the 1990s and 2000s, and suggests that salsa’s popularity started in London, then proceeded to the continent and later to Eastern Europe. Although salsa’s routes are arguably less linear than in this version of its dissemination, the dancers I met often mentioned a similar timescale for the early establishment of salsa studios in Western Europe during the 1990s and in Eastern Europe during the 2000s (see also Pušnik and Sicherl (2010: 111) who state that salsa arrived in Slovenia in the early 2000s).

In the dissemination of salsa, individual dancers played an important role, some of them contributing to build up localised salsa dance *scenes* in various European cities during the 1990s and 2000s. Early salsa teachers in European cities in the 1990s had often migrated from Cuba, Colombia or Venezuela, as my interview partners told me when asked about their first salsa experiences. According to Llano (2014), Cubans were the first to teach salsa in Spain: Most of them had professional dance training, had participated in dance companies, and had toured in Europe, principally Italy, and then remained in Europe” (Llano 2014: 189). Others had no professional dance training but taught the steps they had learned in family contexts or with teachers they met in Europe. A dancer who danced in London during the 1990s and early 2000s remembers how he started to dance *Cuban salsa* taught by Latin Americans:

I think way back in 1998 when it was Cuban, we didn’t even think Americans did salsa. Most people didn’t think Americans did salsa [...] which is strange: even though a lot of the music we were listening to was out of America. [...] As we knew it’s Cuban, [...] because of all the Cuban or South American people that lived in London, mainly Cubans, that’s what we learned. [...] And then, where we knew was when On1 came to the UK. I think On1 probably came to the UK, in 2000 or 2001 [...] Then we knew about LA-style, [...] And I think maybe two or three years after that, I definitely remember in 2003, 20004, then On2 became the new craze. (Abod)

From the perspective of European salsa dancers in the 1990s and early 2000s, salsa was seen as a Cuban or Latin American dance practice and not related to the US in any way – a completely different vision from the one described in Chapter 1, according to which New York is named as the birthplace of salsa. While the debate

over ownership of salsa in the US was mainly between Cubans and Puerto Ricans (see Manuel 1994 and Singer 1983), in Europe salsa was generally seen as Cuban. The strong presence of Cuban and other Latin American salsa teachers at that time in Europe (and the absence of Puerto Rican salsa teachers) thus led to a very different image of salsa dancing from the political identity project of mainly Puerto Rican immigrants in the US and particularly New York. The different vision of salsa's origins seems to have led to an expansion of *Cuban salsa* in Europe.

It was only in the early 2000s and with the emergence of salsa congresses, that dancers based in the USA, who had already formed dance companies and built up dance studios, started to be invited to Europe to teach workshops and perform. As McMains (2015: 268) argues, in the early days of professional salsa dancers' travelling from the USA to Europe, the web-presence of a few salsa dance professionals played a crucial role for their success among European dancers, who already followed them on their websites and now invited them to teach their "new" styles of salsa dancing (New York, LA, distinguished in On1 and On2). According to McMains (2015: 290), particularly female dancers were able to capitalise on the new possibilities the internet offered, as they were the first to sell instructional salsa videos online and use online journalism (even before blogs existed), thus building their reputation.

The individual entrepreneurship, sometimes related to migratory trajectories, also led to different regional trends in salsa dancing in Europe. Thus there are cities where only one salsa style is danced, due to the local salsa studio's offering. In other cities, salsa studios of different styles compete for their share of students, thereby developing individual stylistic variations as the different salsa dance styles are open to reinterpretation and influences of other dance movements. As Wieschiolek (2013) writes: "Today salsa has become internationalised to such an extent that it can no longer be associated with any one country or city. In Cuba, Miami, Colombia and West Africa new trends and styles developed in addition to the ones of the previous centres in New York and Puerto Rico" (121). The picture of "local" salsa scenes and the importance of individuals working as driving forces is thus highly diverse – a fact that clearly distinguishes salsa dance commerce from other dance worlds, for example standardised ballroom with its regulations and governing organisations

such as the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing.⁴³ In addition, the otherwise common practice of dance franchising, including specific teaching procedures and manuals to regulate teachers, has not been pursued in salsa. The informal character of the salsa circuit thus leaves room for individual strategies of economic entrepreneurship, as discussed throughout this thesis.

Nowadays many of the numerous salsa studios are connected to the salsa congresses and dance styles taught and performed at congresses, either through the travelling of the teachers (and sometimes students) to congresses, the invitation of guest teachers to schools or the circulation of dance instruction DVDs and YouTube videos to learn the latest moves.

3.1.2 The commercialisation of salsa

With the formation of the salsa circuit, a new group of salsa dance professionals came into being, travelling to events to teach and perform. Some of the US-based dancers moved permanently to a European country as they soon realised that there existed a gap in the market. Besides the aforementioned exchange between dance schools in London and New York, Milan became an important salsa hub. Milan-based dance school owners worked with teachers formerly based in the US, which, as Borland (2009: 470) notes, “resulted in the development of a migratory stream of instructors from New Jersey to Italy”. Marcos, a salsa dance professional who travels worldwide (his story will be introduced further in Part III), was convinced that European festivals are highly relevant for salsa dance professionals previously based in the US or elsewhere:

Marcos: You can see there are so many [salsa] artists moving away from the United States or any other places and coming to Europe. Because somehow, Europe is a place where... Europeans value art more [...] And it's very important in general, because if it

⁴³ Salsa is not the first so-called Latin dance to be commercialised. Nevertheless, as McMains (2015) argues, the accessibility of salsa videos online makes it practically impossible that there could be a single source that becomes the regulating authority. “Previously, North American students of Latin dance learned from a dance teacher sanctioned by one of the ballroom dance industry's regulating bodies; now, online consumers actively take control of their own dance education” (McMains 2015: 280). See also Pietrobruno (2012) on the importance of YouTube dance videos “as a source of popular global knowledge” (113).

wasn't for many festivals, here in Europe, many artists would have to work in McDonald's or something, you know? It is like that.

Joanna: So is Europe the most important market for artists?

Marcos: Well, yes. Europe has nowadays the highest quality. More than the US. I mean, some of the best artists are here. Just go to Italy, just Milano, you find a bunch of great teams, and many of them are also coming from New York and moving there.

Most of my interview partners agreed on the importance of the European salsa "market" for the establishment of their careers as salsa dance professionals in the circuit. The establishment of new salsa routes is due to individual contacts; organisers of large events travel to other events to promote their own congress via flyers and personal contacts. Suzana, who works for a big salsa event in Europe, told me about their marketing strategies:

Suzana: I mean, lately we also started to travel to Asia, that's why we had many people from India last year, we had from Singapore, we are very well connected with the Middle East. And we had many people from Dubai, from Abu Dhabi, also from Qatar we have, from Oman and so on. Well, it is because of the travelling.

Joanna: OK, because you travel?

Suzana: Yes. For example, we didn't travel so much in the US and we don't have so many US people; we didn't travel in South America, again there are just a few. But from Asia, Middle East and Europe it's many. And now they started to come from South Africa as well. Or from North Africa.

Joanna: Did you go there? Or how did that start?

Suzana: South Africa, in November I'll be there for an event, maybe, I'm not sure yet, but to Asia we've been already. And we made many good contacts, so I told you it's very personal, I talk to the people and they see you and yeah.

Suzana is part of a transnational network of salsa congress organisers, usually themselves salsa dancers, some of whom run their own dance school. The event she co-organises applies an aggressive marketing strategy, including "newer" salsa countries in the Middle East, Asia and South Africa.

In sum, the dissemination and commercialisation of salsa dancing has led to numerous individuals building their professional careers on its performance and instruction, so that “the new salsa dance industry may constitute the largest percentage of social dance commerce worldwide” (McMains 2009: 311). From the perspective of dancers in European countries, salsa dancing has traditionally been perceived as a Latin American practice, and despite its new routes, salsa continues to be associated with its Caribbean and Latin American origins. Compared to other regions in the world, the European salsa market is said to be important in terms of its size and is particularly interesting in economic terms, as dance professionals are able to make a living out of dancing, mainly through teaching salsa. Male and female salsa dance professionals of different nationalities and socio-economic backgrounds thus compete for their share in the salsa circuit. As a result, salsa congresses are particularly important meeting places for salsa dance professionals.

3.2 Salsa hubs

As argued in Chapter 1, salsa hubs can best be understood as a specific time-space constellation, in which circulating salsa dancers meet. This thesis builds on salsa congresses as one entry point into the salsa circuit. I will therefore contextualise the development and some organisational aspects of salsa congresses (3.2.1). However, concentrating solely on hubs located in Europe would have limited the understanding of the salsa circuit. Furthermore, the salsa dance tourism space in Havana turned out to be an important hub of the salsa circuit, and it will thus be introduced in more detail (3.2.2). Through this description of two salsa hubs, this section introduces the context for the further analysis.

3.2.1 Salsa congresses

In salsa dancers’ narratives as well as in the literature, the salsa congress held in Puerto Rico in 1997 is credited as being the first salsa event attracting dancers living in different countries. A Puerto Rican journalist who wanted to bring together salsa dancers from different locations launched this event, which united participating dancers from 19 countries, dancing various salsa dance styles to the same music

(McMains 2015: 260–263). Some of my interviewees also mentioned similar events with a more regional outreach in the UK and Italy being organised as early as the 1990s.

EVENTS 2013				http://www.Salsa-Trips.com/Events			
	04/07 - 07/07	Warsaw Summer Salsa Festival	Warsaw Poland		27/09 - 30/09	Festival Step in Dance	Paris France
	05/07 - 07/07	Cannes Salsa Festival	Cannes France		02/10 - 06/10	Berlin Salsa Congress	Berlin Germany
	05/07 - 07/07	KETA Kizomba Festival	Lisboa Portugal		04/10 - 06/10	UniDanza Afro Cuban Dance Festival	Hamburg Germany
	05/07 - 07/07	Mambo (on2) Festival	Munich Germany		09/10 - 13/10	Sicilia Salsa Festival	Taormina Italy
	12/07 - 15/07	Salsafestival Hamburg	Hamburg Germany		11/10 - 13/10	Amsterdam International Salsa Congress	Amsterdam Netherlands
	16/07 - 22/07	Salsa Beach Splash	Sibenik Croatia		16/10 - 20/10	Afrobailar Festival	Prague Czech Republic
	19/07 - 21/07	Freiburg Salsa Festival	Denzlingen Germany		18/10 - 20/10	Bachata me mucho Munich	Munich Germany
	23/07 - 27/07	Puerto Rico Salsa Congress	San Juan Puerto Rico		18/10 - 20/10	Festival International de Salsa a Valbonne	Valbonne France
	24/07 - 28/07	Miami Salsa Congress	Miami Beach United States		18/10 - 20/10	Freestyle Salsa Fest	St. Petersburg Russia
	26/07 - 28/07	Ruedafestival	Stuttgart Germany		18/10 - 20/10	Salsa Power Festival	Ljubljana Slovenia
	11/08 - 18/08	Tabarka Salsa Festival	Tabarka Tunisia		18/10 - 20/10	Sexy and Sensual Latin Dance Festival	Heathrow United Kingdom
	16/08 - 18/08	Love Dance Festival	Malmö Sweden		25/10 - 27/10	Festival de Cuba	Stuttgart Germany
	23/08 - 25/08	Bachaturo Bachata Festival	Warsaw Poland		08/11 - 10/11	Warsaw Salsa Festival	Warsaw Poland
	23/08 - 25/08	Salsa Gala Munich	Munich Germany		16/11 - 18/11	Russian Bachata Festival	St. Petersburg Russia
	28/08 - 02/09	New York Salsa Congress	New York United States		22/11 - 24/11	Singapore International Salsa Festival	Singapore Singapore
	29/08 - 02/09	Salsa Jam Cyprus	Kyrenia Cyprus		27/11 - 01/12	Hot Salsa Weekend Stockholm	Stockholm Sweden
	30/08 - 02/09	Budapest Kizomba Festival	Budapest Hungary		29/11 - 01/12	Bachata Festival Munich	Munich Germany
	06/09 - 08/09	Munich Salsa Gala	Munich Germany		06/12 - 08/12	Latin Festival Ludwigsburg	Ludwigsburg Germany
	12/09 - 15/09	KIFE - Kizomba Italian Festival Event	Trieste Italy		06/12 - 08/12	Vienna Salsa Congress	Vienna Austria
	12/09 - 16/09	Salsa Festival Marrakech	Marrakech Morocco		13/12 - 15/12	Istanbul Dance Festival Winter Edition	Istanbul Turkey
	20/09 - 22/09	Salsa Convention St. Gallen	St. Gallen Switzerland		27/12 - 29/12	Salsa Festival Dusseldorf	Ludwigsburg Germany

Picture 5 Salsa advertising, a list of salsa events in 2013 (printed advertising material of www.salsa-trips.com).

The commercially successful format of the Puerto Rican salsa congress, uniting dancers of different salsa styles, was soon copied in cities throughout North America, Europe and Asia by local organisers, whereby individual entrepreneurship was once more decisive. Some individuals were highly influential in promoting salsa congresses and competitions, as Fraser Delgado (2014: 109) notes in reference to Miami as a particularly important node in what she calls “the global studio salsa network”. McMains (2015: 263) mentions “Torino (Italy), Tokyo, Los Angeles, and Washington (DC)” among the first cities to host a salsa congress after the one in Puerto Rico. Almost 20 years later, several salsa congresses are held every weekend somewhere in the world, mostly in North America and Europe, with lesser events in Asian and South American countries and a few in African countries. An online

calendar of dance festivals lists between 10 and 20 salsa events per month for every month of the year 2016 (see Picture 5).⁴⁴ Some of the congresses have been running annually for two decades, others started more recently. The two terms congress and festival are used interchangeably in the salsa circuit, which I will do throughout this thesis.

Scholarship on festivals has noted an increase in the number of newly created festivals all over the world since the 1960s (Picard and Robinson 2006: 2). MacLeod (2006) argues that the promotion of many festivals depends for its appeal “on a new type of transnationalised festivity rather than local meanings, traditions and social practice” (235). In this context, “festival formats may now be replicated in a series of international venues throughout the world” (MacLeod 2006: 235). This certainly holds true for salsa festivals, which take place in conference venues or in hotels, locations usually used for business-gatherings or holidays. They provide the required facilities to host several hundreds to several thousands of participants, travelling in from other cities and countries. Some festivals have grown out of a local salsa *scene* while others take place in holiday resorts where practically no dancers live as I observed in the case of the salsa festival in the Croatian coastal town Rovinj.⁴⁵ As Kabir (2013) writes,

there is no logic to the location chosen other than that of it being the domicile of a salsa entrepreneur who has both local and international connections, ambition, together with the advantage of selling the location in question as having some intrinsic attractions to tempt an international salsa crowd, as well as infrastructure for their board, lodging, and dancing (Kabir 2013: 265).

I would add to this list the importance of the transport infrastructure, such as a nearby airport, a point one congress organiser particularly highlighted during the interview.

The entry fee for salsa congresses ranges from 80 to 200 Euro (a “full pass”, including entry to all parties and workshops), wherein accommodation and travel are not

⁴⁴ There exist several websites that collect information on salsa and other dance festivals, one of the most comprehensive is festivalsero.com (accessed 14 March 2018).

⁴⁵ See crosalsafestival.com (accessed 14 March 2018).

included. The large salsa congresses attract up to 5000 attendees, some of them with a high percentage of participants travelling in from other countries (reaching up to 80% in the case of Berlin Salsacongress in 2015, according to its organisers) (see Picture 6). Salsa congress organisers structure their events in similar ways around the globe: with instruction (salsa workshops) during the day and choreographed shows and social dancing during the night (see also Borland 2009).



Picture 6 Flyer Berlin Salsa Congress 2013.

The workshop programmes include different salsa *dance styles* to choose from, often separated into three different competence levels (beginner, intermediate, advanced). Other dances such as bachata are included in the workshop offering, and since around 2010 other dance forms like kizomba (originating in Angola and Cape Verde,

see Beljaars 2016) have been integrated and are taught and danced at salsa events as well.⁴⁶ Often, festivals offer several workshops in parallel sessions; for example, the festival in Rovinj 2014 offered nine hour-long workshops each hour, for five slots between 10am and 6pm, over two and a half days, while the festival in Berlin 2013 offered a total of over 100 scheduled workshops between Thursday and Sunday (according to the printed festival programmes available at the event) (see Picture 7).

Workshop schedule

Most International Salsaevent
Berlin, Germany
Edition 10/2013

Meet us with licence to dance!
2013

Tempodrom

Thursday, 3.10.2013

Big Arena	Small Arena	Foyer	Seminar II
6.00 pm	James & Alex Styling in PW on 2		
7.00 pm	Yamulee FW & PW on 2		
8.00 pm	Juan Matos Footwork on 2		

Friday, 4.10.2013

Big Arena	Small Arena	Foyer	Seminar II	Sportshall I	Sportshall II
3.00 pm	Adolfo & Tania Master PW on 2			Supermarino Million Moves	Osbanis & Aneta More than cuban!
4.00 pm	Yamulee Master PW on 2			Tropical Gem PW on 1	Juan & Amneris PW on 2
5.00 pm	Terry & Cecile Master PW on 2			Tamam & Lisandra Styling in PW on 2	Gil & Shelley PW on 1

Saturday, 5.10.2013

Big Arena	Small Arena	Foyer	Seminar II	Sportshall I	Sportshall II	Mövenpick
11.30 am	Supermarino PW on 1	Osbanis & Aneta Cuban roots on 1	Salsa Sinners PW on 1	Amneris Martinez	Anna Bagdasarjan	Tamambo Men's styling
12.40 am	Yamulee PW & FW on 2	Leon Rose Project Salsa Contemporary	Nuno & Vanda PW on 1	Carla Vocon	Ioanna Chinai	Grupo Alafia Get style in dance
3.00 pm	Tropical Gem PW on 1	Supermarino More moves on 1	Nelson Flores SALSA HISTORY	Alfira Atzeni	Natalia Lopez	Chiquito Men's power
4.10 pm	Dominican Power Salsa Hip Hop on 1	Tropical Gem Rumba & Salsa	Magda & Alexis HISTORY OF SALSA	Alfira Chagowska	Alex de Smet	Mouaze Men's Footwork

Sunday, 6.10.2013

Big Arena	Small Arena	Foyer	Seminar II	Sportshall I	Sportshall II	Mövenpick
11.30 am	Nuno & Vanda Styling in PW on 1	Tamam & Lisandra ChaChaChá	Ansima Ballett Tricky PW on 2	Yamulee BURLIQUE	Gabriel & Zynthia Salsa & Acrobatics	Grupo Alafia Pachanga I
12.40 am	Leon Rose Project Fast PW on 2	Anna & Dvir PW on 1	YeMambo Styling in PW on 2	Tania STRIPTEASE DANCE	Lisandra Bañel	Salsa Libre Styling in PW on 2
3.00 pm	Ansima Ballett Salsa & Modern on 2	Terry & Cecile Footwork on 2	Gil & Shelley London Style on 1	Bright Untermaier LAP DANCE	Mehe Malik BELLYWOOD	Grupo Alafia Pachanga I
4.10 pm	Juan & Amneris Crazy Footwork on 2	Neeraj & Gosia Flow in Salsa on 2	Mouaze & Ela ChaChaChá	Bright Untermaier LAP DANCE	Mehe Malik BELLYWOOD	Busra feat. Alafia Basic PW on 2

Levels

ADVANCED	INT/ADVANCED	INTERMEDIATE	ALL LEVELS	LADIES	MEN	PACHANGA	BEG/INTERMEDIATE	KIZOMBA	BACHATA
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Picture 7 Workshop schedule, Berlin Salsa Congress 2013.

The festival nights are spent dancing, often to different types of salsa music on several dance floors. Some events offer dancing to live music but, as Kabir (2013: 271) states, “With the commercialisation of salsa through the congresses, there was the added concern that bringing bands over to Europe from Latin America or the

⁴⁶ Over the last few years I have observed a general diversification and there are more and more events specialising in one specific salsa style (eg *New York* style or *Cuban salsa*) or dance (eg kizomba). At festivals where all the styles were taught, the diversification was spatially visible in separate rooms for every dance and salsa style.

Caribbean would cost far more than paying for a DJ to travel from one part of Europe to another”.

Around the standard programme of dancing during day and night, in recent years event organisers have created special offers to make their festival more attractive: paying participants can now take part in challenging workshops (known as *bootcamps*) spanning several days taught by so-called salsa *stars*, beach parties, boat trips, safari tours and holidays around the festival.

Some of the bigger events hold championships, where ambitious professional salsa dancers compete and can gain in status by winning a title. No single organisation is generally approved as a regulating body for competitive salsa dancing and there are several competitions that claim to be world championships of salsa. Renta (2014: 117) lists three world salsa championships in 2014: the World Salsa Federation in Miami, the Puerto Rico Salsa Congress in Puerto Rico and the World Latin Dance Cup in Las Vegas. Some events also offer internal competitions called *stargate shows* during the day, where amateur groups and dance couples perform. The dancers are judged by a jury as well as the public's applause, and the winners perform on stage at the night's shows. Amateur dancers thus can hope to perform on stage or to be discovered by one of the attending promoters in order to get invited to another festival.

The spread of salsa festivals thus proceeded hand in hand with the professionalisation of salsa dancing and the emergence of a new type of salsa business, including dance professionals who make a living by travelling in the salsa circuit and teaching workshops.

3.2.2 The space of salsa tourism in Havana, a recently emerging salsa hub

In their discussion of spatial hubs, Kiwan and Meinhof (2011: 5) point to the importance of capital and metropolitan cities (such as Paris, London and Berlin) as “key nodes for migration flows and migrant cultures”. In their research with African musicians, not only the metropolitan cities in the global North are pivotal for networking, but also the ones in the global South, such as Antananarivo, Casablanca or Dakar (Kiwan and Meinhof 2011). Although Cuban musicians and dancers played a key part in salsa's early development, and some Cuban dancers were highly

influential in its dissemination abroad, it is only recently, and not least through foreigners' increasing interest in Cuban dances, that what I call "salsa tourism space" has developed in Havana. I will first address the ways (cultural) tourism developed in Cuba, and then describe the space of salsa tourism in Havana, which has the potential to become a hub of the salsa circuit.

Cultural tourism and encounters in informal economies in Cuba

Beside salsa's development and increasing popularity abroad, the establishment of a salsa tourist space in Havana also needs to be understood against the backdrop of the development of tourism in Cuba. As Simoni (2016) notes, following Cuba's independence from Spain in 1902, the Caribbean island became an ever more attractive recreational destination for North Americans, which led to Cuba becoming "the tourist hub of the Caribbean region (Hall 1992: 109)" by the 1920s. The next decades saw the development in Cuba of an entertainment industry with manifold opportunities for gambling and prostitution, nourished by Cuba's representation as "Pleasure Island" (Skinner 2011). With the Cuban revolution in 1959, the number of tourists started to decline, particularly as of 1961, when US residents were prevented from visiting the island by the US economic blockade against Cuba (Simoni 2016: 37). The new government promoted forms of internal tourism and launched programmes to eradicate gambling and prostitution. Since the 1990s the number of foreign tourists in Cuba has increased again, as a result of the authorities' efforts to develop international tourism as a path out of the economic crisis following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Over the 1970s and 1980s the Soviet Union had heavily subsidised Cuba's export products; Cuba depended on the communist bloc for 80% of its trade and with its collapse the nation confronted a massive economic crisis (Simoni 2016: 39). "In the new economic context of crisis, the Cuban government attached all the more urgency to the development of international tourism as a privileged path to draw much-needed hard currency into the country" (Simoni 2016: 39). At the same time, the Cuban government restricted forms of informal encounters (understood as sex tourism) between Cubans and foreign tourists (Simoni 2016: 44).

As scholars of tourism have noted, the Cuban government encouraged the development of special types of tourism, among them beach, heritage and health tourism (Babb 2011: 26). “Cigars, rum, and the increasingly successful Cuban music and dancing were also among the key features promoted, evoking the possibility of exciting parties and hedonistic pursuits” (Simoni 2016: 41). In tourism promotional materials of the 1990s, Cubans were portrayed as “living out of smiles, dances, and music” (Simoni 2016: 41), a representation many of the salsa tourists I interviewed shared. Contemporary travel guides also acknowledge “the presence of music and dance as unquestionable components of Cuban daily life” (Ana 2017: 177).

While some of today’s foreign visitors may be inclined to visit a show at the Tropicana, Havana’s famous Cabaret, others may be interested in watching a rumba performance at the *Callejón de Hamel* (see Picture 8), or listening to one of the timba bands in a *casa de la música*.



Picture 8 Rumba performance, Callejón de Hamel Havana 2014 (© Joanna Menet).

The informal tourist economy around folkloric dances and salsa represents a small share of the gross tourist economy. Nevertheless, cultural tourism has opened up access to tourists bringing in hard currency to a new group of musicians and dancers

who were formerly excluded from tourist places (see also Bodenheimer 2013; Ana 2017). Many musicians and dancers engage in the informal tourist economy and try to take their share in the financial opportunities the growing cultural tourism offers. As I could observe, dancers who teach professionally in Europe bring groups of European tourists with them to Havana, and thus demonstrate their new status as successful artists living abroad. Wearing expensive clothes of well-known brands and driving new cars, they fuel the myths of migration and the imaginary of Europe and North America as places where one can make money by teaching salsa. Imaginaries of a “cosmopolitan lifestyle” (see Section 7.1) linked to ideas of economic opportunities elsewhere were frequently expressed during my two research stays in Havana. Whenever I met young dancers, they asked me where I came from and many told me that they wished to leave the country and participate in the salsa circuit elsewhere.⁴⁷ A trip to Europe or even the dream of living there was understood as an escape from daily hardship and a general lack of prospects.

The space of salsa tourism in Havana

During my research trips to Havana I listened to numerous bands playing the standard repertoire of *son* music pieces (made world famous by the success of Buena Vista Social Club) and observed young dance couples performing in and around the restaurants in touristic *Havana vieja*. During my visit in August 2015 several young men approached me on the street and invited me to “learn salsa” with them. Although some of my Cuban interviewees rejected the label salsa as “only a marketing tool” and preferred to call their dance *casino*, these young Cubans in the streets labelled their dancing salsa as a way to (re)inscribe Cuban dance in the history of salsa, being well aware of the transnational salsa craze and tourists’ hunger for “authentic experiences” such as salsa lessons in Havana.

Davis (2015a) reports a similar phenomenon of dance tourism, though of larger dimensions, in the case of Buenos Aires, where tango tourism has become “a booming industry with thousands of Europeans, North Americans, and Japanese and

⁴⁷ One of the most popular salsa (timba) songs sold on self-burnt CDs and played at every party and during lessons I took in 2014 was “Pasaporte” by Cuban band *Havana de Primera*. The song depicts the feelings shared by many of the young Cuban dancers I met. See rebrand.ly/salsa-7.

Koreans heeding to Buenos Aires each year to dance tango” (23) by the 21st century. She describes the tango scene of Buenos Aires as offering more than 300 tango events a week, plus tango shows and performances in the streets.

In Havana, the infrastructure for salsa dancing is smaller and tends not to be as specialised, so that on my first research trip in 2014 a visiting dancer complained about the lack of opportunities to go out and “dance with good Cuban dancers” (see Section 4.3 for an exploration of the encounters between European students and Cuban dance teachers). During my research visits in 2014 and 2015 dance tourists tried their luck at dance and concert venues such as the *casa de la música*, the outdoor club 1830 or the weekly dancing night in the *Hotel Florida*. Alongside these dance venues, over the last several years, dance schools exclusively aimed at visitors have become popular in Havana, teaching salsa, son, rumba and so-called Afro-Cuban folkloric dances as well as new (European) dance trends such as kizomba.⁴⁸ The schools often work together with salsa teachers in other countries, who organise salsa holidays and bring groups of students to take classes in the schools in Havana; others cater to individual travellers’ needs. Until recently, the Cuban laws only allowed certain forms of private entrepreneurship. Due to these regulations of tourism and private enterprise, Cuban nationals were not allowed to be owners of a dance school catering to tourists. Juli, a dance professional who taught salsa lessons despite this legal prohibition, told me about the problems she had with the authorities and the ways she tried to convince them that “it is not my fault that tourists like me to show them how to dance” (for an analysis of her story, see Chapter 7). With the changes in the Cuban political landscape, including plans to expand private enterprise since 2010, small private enterprises are now allowed (although in restricted numbers). The government issued licenses for self-employment, which has led to more salsa teachers offering their services and studios opening up, as interviewees told me during my second visit in Havana in August 2015.

⁴⁸ The dance schools in Havana extended their offer to the new trends in the salsa circuit, now offering classes in kizomba (promotional video on Facebook in March 2018).

Organisers advertise dance holiday packages using slogans such as “learn to dance with Cuban dance partners”, thus drawing on essentialist ideas of Cubans as good dancers, and catering to the visitors’ wish to dance with Cubans once in the country (see Picture 9). Based on my observations, the phenomenon of salsa teaching in Havana is highly gendered, as the incoming tourists are for the most part female dancers, looking for (Cuban) male dance partners. This imbalance in the demand leads to more opportunities in salsa teaching for male dancers.



Picture 9 Flyer Salsa Festival Santiago de Cuba 2018.

While dance studios engage the common tourist imaginary, they are also linked to the specificities of the salsa circuit, as the example of the new kizomba trend in Havana’s dance studio offer demonstrates. Recently, the festival format has been

introduced to Cuba. During the time of my research in Havana, there were some dance and music festivals for salsa dancers, but I did not come across events that also invite guest teachers (as at the European congresses described above). However, from 2016 (after my final research trip), a new salsa congress started in Havana, which invited the most sought-after teachers of *Cuban salsa*, all of Cuban origin, and mainly based in Europe.⁴⁹ The establishment of such events in Cuba highlights the importance of the salsa circuit outside of Cuba and the (recent) attempts of Cuban actors based in Cuba to participate in the global salsa commerce without having to leave the country (as the dance professionals I interviewed mostly had, see Part III). As this introduction to the space of salsa tourism in Havana, including some historical context information, has demonstrated, salsa events in Cuba have the potential to become a hub of the salsa circuit. However, as will be analysed more in detail in Chapter 7, actors in the assumed birthplace of salsa are sometimes unsuccessful in their attempts to participate in the salsa circuit, as they lack the necessary resources to access the mobility of other salsa dancers and thus remain stuck at the edge of the circuit. The example of Havana's tourist salsa space points to the global power inequalities affecting the salsa circuit, as it draws attention to the highly unequal access to some hubs for differently positioned individuals. This will become particularly clear when compared to the European salsa students' mobile trajectories, discussed in the next section.

3.3 Circulating people and imaginaries in an affective economy

This section addresses the circulation of people, affects and a specific imaginary of salsa as a “global” *Esperanto of the body*. I here loosely draw on Törnqvist (2013) and her Bourdieusian analysis of tango tourism in Buenos Aires. Analysing a similar phenomenon in tango, Törnqvist (2013) describes the “production of belief” (Bourdieu 1980b), “to highlight tango as a belief system with its internal practical reason and embodied practices” (Törnqvist 2013: 55). In line with this suggestion, my main goal is here to demonstrate that the salsa circuit can be understood as an

⁴⁹ See dancefestivalincuba.com (accessed 14 March 2018).

affective economy, based on the shared beliefs and embodied experiences of salsa as a pleasurable, addictive, transnationally uniting practice. I draw on a Bourdieusian understanding of symbolic economy as “a social system which creates social relations and solidarity as well as antagonism and competition” (Törnqvist 2013: 20) and recent theorisations of affect (Ahmed 2004; Bakko and Merz 2015; Clough 2007; Davis 2015b). Accordingly, the affective economy is grounded on a “refusal” of the ‘commercial’” (Bourdieu 1980b: 261) in which economic interests and profits are downplayed, while symbolic and affective values are stressed.

This section first focuses on one particular group of people, the festival participants or salsa students (3.3.1). As these individuals strive to learn ever-changing moves and dance the night away, they lay the ground on which dance professionals build their careers. Drawing on the “affective turn” in social sciences, the main goal of this section is to better understand salsa students’ motivations and experiences generally (while in Chapter 5 these experiences of dancing will be analysed with regard to the ongoing negotiations of the gendered partner structure of salsa). I will introduce Karl, whose passionate story prepares the ground for a closer look at how salsa students talk about and organise their dancing, which many describe as an “addiction”. Karl’s story will be analysed as an example of a “mobile salsa trajectory”, which shares some similarities with the transnational salsa careers of salsa dance professionals: some salsa dance professionals start with what I call a “mobile salsa trajectory” and later develop a professional career in the salsa circuit. Mobile salsa trajectories thus may develop into transnational salsa careers (see Part III).

In the second part of this section, I discuss the idea of salsa as a common language, including the discursive construction and embodied experience of salsa as an “open space for anybody” (3.3.2). As discussed, motivations to learn and practise salsa as a social dance are manifold. While the scholarship on salsa includes an answer to the question of why people engage in the dance in their hometown, the question of why people engage in time-intensive and pricy travelling to salsa events in other countries remains so far unanswered. By applying a transnational perspective to the practices of salsa dance students and by including the affects and imaginaries that dancers share regarding salsa, this chapter argues that a transnational perspective

can also fruitfully be mobilised in the analysis of non-migrants, to better understand how individuals develop transnational identifications, networks and practices (see also Dahinden 2009).

3.3.1 From a hobby to an “addiction”: mobile salsa trajectories

Karl’s story will serve as central theme in this chapter’s process of disentangling some of the elements that keep the salsa circuit alive, by using it as an example of a “mobile salsa trajectory”. Davis (2015a) in her study of tango “aficionados” uses the concept of “tango trajectory”, building on the work of Strauss and Glaser (1970) and Riemann and Schütze (1991), to describe processes that disorder a person’s life and imply a reconstruction of a person’s “identity”. As she writes, “becoming a tango dancer may [...] evoke the biographical disarray, changes in identity, and altered expectations for the future that are common to any trajectory process” (Davis 2015a: 77). I will not go into the depth of Davis’ analysis of passionate dancers’ trajectories, but instead highlight the elements that are of most interest in this chapter’s discussion, mainly the mobility and surrounding reasoning in what I call mobile salsa trajectories of salsa students. It is important to keep in mind that the serious salsa students I portray in this chapter are not representative of all salsa students. Many serious salsa students stay in their local *scene* and never develop mobile salsa trajectories, other dancers keep taking a weekly class in a local studio or quit salsa dancing altogether after a while.

Karl, at the time of the interview 30 years old, lives in a small Swiss town and works as managing director of his own IT business. He started to dance salsa when his then-girlfriend suggested taking lessons together. They found a nearby salsa studio and, though after a year their relationship ended, he continued taking lessons in the same school. After five years he felt that he wanted to develop his dancing further so he decided to take private lessons.

It was during my studies, I studied part-time, 50%, and worked 80%. And at that time, it was my most intensive time; I went out dancing five times a week, for more than two years, really all the time! So I wanted to improve my dancing, and went to [name of a salsa instructor] before I did my round-the-world trip, which actually was a salsa

round-the-world trip. There I was also with [name of a *salsa star*], I don't know if you know him, he is a six-times world salsa champion, I was with him for a month and trained every day.

Karl wanted to learn Spanish and improve his dancing, so once he had completed his Bachelor degree in economics he went travelling; starting in Brazil, he then went to Buenos Aires, Sydney (to take the above-mentioned lessons with a *salsa star*), Bangkok, Tel Aviv, Moscow, Riga, Stockholm and London. As he proudly told me, he found people to dance salsa with in all of these cities. Once back in Switzerland, he decided to take part in the national salsa championship, and continued short travels to about eight salsa congresses a year, while at the same time building up his IT business. When I asked him if something had changed in his life due to his intense hobby, he said:

I think about almost everything has changed. [...] Once you enter the scene [...] you get to know so many people. And somehow your life goes there. [...] All of a sudden, all your friends are there and your private life is in that environment. It's not just a hobby, it's different. And another important point is that I got to know Sara, that also changed in my life. Also, the worldwide connections, it got so extreme. [...] When I travelled I found someone [to dance and make friends with] anywhere.

Karl clearly feels that his life has changed due to salsa, an experience often shared by serious salsa students as well as the interviewed salsa dance professionals (further theorised as “conversion narrative” in Section 6.1.1).

Karl's story stands as an example of a mobile salsa trajectory of a serious salsa student. Following its lines, I will now look at three elements of the mobile salsa trajectories: the intense phase of addiction; the importance of training with acknowledged *salsa stars*; and transnational connections.

Intense phase and addiction

The short summary of Karl's mobile salsa trajectory reveals the ways salsa dance students get into dancing, sometimes following an experience with other dances, often involuntarily through a friend or a partner. After a while, dancers “get hooked” and start to invest more of their time and money into salsa dance lessons and

parties, the moment Karl describes as the “most intensive phase” in his salsa learning. Iannis, a salsa dance professional who teaches in his own studio, observed a similar tendency in his students during that phase:

I see from our students, when, after a while, some months or a year, I think people are at work during the day and they are thinking, “OK, in five hours I’ll go dancing”. And it’s like, what they think about for the whole day. When they’re gonna finish work and go dancing. [...] they get into it and then it’s like an addiction, really. I don’t know if addiction is a good thing, generally, but it happens to many people, they are addicted to salsa.

As Iannis observes, once introduced to the dance form, certain salsa students become quite obsessive about dancing salsa: the interviewed dancers used metaphors relating to addiction (“You need your weekly fix”) or illness such as “virus” (“I caught the salsa virus”). Religious metaphors were used as well; as one dancer put it: “Since I’ve started I’ve converted two friends of mine, they are now dancing as well.” In the above quotation Iannis raises the question of addiction that has been discussed in several studies on dance (eg McMains (2006) on “glamour addiction” in the ballroom dance industry). Davis (2015a: 98) distinguishes between the trajectories of passionate tango aficionados and of drug addicts on the basis of tango dancers’ acceptance, as they perceive the addiction as a positive thing in their life. Similarly, self-confessed salsa “addicts” rarely complain about their “addiction” but are happy with the changes that salsa dancing has brought to their life. Candice, a regular festival-goer and self-defined salsa addict, told me at length about her “intense phase”, thereby proving Iannis’ assumption right:

And all I could think about was salsa, and all I wanted to do is dance. And so I was in the office and I was like, oh my god, I wanna dance, I wanna go dancing. I’d wake up in the morning, and this still happens, I’d wake up in the morning and think: I wanna dance today. And then I’m gonna take my shoes with me to the office, take an extra pair of clothes and I spend the whole morning: today I wanna dance, today I wanna dance, today I’m going dancing. And then by the afternoon I’m so tired and I’m oh, I can’t. And then, you know, sometimes it doesn’t work out, or I go, and then I feel so happy.

The above quotation points to the importance of the affective experience of salsa dancing as a driving force of the salsa circuit: as dancers univocally stated, the experience of “being in the moment” (McClure 2015) of the dance may generate strong feelings of happiness. This also became clear in the interview with Suzana, while discussing why she considers salsa “the best hobby ever”:

It is because you just lose yourself, you know, during let's say that song 5 minutes, you don't care about anything else, you're just you and your partner, the dance floor, the music, the lights, and it's like a dream. I would rather do this than playing chess, I think [laughs].

To account for such intense experiences of complete absorption in what one does, Csikszentmihalyi (1990: 4) has developed the concept of “flow”, describing a state of “optimal experience”, “in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter”.⁵⁰ In this sense, the activity of salsa dancing becomes important for no other reason than the experience of doing it: “dancing is like magic”, as Suzana put it. However, to achieve the state of being able to “lose” themselves in the dance,⁵¹ salsa students have to invest time and money in their dancing skills (see Picture 10).

Training with *stars*

As McClure (2015) found in her study with salsa dancers, the level of competence in dance skills is an important criterion in salsa dancers' affective experience of pleasure. The often-used expression “to train” instead of “going out” also reveals salsa dancers' goal to improve in their dancing. Karl therefore progressed from going dancing five times a week, to taking private lessons, initially with a well-known salsa dance professional in the Swiss context. Later, Karl travelled to Sydney for a month

⁵⁰ “Losing oneself” can be analysed as a sort of escape. Picard and Robertson (2006) argue that the metaphor of escape, often used in contexts of tourism, also reflects the festival experience, “as participants find themselves in a different time and space” (17). Due to their specific time and space frame, festivals are also interpreted as “ritualised transgressions” (Picard and Robinson 2006: 11).

⁵¹ As McClure (2015) has demonstrated in detail, the possibility to “be in the moment” in social salsa dancing is also determined by the gendered roles, which can be interpreted differently depending on the theoretical framework.

to take lessons with a well-recognised dancer of the salsa circuit, whom he considers to be the best in quick footwork (the rhythmical improvised dancing of the lower body). Though Australia would not be the first-choice destination for all European salsa students wishing to improve their dancing,⁵² his choice reflects the importance of individuals attracting students – despite the geographical location of their studio. Enthusiastic salsa students like Karl sometimes follow the *salsa stars* or *travelling artists* of their choice to take lessons with them specifically.



Picture 10 Learning to spin (© Steven Isaacs).

Salsa dance professionals are often called artists and many of them have star-status among salsa students. Academic scholarship on stardom and fandom has analysed the construction of stars and celebrities as related processes (Holmes and Redmond 2006). However, in the salsa circuit the construction of *stars* works differently than in many other social worlds: *salsa stars* are accessible and tangible. The salsa artists

⁵² Due to salsa's history and marketing, many European salsa students I met see New York and Havana (and to a lesser extent Colombia and Puerto Rico) as places they wish to visit in order to get to know "the roots" of their dancing. See also the discussion in Sections 3.2.2 and 4.3.

are tangible insofar as they not only perform on salsa festivals' stages (like other *stars* of the world of entertainment), but also teach workshops and, particularly important, they dance with salsa students during the parties. For many of the salsa students I met, their dances with one of the salsa artists were the highlight of their festival experience, as exemplified by the following observation. At one festival evening I noticed a familiar male dancer standing near the DJ desk, the preferred dancing spot of the artists, for several hours before finally daring to ask the artist of his choice to dance with him. The next day, he proudly told me how nice the dancer was and that she had even recognised him that day! I also observed several female dancers queuing in long lines on the dance floor to wait for their turn to dance with a specific male artist. In workshop breaks on the following day or during the waiting time at airports on their way home, dancers engage in enthusiastic discussions about every detail of their dance with one of the *stars*, sometimes boosting in front of their friends about a dance with a particularly prestigious *star*. (I will discuss the implications of this "convention of tangible *salsa stars*" for the dance professionals in Chapter 6.)

Karl's trajectory reveals not only the importance of learning with a specific teacher, but also the weight dancers give to the experience of learning with new teachers, which is possible in attending a salsa congress with its large offer of salsa dance workshops. Patric, a Swiss salsa student, compared dancers' motivations with those of marathon runners:

It is good for the brain, it boosts concentration. That's why I continue doing workshops, you always meet your edge, it's obvious [...] Feeling this limit and sometimes going beyond, when you realise you just don't get something but with time it flows better. [...] That's what motivates me, that you work on yourself, to improve yourself. [...] Like kind of a competition with yourself, you push yourself to the limit. Others [...] run a marathon, they have a goal. You have a goal, you fight for it, you push the boundaries. For me it's similar.

Patric and Karl both acquired a high level of competence in social dancing which made dancing highly pleasurable for them. As the above quotation suggests, beyond this, learning to dance is also understood as an intellectual task and an individual's

search for their limits, which can be framed as a form of self-cultivation. In her detailed analysis of salsa dancers' interpretation of their practice, McClure (2015) points to a tension between ideas of dancing as self-expression on one hand, and the structured processes of learning specific movements from others, on the other hand. As she argues, individuals negotiate this tension through a "discourse of self-cultivation" (McClure 2015: 12). Festival-goers often wish to improve and learn new turn patterns and body moves, so workshops at salsa congresses cater to this need.

Transnational connections

Karl not only felt the need to improve his dance skills, he also wanted to learn Spanish to better understand the lyrics of salsa songs, and "because culturally it's got a lot to do with salsa, South America. Almost all the music comes from there." He therefore chose to spend three months in Buenos Aires (again, not a typical salsa destination), the second stop on his salsa world-trip. The other cities he mentions were either destinations in which he had already established contacts with salsa dancers he had met at salsa congresses or cities where a salsa festival took place. The "worldwide" connections salsa dancers develop are also an important element of their trajectories. Salsa dancers feel part of a *community* or *familia* of salsa dancers. During the intense phase, salsa dance students start calling themselves *salsero* or *salsera*. They develop new relationships and sometimes meet future partners (Karl met Sara, his fiancée) and for some, their whole social life (besides their job) revolves around salsa. The regular attendance of local salsa nights as well as the bi-monthly (or sometimes even monthly) attendance of salsa congresses in another country form part of this (see Picture 11).



Picture 11 Early evening warm-up, Prague International Salsa Marathon 2017 (© Steven Isaacs).

Candice is always excited to meet other salsa “obsessed” individuals:

Little did I know, that it was woowow, this is mental, I had no idea there’s so many crazy people – just like me! Which is really cool, that’s always the greatest thing about festivals, and in Berlin I’d go and stand on a mat: look at these people, they are all just as obsessed with this as I am, that’s really cool, they all love it just the same way!

Rephrasing Reed (1998), who describes dance as a “tool in shaping nationalist ideologies”, we could say that salsa here helps to shape “transnationalist ideologies” and the creation of “transnational subjects”. Of course this development of transnational subjectivities and networks is not the result of a political project but rather the result of a dancer’s investment in salsa as a bodily practice, and arguably a market-driven one. Pushing this argument further, Davis (2018: 665) states that the biographies even of tango dancers staying in one place should be considered as transnational, as they actively engage in what she calls a “transnational cultural space”. Indeed, as other literature argues, transnational identifications and practices do not require migration or cross-border mobility. In an article entitled “Are we all

transnationals now?”, Dahinden (2009) argues that when studying transnational phenomena, non-migrants should be taken into account too, as they might also be involved in transnational activities. She thus sets out to study transnational social relations as well as “transnational subjectivities”. Building on her findings, Dahinden (2009) argues for a differentiated position and concludes that “even if almost everybody is nowadays to some degree transnational, this should not hinder us from distinguishing different transnationalisms as they reflect varying social positioning in this globalised world” (1382). In this way, the transnational relations and subjectivities developed by Karl and other salsa students have to be analysed as related to their favourable situation.

Clearly, the participation in salsa festivals and the development of transnational connections has to be analysed in regards to socio-demographic backgrounds: salsa festival-goers are often individuals with higher education, stable jobs and enough leisure time to allow spending time and money for their salsa “passion”.⁵³ As I have shown, salsa dancers present at festivals invest a considerable amount of time and money in order to learn this shared bodily practice. They also need to afford the festival price to enter the event as well as the journey (often a flight) and the hotel room.⁵⁴ Global economic inequalities thus shape the experiences of the “transnational encounters” (Davis 2015a) on the dance floor to a considerable degree, not only in what is usually perceived as tourism (for example in Cuba) but also in the congress circuit in Europe. Access to salsa festivals seems thus restricted to those individuals who have enough disposable leisure time and economic capital (cf Skinner 2007). Hutchinson (2014a: 13) also points to the importance of class in an analysis of salsa congresses, stating that although the dance floors of salsa festivals

⁵³ This also distinguishes salsa congresses from local salsa *scenes* where dancers’ socio-economic backgrounds can be highly diverse (see for example García (2013) on salsa dance places in Los Angeles).

⁵⁴ In some cases, entry fees are too high for local residents, as I witnessed when I participated at the Warsaw salsa congress. This congress is said to be one of the cheapest congresses by West European *salseros*’ standards, who thus participate in large numbers. Nevertheless, once in Warsaw, I learned that a friend of a friend who lives there had cancelled her attendance at the party due to the high entry fee. This situation paralleled my experience of visiting a *casa de la música* in Havana in 2014, where a group of Cubans gathered in front of the concert hall, waiting for tourists to pay their entry fee, which amounted to a month’s salary.

“may create an ethnically inclusive community, it is one with little class diversity”. (In Chapter 7 I will analyse in more detail how access to the salsa circuit is regulated for differently positioned salsa dance professionals.)

To sum up, as Karl’s story and the other dancers’ quotations demonstrate, some *salseras* and *salseros* develop mobile salsa trajectories in the salsa circuit alongside their regular jobs, fuelled by their strong wish to dance, to improve their dance skills and to connect to people outside their place of residence. Salsa students also develop transnational networks and subjectivities, and salsa dancing is perceived as a mobile skill that is transferable to many places while travelling to or working in other cities (cf Skinner 2007).

3.3.2 The *Esperanto of the body*: salsa’s representation as a “global” language

This section deals with the circulating idea of salsa dancing as a “global” language, predominant among dancers at salsa festivals. I will examine how salsa is discursively produced as a kind of universal leisure practice through two related arguments: the emphasis on (an essentialist) diversity and the shared bodily practice as a common language. To participate in a social world like that of salsa requires and creates not only bodily skills, but also cognitive models and beliefs in certain values. In his analysis of the economy of symbolic goods, Bourdieu (1980b) describes artistic fields as “universes of belief” (168) and stresses the significance of the “collective belief” (267) in the “game”. Similarly, Becker (1982) insists on the importance of conventions. In this way, salsa dancers share what Törnqvist (2013) calls an “embodied belief structure”, as common ground in salsa’s affective economy.

The first argument suggests that salsa’s universality stems from its appreciation of diversity. As several studies of salsa have observed, there is a strong belief in salsa as an “open space for anybody” among salsa dancers (eg Skinner 2007, see also Boulila 2018). Indeed, as my research shows, one of salsa’s attractions lies in its alleged ability to overcome the usual social markers of difference such as class, age and race. I was astonished by the consistency with which my interview partners of diverse backgrounds and with sometimes diverging interests repeated the idea of salsa’s

openness and described salsa as a space of equal differences in several aspects. In the words of Nara, a US-based travelling *salsa* artist:

In fact, I think the beauty of salsa is its diversity and how accepting it is to all demographics, all different cultures, age groups, income levels, education levels, whatever. And that's the beauty. And I think that the range of what... or the range of people actually contributes to what this dance is. It's nice to have different cultures represented, they make it richer.

Nara's account of salsa reads like a description of political "multiculturalism", including the idea of the equal value of each "cultural group" (see Taylor 1992). As discussed in Chapter 1, in constructivist scholarship such an essentialist understanding of people as part of clearly distinguishable and homogenised "cultures" has been criticised (Schwandt 1998: 236). Nonetheless, the representation of salsa as a leisure activity that allows diversity and equality, serving as a unifying element, forms a constitutive part of the actual salsa imaginary at salsa congresses. A prominent salsa festival promoter describes his event's goal as "creating unity through salsa". Salsa dancers in Europe reproduce this romantic vision of salsa as a unifying element. A number of studies have argued that dancing could be understood as a form of "cultural democracy", investigating the ways "the space of the dance floor has been used to assert black, feminised and gay identities" (Wall 2013: 264). Gilroy (1991) suggests that the dance floor could be viewed as a cultural space where the usual hierarchies of society are inverted, and where competences in dance are more important than skills that dominate outside.

Asked why salsa appeals to them, many of my interview partners referred to similar examples of diversity, for instance in terms of diverse class backgrounds, as Isabelle explains:

In salsa dancing you have got young and older ones, from student to construction worker to the doctor and lawyer, you have everything! That's what I find interesting, you meet people you wouldn't otherwise... Usually you always move in your... in the same environment.

Isabelle, a regular festival participant and salsa teacher in her hometown, here refers to different professional groups participating in salsa. For dancers in Europe, salsa is thus a meeting place, which allows them to connect to differently positioned people than themselves in ways they do not perceive as possible in other circumstances. Abod, a UK-based amateur dancer and regular festival-goer in his early fifties, perceives salsa as a space with no age limit:

If I just go to a nightclub I probably would stop dancing because many nightclubs... it's all right when you are young... when you get to a certain age, then you think [he stretches out his hands in a sign that supposedly means "stop"]. Whereas salsa, the good thing about salsa is the fact that there's no age, typical age limit, in England anyway. There's no age, there's no colour, it's just completely mixed.

Indeed, age seems to be less exclusionary in salsa than in other dance spaces, nevertheless it is important to keep in mind that Abod has a certain level of competence in dancing and that this might be an important element in understanding his experience. Furthermore, like many other dancers, Abod, who was born in Nigeria and later moved to the UK, sees salsa dancing as less discriminatory not only in terms of age but also in terms of skin colour. In this way, salsa is often presented as a "multiracial utopia" (Hutchinson 2014b: 30). In a similar vein, Juan, a professional dancer from Cuba, living in Italy for more than 20 years while dancing and teaching, explained:

I saw European society change for good thanks to music from Cuba, music from New York, thanks to salsa, thanks to all that is happening. People now are more friendly, more communicating and less racist. They see a person how she is, not for her colour, not for where she comes from. And when you go dancing, the most exciting thing, when you go to an event like this or to any disco, you can see the black [man] with the blonde, the blonde with the mulatto or the white with the white... But you never have racial prohibition. And when I go dancing with you, I don't ask you what religion you are. You can be a Catholic, apostolic, a Muslim, you can be a Buddhist, I don't care! Nobody cares who you are for dancing. And this is a very serious thing. It's serious and important for the whole of humanity. [...] I'm only interested to meet you again at

another festival, to embrace you. And to dance with you because I like the way you dance.

Relating to a broader societal change and referring to current political debates on religious difference, Juan underlines his (romanticised) perception of salsa's potential as a unifying force.

As demonstrated, my interview participants thus agree about salsa's inclusionary aspect and the irrelevance of the usual social distinctions such as class, age, race and religion in salsa spaces – at least for the duration of a dance, in what Kabir (2013) calls a “momentary transnational utopia” (274). The shared value of “passion for salsa dancing” unites dancers, thus pointing to the importance of the salsa circuit as an affective economy, which entails the moral obligation to ascribe to this imaginary.

The second element of salsa's construction as a universal leisure practice is its understanding as a form of bodily communication, allowing for encounters with “others”, but not necessarily racialised or exoticised others, as argued in the discussed literature on salsa. Valentina, a dancer involved in congress organisation, expressed this idea clearly:

And in the end, we all speak the same language. I can go to Japan without speaking a word of Japanese but once on the dance floor we understand each other. I can go to Miami and just dance, the man leads and I join in. Even though every human does it differently in their individuality, the basics are always the same, that's the beauty of our dance.

Salsa dancers thus feel connected to other dancers far away through their common dance practice, independent of their ability to talk to each other. Ernesto, a dance professional who makes a living out of his worldwide teaching activities, told me that salsa, for him, is the *Esperanto of the body*, referring to the global endeavour of this constructed language. Its founders and adepts wished to create a language that is quick to learn and thus does not privilege speakers of one language over others. The idea of a language of the body is also enhanced by the downplaying of other verbal communication in dancers' salsa experience, adhering to the common saying that in salsa people do not talk: “You don't have to say a lot, don't have to talk about

your problems, can just forget everything and just dance, you don't even have to talk, that's not part of it" (Patric).

In *salseros'* and *salseras'* discursive production of the salsa space as open and non-hierarchical, other elements that could separate them are thus downplayed (see also Gagné 2014: 449). For dancers, salsa dancing is attractive precisely for its affective dimension and the possibility to connect with strangers on another level than language: the body. In a similar way, Hamilton and Hewer (2009) state that salsa "can be seen as a medium of expression through the communicative body, that is, a body in process of creating itself" (505). Abod describes this experience:

The thing that I get the most pleasure out is coming up to somebody I never ever met in my life, spending four minutes and thinking: wow, that was an awesome dance! And that to me, that is what salsa is about. You go to somebody, a salsa dancer, you've never ever met before and have a beautiful dance. And you have to have a partner in order to do it. And that's what I like, and that's my attraction to congresses, just to go there and just dance. [...] So that's my socialising now, it's salsa travel.

In salsa dancers' accounts, the pleasure gained from the affective, embodied experience of the moment of dancing is even increased when dancing with somebody "never ever met before". Ajay, an internationally touring salsa instructor, summed it up in the following words:

Since it's a social dance where you dance with different partners, a festival is a perfect place to dance with a hundred unknown people who've come from God knows where and enjoy that. You can't get that back in your own city where you live, so festivals are a great meeting place for social dancers because there's a certain excitement about being able to do all those beautiful turn patterns and all that stuff with someone you'd never danced [with] before. And the first time you hit a song in your life, wow, this works like magic.

Following a similar logic, Karl told me about his active search to dance with partners from as many different countries of origin as possible.

I still remember very well, Athens was my first congress abroad, and I tried to dance with as many nationalities as possible. [...] It was so cool, I mean, where else do you

have so many cultures in one room, elsewhere you don't find this. So I thought I want to experience it, how they dance in Russia and so on. So I tried it for the whole evening, one after the other, and hoped to have another country. [...] So you ask, "where are you from", and when it is the wrong country, you continue. But it was really cool.

On my questioning, Karl acknowledged that, in the end, the dances were not that different, and the experience on the festival dance floor rather depended on individual characteristics and levels of competence in dance than on the country of origin. However, like all the other quoted dancers, he understood difference in terms of origin country as a value in itself. The dancers' discursive construction of "others" thus relied on the value-free (but highly essentialist) discourse of difference in cultural or national terms.

The various origin countries of dancers were seen as enhancing the congress experience and sometimes hierarchies were negotiated between groups of dancers. Interestingly, salsa ownership and affinity were not only claimed by *Latinos/Latinas*, but also negotiated among *Europeans*: during my observations at European festivals I was often told that Eastern European dancers were particularly "good dancers". Maria, a Polish salsa artist, while talking about the emerging salsa countries in Eastern Europe, told me that *Eastern Europeans* "are catching up very quickly" in terms of salsa dancing because they have a "temper more similar to [the] Latin temper, so the dancing feels more natural" for them. New actors appear and draw a new picture of the imaginary salsa geography. In her article about transnationalism at the Berlin Salsa congress, Kabir (2013) makes a similar observation and indicates the presence of sizable contingents of Polish, Czech, Romanian, Bulgarian, Latvian and Lithuanian dancers. "Clearly, salsa has given post-communist European subjectivities an entry point into a hitherto denied world of expressivity, flamboyance, and fun" (Kabir 2013: 270). The numerous salsa congresses held in the Baltics, Eastern Europe and even Russia attest to salsa's success among people living in these countries (see Picture 12); this development is not unnoticed by salsa dancers living in Western European countries, who have socialised with salsa for many years. For instance, London-based touring salsa dance professional Andy was

convinced that Russian female dancers are the best: “There that’s the best social dancers. [...] I think Russia has in percentage 95% of the best dancers in the world, in terms of social dancing. They are beautiful dancers, very good dancers.” In this quote social dancing is contrasted with competitive and show dancing, and the argument put forward is that Russian followers have great dance skills.



Picture 12 Flyer Kiev Spring Festival 2016.

Another Swiss-based male dancer told me at length about his travels to Moscow because of the great female dancers there. Dancers meeting at festivals in Europe were thus categorised according to not only their nationality but also gendered:

Eastern European and Russian dancers were said to be particularly good followers (usually women), while Western European dancers were said to be good leaders (usually men). In this respect I also found a discussion between festival organisers revealing: during a meeting of salsa congress organisers during one of the festivals, the organiser of a large and successful event in Vienna told the others that the previous year he had had to kick out 40 party dancers at 9 in the morning, “because in Eastern Europe it is like this, the party goes from 1am to 9am, they are used to doing it like that.” And proudly he added: “And at my congress I have the girls from the East and the guys from the West”. His statement was met with laughter, the other organisers cheered and one of them asked how he did it. He explained that he had travelled a lot over the last three years promoting the festival. Vienna thus found itself at the crossroads of European integration. As these examples demonstrate, salsa in the European circuit is often promoted with a focus on its inclusionary aspect, not its supposed Latinness. The salsa dancers and event promoters (re)produce the imaginary of salsa as a unifying practice, minimising references to salsa’s historic associations with Latin America, the Caribbean or New York, thus making it available to an interested public all over the world.

To summarise, through the two interrelated arguments of the appreciation of diversity and the shared bodily practice as a common language, salsa is discursively constructed as a unifying practice. Salsa congresses are imagined and discursively produced as spaces of diversity and equality in terms of nationality, class, age, race and religion, thus echoing debates about political multiculturalism (Taylor 1992). This shared representation is pushed by promoters who market salsa thus, and also serves as common ground in the affective economy of the salsa circuit.

However, although salsa dancers see their practice as a “global” language of the body, which unites people of various background, they completely gloss over the highly heteronormative and gendered character of these salsa spaces (see Part II), as well as questions of class (the ones mentioned above but also in terms of mobility capital, see Part III) or age and physical (dis)ability. While on an individual level, the salsa dance floor may be experienced as a meeting place of “different” people, it is nevertheless embedded in larger power relations that structure the experience of

“transnational encounters”. Furthermore, as Boulila (2018) points out in her analysis of the salsa dance industry in Europe, there are “racial underpinnings of cosmopolitan consumption”: “Although salsa as an individual movement can be interpreted and performed by *any body*, not all bodies have the same access to symbolic and material systems of power“ (6). It will be the task of the following chapters to demonstrate the other side of the discourse of salsa as unifying practice by disentangling some of the elements that structure the transnational salsa circuit hierarchically, along the axes of gender, ethnicity/race, class and mobility capital.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have laid the groundwork for the analysis of the following chapters, by introducing the contextual background of the development of the salsa circuit from a European perspective. In contrast to the literature focusing on historical development of salsa in North America (mainly New York), I have argued that Cuban salsa dancers were among the early salsa instructors in Europe, and they successfully managed to foster a perspective of salsa as originating in Cuba. As I have discussed, individuals played an important role in salsa’s transnationalisation, building up local dance scenes with dance studios and parties, as well as larger salsa events attracting dancers visiting in from other cities and countries.

Building on the model of the salsa circuit developed in Chapter 1, I described two salsa hubs and discussed the circulation of salsa students as well as affects and a specific imaginary of salsa as the *Esperanto of the body*, which link these hubs (3.3). The discussion also demonstrated the importance of imaginaries in the process of circulation: students’ imaginary when travelling to festivals or to Cuba, forming part of salsa tourism, as well as, imaginaries of a “cosmopolitan lifestyle” in Europe or North America, which play an important role in the lives of Cuban salsa dancers, as I will further explore in Chapter 7.

The description of the salsa congresses as hubs demonstrated their significance in terms of a meeting point and job opportunities for salsa dance professionals, who started to construct transnational careers travelling from event to event (as analysed in Part III of this study). The contextualisation of the space of salsa tourism in

Havana as potential salsa hub pointed to the global power relations between countries, affecting individuals' possibilities to participate in the salsa circuit. As I have argued, despite Cuban musicians and dancers having played a key role in salsa's early development, the salsa tourist space in Havana is a relatively new phenomenon. Several factors influenced its development, among them the Cuban authorities' marketing of tourism, as well as dancers' activities abroad, which fuelled Europeans' interest in travelling to Cuba to dance salsa.

The last section of this chapter empirically approached the circulation of salsa students and imaginaries in the salsa circuit. By focusing on three stages of the "mobile trajectories" of serious salsa students, I demonstrated that they engage in the time- and cost-intensive activity of salsa dancing due to their strong affective relation to the dancing experience, whereby they also develop transnational networks and subjectivities. As shown, dancers engage in salsa dancing out of their wish to engage in transnational encounters with "others", but not necessarily with exoticised "others", as critical studies on Latin dances have argued. Furthermore, the interviewed dancers were more driven by their wish for self-cultivation than a desire to perform what have been called "traditional" gender identities (cf Schneider 2013: 558), a point I will elaborate in Chapter 5.

As I have argued, the discursive construction and representation of salsa as the *Esperanto of the body* adds to the idea of salsa as a unifying element despite supposedly essential differences in terms of class, age, race and religion and thus produces specific beliefs. These beliefs form the shared "rules of the game" for the affective economy of the salsa circuit. As Bourdieu (1980b: 265) has argued in his analysis of economies of symbolic goods, the shared beliefs in the value of an artwork are continuously generated inside specific fields of production. In the salsa circuit, these shared beliefs draw on embodied experiences, which circulate within an affective economy.

However, despite dancers' celebratory accounts of the emancipatory promises of the dance floor, like any other social space the salsa circuit is structured by internal and external hierarchies, particularly along the lines of gender, ethnicity/race, class and mobility capital – as the following chapters will demonstrate.

PART II

NEGOTIATING ETHNICITY AND GENDER IN THE SALSA CIRCUIT

Introduction to Part II: conceptual notes on conventions, ethnicity and gender

Part II of this study focuses on the ways in which actors in the salsa circuit (re)produce the circulating representations of ethnicity and gender. From the discussion in the last chapter and following the cited dancers' representations, the salsa circuit could be viewed as a space in which ethnicity and race are less relevant than gender. However, the analysis actually shows the opposite: while ethnicity constitutes an important frame for many of the interviewed dancers, gender is more playfully negotiated and its structuring effects more openly contested. Furthermore, the two categories also intersect. As the sociological analysis of bodies has demonstrated, a micro-sociological analysis has to account for the fact that embodiment is always intersectional and transcends categorical boundaries (Villa 2010: 216). To explore this puzzle, the next two chapters analyse the negotiations of several of the gendered and ethnicised/racialised conventions of the salsa circuit.

As already discussed, Becker (1982) analyses art worlds in terms of cooperation, networks and conventions. He particularly demonstrates that collaboration between many different people is needed to produce any form of artwork, and he looks at all the different tasks that must be performed in order to do so. To exemplify this division of labour in the production of art, he refers to Hollywood films: "The list of credits which ends the typical Hollywood feature film gives explicit recognition to such a finely divided set of activities" (Becker 1982: 7). As Becker (1982) argues, in order to cooperate, people "rely on earlier agreements now become customary, agreements that have become part of the conventional way of doing things in that art" (29). These conventions concern the decisions necessary to organise some of the cooperation between some of its participants (Becker 1982: 42).

Schulze (2015) draws on Becker's (1982) ideas to demonstrate how "hardcore kids" organise their collective activities with regard to gender around "gender conventions". As she argues, the world of hardcore only exists due to the collective activities of its members who work to bring it into existence (Schulze 2015: 21). Following her approach, the production of gender (and ethnicity) can be understood as part of this work or collective activity. Relating to West and Zimmerman's (1987)

“doing gender” approach, Schulze (2015) states that gender is a “product of social doings of some sort” (21). This framework is easily transferable into the context of salsa and the ways dancers organise based on gender conventions.

The theoretical framework of “doing gender” (West and Zimmerman 1987, 2009) conceptualises gender as a routine accomplishment in social interactions. From a “doing gender” perspective, “gender is not something we are but something we do” (Deutsch 2007: 106). Gender is understood as universally relevant and important in producing societal hierarchies. West and Zimmerman (1987) build their approach on the analytic distinction between sex, sex category and gender. They understand sex as “a determination made through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males” (127). Placement in the sex category is achieved through the application of sex criteria, sustained by “identificatory displays” in everyday life. Gender “is the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one’s sex category” (West and Zimmerman 1987: 127). Building on Garfinkel (1967), West and Zimmerman (2009) propose to perceive of gender as an achieved status, “moving masculinity and femininity from natural, essential properties of individuals to interactional, that is to say, social, properties of a system of relationships” (114). This ethnomethodological inspired approach is thus interested in the specific doings of gender or, in other words, the “work” involved in producing gender (Schulze 2015).

I use similar theoretical assumptions to analyse ethnicity, framed as “doing being ethnic” (see also Brubaker 2002: 163; Moerman 1974), combined with an approach focusing on the upholding of group boundaries (Barth 1969). Lamont and Molnar (1992) define symbolic boundaries as

conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices [...]. They are tools by which individuals and groups struggle over and come to agree upon definitions of reality. Examining them allows us to capture the dynamic dimensions of social relations, as groups compete in the production, diffusion, and institutionalization of alternative systems and principles of classifications. Symbolic boundaries also separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and

group membership [...]. They are an essential medium through which people acquire status and monopolize resources (168).

As this definition makes clear, symbolic boundaries (for an overview see Pachucki, Pendergrass, and Lamont 2007) are used to categorise social actors and negotiate status.⁵⁵ The concept, therefore, is helpful to analyse the ways in which salsa dancers talk about others. In this way, it becomes apparent that different interest groups struggle for symbolic and economic capital: processes of categorisation are not neutral, but power relations enter through a hierarchisation of one of the created groups (Jenkins 1994). I will exemplify this process with the negotiations around “Latinness” and the convention of pedagogical techniques (“teaching convention”) among dance instructors perceived as *non-Latino* and *Latino/Latina* (or, more specifically, *Cuban*) in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5 I address the negotiations of two gender conventions of the salsa circuit: the leader and follower structure and the gendered moves in the dance.

⁵⁵ While scholarship on boundaries generally acknowledges the importance of symbolic and social boundaries, this chapter mainly focuses on the (re)production of symbolic boundaries. However, the symbolic boundaries have social consequences in the affective economy of the salsa circuit, particularly regarding the accumulation of salsa capital and economic capital.

Chapter 4 Salsa's "Latinness": negotiating ethnicity and authenticity in salsa dancing and teaching

This chapter addresses the ongoing negotiations of salsa's "Latinness" between salsa dancers. Dancers with different countries of origin develop various strategies and claim different positions to legitimate their authority as salsa dancers. In this process, they mobilise arguments of "authenticity" and ethnicity, which sometimes intersect with gender.

Although most dancers I talked to adhere to the idea of salsa as *Esperanto of the body* and a space for anybody, a closer look reveals that internal struggles are also carried out on the battleground of cultural "authenticity", origins and "roots". However, ideas of salsa as associated with Latin American or Caribbean "roots" have to be nurtured and "authenticity" related to ethnicity is constructed in interactive ways, as the second part of this chapter demonstrates.

As already discussed in section 1.3.2, actors in the European salsa circuit often distinguish between the categories of *Latinos/Latinas* and *Europeans*, or just *non-Latinos*. Furthermore, they often distinguish between *Latinos* and *Cubans*, the latter being sometimes included in the larger category of *Latinos/Latinas* and sometimes set apart as an extra category of dancers. The prevalence of these categories has to be interpreted against the backdrop of the historical dissemination of salsa music in the US political context, where the category of "Latino" is highly relevant (McMains 2015). This chapter follows the actors' logic and presents the boundary-making of the two thus distinguished groups.

This chapter loosely draws on Urquía's (2005) analysis of London's salsa scene as well as Pietrobruno's (2006) ethnographic study on Montreal's Latin dance schools. Pietrobruno analysed salsa teachers' quest for legitimation in several salsa dance studios in this North American city. The salsa teachers in Montreal used the rhetoric of authenticity to "sell" different salsa dance styles, whereby they either invoked or rejected the discourse of authenticity and origins (Pietrobruno 2006: 112). The salsa teachers in Pietrobruno's study constructed authenticity in terms of salsa's supposed origins (the Caribbean or New York). On the contrary, Urquía's description of salsa's development in London during the 1990s demonstrates that salsa became "de-

ethnicised” and other aspects were valued more in the context of London’s clubs. Urquía (2005) argues: “As dance lessons increased in importance as the main way to learn Salsa, dance teachers became the source of the most authoritative salsa regardless of their own ethnicity or cultural background. In this way locals could become more authoritative than Latin Americans and the ethnic dimension of Salsa as cultural capital began to be eroded” (390). Other forms of knowledge and not ethnicised qualities such as technical excellence and pedagogical techniques are important skills in today’s teaching business. Indeed, Latin Americans are not automatically seen as good salsa teachers. However, as my findings show, in the struggle for reputation among different dance professionals in the salsa circuit, some dancers do attempt to build on ethnicity to construct their career by emphasising the idea of cultural authenticity, and Urquía’s observation has to be nuanced. Furthermore, salsa dancers also draw on other resources to construct authenticity, and as Lindholm (2008) argues, “there are two overlapping modes for characterizing any entity as authentic: genealogical or historical (*origin*) and identity or correspondence (*content*)” (2).

This chapter considers the negotiations of authenticity in several sites: at European salsa festivals and in salsa tourism spaces in Havana. It explores the boundary-making processes and position strategies individual dancers develop in order to create and maintain their reputation as artists in the salsa circuit. To do this, it first examines the boundary-making strategies of non-Latin salsa dance professionals (4.1), then focuses on the positioning strategies of Latin American salsa dance professionals (4.2). I analyse the performed ethnicised practices as part of symbolic conflicts and strategies of entrepreneurship in the competitive field of the salsa circuit. The last part of this chapter addresses the negotiations of authenticity in the space of salsa tourism in Havana (4.3).

4.1 Non-Latin salsa dancers and the negotiations of salsa

This section focuses on the negotiations of salsa’s definition and the ways non-Latin dance professionals position themselves as legitimate dance teachers. I demonstrate actors’ boundary-making processes to distinguish themselves from other dance

professionals. I will particularly analyse the ways in which actors in the salsa circuit negotiate salsa's "Latinness" (4.1.1) and the boundary-making strategies mobilising the convention of correct pedagogical techniques, the "teaching convention" (4.1.2).

4.1.1 "Anyone can learn about its roots and all that stuff": undoing salsa's "Latinness"

As argued in Chapter 3, in the salsa circuit, salsa dance is promoted as open for anyone, and its historical associations to places in the Americas are downplayed. Salsa dance professionals who cannot lay claim to Latin "roots" engage in negotiations of salsa's "Latinness" to legitimate their dancing.⁵⁶ They follow a strategy of universalising salsa by insisting on a definition of salsa dancing as an acquirable skill. This strategy exists in two variations: while the first understands salsa's Latinness as acquirable for non-Latin people, the second denies any importance of this Latinness. Both variations finally lead to the legitimization of non-Latin salsa teachers, as the following discussion demonstrates.

Ajay, an Indian-born salsa performer and instructor who became interested in salsa dancing during his studies in the USA, explained to me during the interview:

Of course if you're coming from Latin America, you're born and brought up with that culture, with the dance, with the music, especially with the music, and you speak the language, you understand the lyrics of a song, all of that does help and all of that does make their dancing experience more authentic. But it's like saying, "if you're not an Indian you can't do Yoga" [...]. It's not like this, it's pretty like anyone can dance and anyone can learn Spanish and anyone can educate themselves about Latin America and its roots and all that stuff. So it's easier for those who grow up with it because they don't need to go through certain things of learning just because of where they have been and how they have grown up.

In the above quotation Ajay reiterates the tension between salsa as a specific dance tied to an idealised and essentialised origin in Latin America and at the same time an activity that may be learned by anyone today. The elements he mentions are the

⁵⁶ For example, several dancers told me that they were often asked why they do not speak Spanish or where they had learned to dance in ways that teachers perceived as *Latinos/Latinas* were not asked.

ones mostly negotiated when salsa dancers invoke ideas of salsa's "authenticity" (see also Urquía 2005). They include knowledge of what Ajay calls "the roots" of salsa as well as mastery of the Spanish language and an embodied vocabulary (the movements). Using the term "authentic" to describe the experience of *Latinos* and *Latinas*, he indicates the dance's origins and images of a homogeneous place of origin. Nevertheless, Ajay insists that non-Latinos can learn all of the above-mentioned elements, thus confirming the discourse of salsa as a universal leisure practice and *Esperanto of the body*.

Salsa dancers do often insist that they can learn the (bodily) language of salsa, but some believe this learning process can include a mental transformation, as German salsa dance professional Anna recalls during the interview:

Salsa had a huge effect on me, psychologically, yes, so that I got a lot of self-esteem and self-affirmation. Suddenly I realised that out of a shy, young girl full of complexes, I developed into a, how can I say, while dancing I felt myself, sensed myself, felt an energy in myself that no one would ever have thought I have [...]. And I didn't feel as German, I never felt as German, yes. And suddenly I had found my destiny, in dancing, in passion.

As this dancer describes, salsa dancing becomes a space for and source of self-esteem and empowerment. Anna also draws a connection to the supposed non-German origin of salsa in order to identify with a more emotional character. When I asked what she meant by not feeling as German, she answered:

For me, Germans are quiet, introverted people. And I am not like this, I think. I am very emotional and very passionate, in the dance and elsewhere. And I can't identify with German people and always try to transmit something of my energy to them during the dance lessons, so they can feel themselves. And they all think I'm a *Latina* or Spanish, that's nice.

Anna here describes herself as emotional, passionate and energetic, and associates these traits with a non-German origin, thus ethnicising the practice of salsa dancing. Through her dancing, Anna constructs "an alternative sense of self" (Bosse 2008: 60) that she perceives as more vibrant, similar to the dancers Bosse (2008) studied (as discussed in Chapter 1). The reference to the cultural otherness of the dance allows

some dancers to embody specific types of femininity (and masculinity), which are described as liberating and empowering. By constructing salsa, its history and the feelings it generates as something learnable, non-Latin salsa dancers represent and experience the practice as a leisure activity, though with its own history.

By contrast, the second way to claim a legitimate status as salsa instructor consists of a redefinition of salsa as not particularly related to Latinness, instead focusing on the individual expression of a dancer. This is demonstrated in the following discussion drawn from an interview with Nara:

Joanna: And is history important? Like all these historical “roots” you were referring to? For your dancing?

Nara: So my knowledge of the roots is really limited, I don’t actually know that much, I will admit that, ‘cause I haven’t studied it in that way. My expression to it has all been pretty spontaneous, in the moment, whatever the music is calling to. Not sure what they’re saying necessarily, or the historical background, or who’s singing, I don’t know all of these details half the time, but I do know what the music makes me feel. So I just follow that.

Nara, a female salsa professional with high reputation as a solo artist, who grew up in North America as the child of Asian parents, here downplays the importance of the “Latin” elements: neither an understanding of Spanish, knowledge of the singer nor any “historical background” are important to her dancing. On the contrary, Nara defines her dancing as a direct response to the music and the ways the music makes her feel (a position she also defends in regard to salsa’s gendered structure, as elaborated in Chapter 5).

This insistence on the kinaesthetic response puts the affect of the individual dancer at the centre of the dancing experience and de-centres the practice of salsa dancing from its focus on an essentialised origin. Musicality has become a key concept in the salsa circuit over recent years and dance instructors as well as students insist on the importance of a musical understanding of the dancing and direct response on a kinaesthetic level. In so-called musicality workshops, salsa dance professionals either discuss the instruments and rhythms or demonstrate the ways particular body parts – the shoulders, the hips, the feet – can accentuate rhythm patterns of a specific

song. The concept of musicality remains vague, but it is related to a dancer's understanding of the music and the ways to relate it to individual expression. Musicality is partnered by the insistence on the connection between two dance partners, understood as eye contact, communication through body parts and the relation to the music. This interpretation of the concepts of musicality and connection de-centre the focus of salsa teaching from a discourse of cultural or "ethnic" authenticity (linked to an imagined past or elsewhere) to individual authenticity, whereby the immediate dancing experience stands at the centre.⁵⁷ In this perspective, an individual's personal relationship to salsa dancing is deemed more important than the person's supposed relation to the dance through his or her upbringing or origin. In a discussion with Candice, a regular congress participant, this became very clear:

When you dance with someone you always just wanna know, "how long have you been dancing?" But even that doesn't matter, because after two years it doesn't, you know. Everyone can dance, it's just a question of how much you love it and how much you do it, rather than anything else.

Candice here insists on the importance of the time factor as well as the passion an individual demonstrates for learning the practice. As this discussion shows, the interviewed non-Latin salsa dancers constructed salsa-related "authenticity" as a property of individuals, with no reference to "cultural" or ethnicised "authenticity".

4.1.2 "Latinos teach badly": boundary-making

During my research, the "teaching convention" proved to be an important element in the boundary-making process between dance professionals perceived as *Latin* or *Cuban* and those perceived as *non-Latin*. With the spread of salsa events in Europe, all including workshops for differently experienced salsa students, as well as the proliferation of dance studios, such formalised teaching situations became more important. The ways the dance is taught therefore became an important issue in negotiations about the legitimacy of salsa teachers.

⁵⁷ As introduced in Chapter 1, the concepts of musicality and connection are often interpreted as being characteristic to salsa as part of *sabor* (Renta 2014), see also Section 4.2.2.

Anna, a German salsa dance professional who became a studio owner after 20 years of travelling to and teaching at salsa events, distinguished her teaching methods from others and qualified them as “German”:

They teach very badly, the Latinos. Yes, Cubans are great dancers but they don't have any idea how to teach Germans. I know the way the German thinks and I can get a feel for them and I developed a method so they can learn and feel themselves better. And I guess that is the secret of my success, so that after 22 years I am still in this hotly contested market, even though there are many rivals.

Here Anna portrays *Latinos/Latinas* and Cubans as good dancers, repeating a common discourse that assumes people of Latin American origin are naturally endowed with dance skills. Although she acknowledges their competence as dancers, she constructs them as lacking the “teaching concept” to teach Germans. Therefore she draws the picture of an essentialised German way of learning, one that she is able to understand through her own Germanness. In stressing her own pedagogical techniques, she is able to draw on something the Cubans, better positioned in terms of dance (and the authenticity value attached to their dancing), are supposedly unavailable to achieve. While this teacher speaks about the German context, where she has her own salsa studio with several employed teachers, another dance professional, Ernesto, uses a similar argument for the festival circuit, explaining why certain festivals invite him and others do not. Ernesto perceives the “newly arriving” Cubans as a threat to his own teaching activities, as they better fit racialised stereotypes.

I don't know why some countries invite me and others no more. [...] There are thousands of teachers, millions! Soon we'll have more teachers than students. My goodness... it's incredible! And for example, we should not forget that salsa transmits many clichés and organisers and most of the public too, are open for these clichés. There's nothing I can do, it's like this. For example in *Cuban salsa*, the big stereotype is as a boy: young black Cuban, if possible the shirt a bit open... look at me, I am not this Cuban stereotype. As nowadays there are many Cubans coming over from Cuba, who are like this, they'll probably rather take them at a festival. But afterwards they

will maybe realise that the teaching isn't as good [and they say]: "what was his name, Ernesto? Come on, let's call Ernesto again!"

Ernesto, who has been teaching Cuban-style salsa for a long time, also developed a specific teaching method, as he told me at the beginning of the interview. Again, in order to distinguish himself from the young, racialised Cubans whose "authenticity" might grant them a higher reputation, he presents himself as a better teacher with clearly structured pedagogical techniques.

These teaching techniques focus particularly on the way the dance relates to the music: in practically all the workshops at salsa congresses, salsa dance is taught by demonstrating the steps, and at the same time counting eight beats, with steps on the counts (1, 2, 3, [pause] 5, 6, 7 [pause] or [pause] 2, 3, 4, [pause] 6, 7, 8), thus "breaking down" complex movement patterns into smaller segments and relating them to specific steps.⁵⁸ This teaching vocabulary includes both counting to eight, and explaining where the weight of the body lies while stepping on the right or the left foot as well as other technical terms. During my observation in dance studio settings as well as festivals, I found that it is not uncommon to have a full one-hour class without any music played. The teachers concentrate on the counting and demonstration of steps and body movements on the counts (see Picture 13). This way of learning strongly contrasts with ways of music-related learning, in which the rhythmical instruments of the music guide the steps, and the body movements are learned through imitation (McMains 2009).

Dance instructors like Anna or Ernesto, whose legitimacy as salsa instructors might be challenged (in both cases due to age, as well as ethnicity/race for Ernesto as a non-Cuban and in terms of gender for Anna as a female dancer), draw on images of Cuban teachers as less adapted to European dance students. In this vision, salsa dancing is constructed as a series of steps on counts that have to be acquired in the specific context of a dance lesson (see Urquía 2005). It is related to the claim to possess a specific teaching technique, and the argument is used to distinguish one's teaching from other dance teachers in the salsa circuit.

⁵⁸ For a short demonstration of the On2 technique, see rebrand.ly/salsa-8.



Picture 13 Learning the steps, workshop Vilnius Salsa Festival 2017 (© Steven Isaacs)

A somewhat related assertion against dancers of *Cuban salsa*, and sometimes Cuban dancers per se, is the argument of the “educated dancer”. At salsa congresses, the boundaries between *Cuban salsa* and other salsa styles are spatially institutionalised by allocating them different rooms with different DJs. Dancers heatedly discuss which style is better and thus mobilise various aesthetic arguments. These arguments intersect with ethnicised, racialised and class-based boundaries, and for salsa dance professionals the struggles about styles may in certain situations be related to performing and teaching opportunities. This was made explicit in the interview with Suzana, an employed co-organiser and promoter of an important salsa event in Europe. She explained why she does not wish to invite instructors of *Cuban salsa* to her event, based on a boundary between “educated dancers” of New York-style or On2 and dancers of *Cuban salsa*:

Joanna: Maybe a bit for the artists, like, where are they coming from? How do you choose them?

Suzana: [...]. We promote New York-style, we like New York-style, and our friends are *cross-body*... line dancers, let's say. And I don't like so much Cuban, it's not... I don't like timba [music] very much [...] And I don't like the people from the Cuban [style]. I'm very honest. [...] it's because of the teachers. [...] Because once I saw [dancers of a famous company] dancing socially, Cuban, it was amazing! But usually people dancing Cuban they are very disrespectful on the dance floor. [...]

Joanna: And in what way are they another community, the Cuban people? [...]

Suzana: [...] I don't know, we just share different things, we are totally in the... You know, to dance New York-style is more complicated, but it's better. [...] Honestly if it's a mixed party, I don't like it. It happened to me, I was dancing *cross-body*, they were dancing Cuban, extremely, I got hit many times, they don't even say sorry, anything. I think it's that us, On1 or On2 dancers, in many schools we are also educated. So I was the same in my school, like: "you dance on the dance floor, it's not all yours. You have your part, you have to protect your partner, you have to look around, you have to respect the people around!" The Cubans they proved me that they don't do that.

Suzana marks the boundary between dancers of Cuban style salsa and other styles through her discursive strategy, mobilising several arguments: the music, the alleged disrespect and the lack of education on the dance floor. Furthermore, she constructs Cuban-style salsa as less technical (and hers as "more complicated"). Although she acknowledges the skills of some chosen dancers of *Cuban salsa*, her statement clearly positions New York-style as better. She thus also creates a hierarchy between Cuban and other styles of salsa.

Nevertheless, one element Suzana mentions is the importance of Afro-Cuban dances and rumba, dances which contemporary salsa dancers of all styles include in their performances on festival stages as well as dance floors. Over the last few years, movements from these dances have become markers of "authenticity" – cleverly marketed by dancers originating in Cuba. Suzana, in her position as a congress organiser, thus acknowledges the importance of salsa artists of Cuban style as she is interested in what the paying festival participants want.

To summarise, while European and other non-Latin (or in some cases non-Cuban) salsa dance professionals attempt to enhance their reputation through the emphasis

on qualities such as technical ability, teaching methods and individual response to music, they represent Latin American and particularly Cuban dance professionals as lacking precisely these qualities.

4.2 Latin American salsa dancers and the negotiations of salsa

I will now discuss the ways dance professionals of Latin American and more specifically Cuban origin in the European salsa circuit deal with these accusations of a lack of a teaching method by demonstrating their teaching skills (4.2.1), and by claiming a cultural authenticity that is place- and origin-related (4.2.2), thus engaging in what has been described as “authenticity work” (Peterson 2005: 1086).

4.2.1 “In Europe I have to count exactly on eight beats”: learning the teaching convention

Dance professionals of Cuban origin are well aware of the image of “good dancers but bad teachers” in the salsa circuit, and newly arrived dancers quickly learn about the importance of the teaching convention in the (European) salsa circuit and include it in their repertoire. In an interview in Havana, Germany-based Cuban salsa dance professional Yaimara told me: “In Europe people learn differently than here, so in Europe I have to count exactly on eight beats so that the others can learn.” London-based Cuban dance professional Reinaldo agrees: “I have friends [in Cuba] they don’t know ‘one, two, three’, for example. I didn’t know ‘one two three’!” To perform their status as salsa teachers or, in other words, to do being a salsa teacher entails learning the appropriate teaching vocabulary.

Instructors of the salsa circuit all had to learn this teaching method to use it in their classes.⁵⁹ As McMains (2009: 311) argues: “Salsa dancers who acquired their skills by growing up in a culture in which salsa music and dance are part of everyday life cannot rely on the methods by which they learned as the basis of a successful teaching business”. Yaimara explained:

⁵⁹ The same holds for teachers in Havana’s tourist dance spaces, as they use the technique to teach foreign students. As I observed, although usually speaking Spanish, they count in English to demonstrate their knowledge of how “teaching Europeans” has to be performed.

And I am still learning. As well for my teaching, my methodology. [...] In Cuba we learn differently. Many people just watch, then they copy and one day they do it, that is part of the culture. Even just walking, women in Cuba are walking totally different. But as I realised, here it is not the same, not only for German people, for the whole of Europe, it's logical, it's not your culture.

Teachers of *Cuban salsa* who have learned to dance in lived contexts and without standardised teaching techniques have to adapt their approach to transmit the knowledge of dances. They therefore learn how to translate the body movements they know into a specific form of teaching vocabulary – counting on the beat and breaking down movements into their components.⁶⁰ In this way, they demonstrate their ability and skills in teaching students, thus adapting to the teaching convention.

Furthermore Cuban dancers often need to include quicker turns and complex figures (what is generally referred to as “technical” dancing) for their European students. Several dance professionals told me about the different ways of dancing in Cuba and the European salsa circuit. Reinaldo put the differences as follows:

But in Cuba no one dances salsa, there are rappers, there is rock, there is romantic music, you know. There is nothing [...] salsa. Even they are in shock with me, they are: “wow, how you dance man? Because we never saw you dance like that!” And before, we [were] dancing in a small group like a Rueda de Casino [several couples dance in a circle and switch partners], and now when I go, these girls who used to dance with me, they are like: “no no, you complicate too much now, you do too many things now”, and this and that. Because they don't do, the dance is not what they do in here, people take [classes] like every week, everyone trains to get better.

Reinaldo here describes a paradox several of my interview partners reflected upon: “the way we dance here is not the way they use to dance there”. *Cuban salsa* as defined in the (European) festival circuit is not exactly the same as the ways people dance in informal contexts (in Cuba or other countries). What is called *Cuban salsa* at festivals reveals itself as influenced by salsa's transnationalisation and mixing in

⁶⁰ Bizas (2012) discusses the same difference and adaptation in pedagogical techniques in the case of New York's Senegalese sabar teachers.

the festival circuit – rather than a carbon copy of what is or was danced on Cuban territory. Despite the common understanding of *salsa Cubana* presented in the European salsa circuit as being a direct Cuban “product” so to speak, and the construction of authenticity as place-related, Cuban dance professionals have to go through a process of adapting their teaching and dancing to the salsa circuit.

This gap in different learning and teaching techniques has historical reasons: At the beginning of the 2000s, when different salsa dance styles became more popular in Europe, dance teachers from North America, and particularly New York and Los Angeles, started to be invited to teach at events in Western European cities (see also McMains 2015: 269). Abod, who lived in the UK at that time, remembered the different teaching methods these US teachers used compared to the Cuban (and other Latin American) teachers living in the UK:

And the thing with the LA guys was they brought time discipline. Improved teaching technique in dancing. And because a lot of teachers came from a ballroom background, they brought improved teaching techniques. And a lot of the Cuban dancers at that time, people might disagree with me, were teachers just because they were Cuban. And everybody expects the Cubans are going to dance, so they taught. There were a few good Cuban dancers but there weren't good teachers in that structured syllabus. [...] So the LA people brought that [...] One thing that did happen in England, [...] is when LA came, a group of Cuban teachers, they saw a threat to their livelihood, suddenly somebody tried to do accreditation.

McMains' (2015) historical analysis of salsa dancing in LA and New York shows that successful dance teachers implemented teaching techniques they had learned in ballroom dancing. “Because there was no tradition of teaching Latin dances in formal classes in Latin America, when a demand for Latin dance classes among Latinos began to grow in the 1990s, salsa dancers turned to the ballroom dance industry for models” (McMains 2015: 230). Today, ballroom and competition-oriented dancesport organisations are often organised on a national level and, with salsa's arrival in Europe, they became interested in doing accreditation for salsa dancers. As Abod recalls, the British ballroom dance organisation UKA (United Kingdom Alliance of Professional Teachers of Dancing and Kindred Arts) became

involved with salsa. Urquía (2005: 391) notes in his study on salsa's re-branding in London that the UKA started to issue diplomas, claiming a wish to improve salsa teaching. This bolstered the status of accredited teachers but at the same time excluded several of the so far successful salsa teachers of Latin American origin who were thus threatened in their status as legitimate teachers of salsa. As Urquía (2005) writes, "The examinations, certificates, medals and a book (in English) of dance steps also intimidated those Latin American teachers whose visas did not allow them to work officially and who were wary of the official sounding UKA" (391). The attempts at codification were therefore contested and, to counterbalance, the argument of "cultural authenticity" was put forward. As Urquía's (2005) study further shows, in the symbolic conflict over salsa in London, claims of (ethnic or cultural) authenticity stood against claims of technical excellence, in very similar ways as today.

Taking up the example of the institutionalisation of salsa in London through the ballroom dance organisation UKA in her critical analysis of "salsa cosmopolitanism" in Britain, Boulila (2018: 10) states that "claims to authenticity or cultural property can act as a strategy against the commodification of salsa by organisations like the UKA". Extending the same line of argument, "doing being ethnic" (see next section) can be understood as a tool to counter the processes of exclusion at work in the (European) salsa circuit, particularly regarding the participation of non-European salsa dancers; in terms of access to the circuit, this includes material struggles such as the institutionalisation by European national dance organisations, and also the above described symbolic struggles among dance professionals inside the salsa circuit. In the context of the salsa circuit, a specific form of "Cuban authenticity" becomes a resource that dance professionals can mobilise to construct salsa capital (see Chapter 8).

4.2.2 "Move your body! That's the Cuban style!": doing being Cuban

One strategy to deal with the trope of the "bad teacher but good dancer" for teachers of *Cuban salsa* is to engage with it by embodying and representing Cubanness, by "doing being Cuban". While most salsa dance professionals choose and concentrate on one or several of the salsa dance styles, dancers of Cuban origin told me that

other people look at them as mere representatives of *Cuban salsa*, and often hear phrases like: “oh, you’re Cuban, so you don’t dance New York-style salsa”. Dancers of Cuban origin in the salsa circuit reinforce this naturalising argument, when choosing *Cuban salsa* as their only field of expertise and performance. I identify three entangled elements of doing being Cuban: the construction of Cuban salsa as originating in Cuba, the performance of knowledge about how things are done in Cuba and a specific embodied vocabulary marking Cubanness.

When talking about salsa, Cuban dancers often use the roots-metaphor, mobilising a strong image of ancestry. Reinaldo told me: “But many people know that salsa, the roots, are from Cuba.” Thus these dancers actively try to reinscribe Cuba into the “origin myth” circulating in the salsa circuit. They push this argument forward against the European dancers who do not know about salsa’s history. In this way, Cuban dance professionals are able to present themselves as more authoritative in terms of teaching *Cuban salsa*. As Yaimara explains:

It is very clear, actually many people have wrong information. I don’t blame anybody, but Cuba was totally closed with the *bloqueo* [the US embargo] and many people left Cuba and went for example to the US and took the music with them, like Celia Cruz for example or other musicians and they played the music there. But the music is the same that was in Cuba for a long time. And then they gave it the commercial name of salsa, the name was commercial but what they played was the same music as in Cuba. And after that, salsa made an evolution, with the New York-style, the Puerto Rico-style, nice style as well.

Yaimara here refers to the US embargo against Cuba, and the many musicians who left Cuba during the 1960s. In these ways, dancers of Cuban origin draw on the argument of salsa’s history to enhance their own legitimacy as salsa teachers.

The following field note demonstrates the ways in which Cuban dance professionals perform and embody Cubanness.

I participate in the *rueda*⁶¹ workshop led by Juan, a well-known Cuban dancer performing and teaching in Europe for over 20 years now. The room is huge, a sports hall with a stage at the front of the hall, the DJ desk next to it and pictures on the wall, showing the common clichés of colourful street scenes of Havana, mainly historic cars in front of colonial style houses. Juan steps into the middle of the big room, wearing a skin-tight sleeveless shirt in white with the Cuban flag on it, black trousers and sport shoes. [...] At the end of the workshop, after much applause, Juan shows the patterns taught during the class and the participants film him with their mobile phones or cameras. Afterwards, several people approach him and ask him to take their picture with him. He agrees and poses with one after the other in front of the colourful posters on the wall. A person asks me to take their picture and hands me over her cell phone. [...] Juan now says, he wants a picture of him in front of the flag: he stretches his arms over his head and shouts: “mi Cuba, mio!” Smiling, he asks if the whole flag is in the photo. People are now leaving and Juan walks back to the DJ desk and changes his sweat-soaked shirt.

(Edited field note, salsa festival Rovinj, 2014)

As becomes clear in this field note, teachers of *Cuban salsa* engage in a playful way with the imaginaries of Cuba, positioning themselves as ambassadors and authority in terms of Cubanness. T-shirts or baseball caps in the colours of the Cuban flag are popular accessories among Cuban dance teachers during the workshops. In a similar vein, I observed several times how Cuban dancers demonstratively showed a Cuban flag on stage after their dance performances – the only national references on salsa festivals’ stages. By using national symbols, the dancers define their dancing as Cuban and are able to capitalise on their perceived “cultural authenticity”. Through such performances of the national identity, Cuban dancers “authenticate” their dancing. These dancers thus actively participate in the upholding of the Cuban clichés and participate in the construction of *Cuban salsa* as something essentially

⁶¹ In the festival circuit, *rueda* is taught as a type of *Cuban salsa* danced in a big circle with constant changing of partners.

Cuban. In other words, they are doing salsa's Cubanness. The following field note of an observation at a workshop demonstrates some more elements used in this process.

Although it's only 11am the festival location is already crowded. There are ten different workshops taking place at this time and I choose one of the rare Cuban-style classes (this festival is basically addressing *cross-body* style dancers), the workshop programme announces it as salsa Cubana. When I arrive in the room (one of the smaller festival rooms), the teachers are already standing on a small stage in front of the room where the workshop participants can see them. Both of them wear white t-shirts and white trainers, combined with jeans (hers tight, his looser), he wears a small necklace of coloured beads, a symbol of the Afro-Cuban Santería religion. He is putting on a headset microphone and welcomes us all in Spanish. He then switches to English with a strong Spanish accent and presents himself and his dance partner: "I'm from Cuba, she's from Poland. So guys, never think, 'oh, I'm not Cuban so I can't dance Cuban-style', that's wrong! She is Polish and she dances Cuban-style!" He continues praising his partner while she smiles and tries to stop him. He continues: "the most important thing is to have fun while dancing, to laugh, to stop thinking".

He then starts teaching basic steps, but soon interrupts: "we in Cuba, we bend the knees, that is really important, otherwise the hips can't move." In order to show us what he means, he completely straightens his legs and walks backwards and forwards with stiff hips – "that's like hula hoop, we in Cuba call it the European style". People around me laugh at his joke, he is a great entertainer. The room is now packed with people; a woman in front of me looks around and leaves the room saying it is too crowded.

After several repetitions of the steps, the teacher puts on some music and the rhythm gets faster. I have to be careful not to bump into the people around me, as the teachers show quick turns and large arm movements. "Men macho! Ladies sexy!" he reminds us and explains the way men should stretch out their right arm just before the turn: "it's just natural, like when you say hi to

someone". He stretches out his right arm and at a final movement, turns his wrist for a quick move of the hand. I try to do it, and for me this is not an easy movement, I never say hi to someone like this, the men around me try to do it but the movement doesn't look like the teachers'.

Later he reminds us about the bent knees: "it's about quality, not quantity of steps! In Cuba, when we are dancing, we don't think, 'how many moves I have'. The most important is el sabor (flavour); you need to bend your knees." And while he talks he shows what he means by it, bends his knees and moves the whole body, his torso and arms move in constant flow. "You've got the steps, yeah, now move your body! That's the Cuban style!"

(Edited field note, salsa congress Berlin, 2014)

This field note stems from a large salsa congress offering predominantly *cross-body* style salsa workshops. The context of this observation is important insofar as the instructor here presents himself as Cuban and advertises explicitly for *Cuban salsa* as a fun practice for non-Cubans, particularly Europeans. Such explicit advertising is rare at events with more dance students of *Cuban salsa*.

I will discuss two revealing elements of doing being Cuban from the above workshop situation: first, the ways teachers explain "Cuban culture" and thus distinguish themselves from non-Cuban teachers through the performance of their particular knowledge; second, the importance of bodily movements as a specific type of embodied vocabulary to mark authenticity.

The instructor above puts forward his own being Cuban explicitly and through mentioning several times the way dancing is done in Cuba ("we in Cuba" do it like this). At the same time he uses his status as teacher to make fun of "the Europeans", whom he portrays as dancers with stiff hips, straight legs and without *sabor*. The concept of *sabor* is related to salsa dancing and is often translated with the English notion of swing or flavour; Renta (2014: 118) describes *sabor* as "the heart and soul of salsa dancing, an aesthetic tradition involving improvisation, creativity, and a corporeal response to the polyrhythmic quality of salsa music that stems from its African heritage". In critiques of salsa's commercialisation, the concept of *sabor* holds a special weight, as performers of stylised and choreographed salsa are often

accused of lacking *sabor* (for a detailed analysis of *sabor* in the context of Puerto Rican nationhood and salsa's global commercialisation, see Renta 2014). The dance professional invites the dance students to learn the ways dancing is done in Cuba, taking the role of a teacher not only of dancing but also of "Cuban culture", thus becoming a sort of "cultural broker" (Szasz 1994).

The teacher in the above field note also describes some movements in *salsa Cubana* as "natural", which is often used to describe *Cuban salsa*. This dancing style is often classified as coming "from the street" in contrast to other, more ballet- or acrobatics-inspired styles. In discussions of salsa dancing, ideas of "naturalness" and "street dancing" are often opposed to ballet-inspired aesthetics (McMains 2015). New York (On2) style salsa is sometimes accused of being transformed into ballet. In this way, Cuban-style salsa is presented as genuinely different from the other salsa dance styles, a dancing where *sabor* and fun are the most important ingredients, and dancers are invited to "stop thinking".⁶²

The instructor in the above-described situation performs a balancing act between on one hand presenting the cultural knowledge he transmits and his Cubanness as exclusive, while on the other hand using the argument of salsa's learnable character to make the dance accessible for non-Cubans. In such ways, Cuban dance professionals reinforce and perform their status as "authentic" Cuban dancers and accumulate and sustain symbolic capital.

A third way salsa dance professionals are doing being Cuban is through the execution of complex movements of the whole body. This is what the instructor performs while exclaiming "that's the Cuban style". Such movements are created through the isolated movement of different parts of the body, such as the hips, the spine, the arms and the upper body. They rely on the mastering of the muscles and movement of different body parts at the same time, "sensuous polyrhythms within the body" (Daniel 1995: 3). Such movements borrow from rumba and other so-called Afro-Cuban dances, and they consist of a specific embodied vocabulary, which has come to signify authentic Cubanness in the salsa circuit, since salsa congresses have started to schedule workshops in rumba (and dances for Yoruban orichas, deities of

⁶² For a solo show of a male performer of Cuban-style salsa, see rebrand.ly/salsa-9.

African-derived Cuban religion, see also McMains 2015: 305). Dancers of all salsa styles take up elements of these dances and include them in their dancing, “to spice it up”, as one teacher put it.⁶³

During my observations of performances at salsa festivals between 2013 and 2015, it was quite common to use elements of rumba, besides elements of ballet, contemporary dance, urban dance and hip-hop.⁶⁴ Even dancers who would otherwise disparage *Cuban salsa*, such as Suzana, the congress organiser quoted above, consider so-called Afro-Cuban dances an important part of salsa festivals. Ana (2017) also observes an increase in rumba workshops at European salsa events “that can enrich one’s style of dancing casino, making its overall appearance more ‘authentic’” (178). Steps and movements of so-called Afro-Cuban dances have thus come to signify a specific authenticity, and Cuban teachers are sought-after to teach it. For dance professionals of Cuban origin, stressing their dancing as authentically Cuban may therefore prove an effective marketing strategy.

In her “genealogy of the mulata body”, Blanco Borelli (2016: 13) coins the term “hip(g)nosis” as a “feminist response to the mere objectification of the dancing mulata”. She argues that female dancers in Cuba were not only objectified but also powerfully used their hips in reaction to such representation. Drawing on her interpretative framework, I would argue that in the salsa circuit, objectification (and reappropriation), including sexualised and racialised representations of dancers’ bodies, concern not only female dancers but also male dancers. In the next chapter the salsa-specific sexualised body parts will be discussed, whereby the female hips figure centrally. For men, the movement of the torso and isolation of the chest and shoulders hold as signifiers of a salsa-specific masculinity, often sexualised and racialised as well. Enlarging Blanco Borelli’s (2016) analysis, I would argue that (Cuban) male salsa dance professionals powerfully use their chests to engage with

⁶³ The two dancers in rumba do not touch each other as in the partner hold in salsa, but look at each other. The male dancer attempts to make contact with or gesture towards the female dancer’s intimate area, with his hands, hips or a foot (a movement called *vacunao*). The female dancer moves her hips, while she rejects his attempts. For an example of an improvised rumba performance after a workshop at a salsa congress, see rebrand.ly/salsa-10.

⁶⁴ In the following video, dancers seen as leading figures of LA-style salsa include such movement in the short choreography they taught at an event: rebrand.ly/salsa-11 (particularly at 0:35).

objectification (by their numerous female European students).⁶⁵ As has been argued for the world music market, there exist multiple pressures for “authenticity”, to which musicians have to respond (Glick Schiller and Meinhof 2011). In a similar vein, Cuban salsa dance professionals respond to calls for sexualised and racialised representations of “authenticity” in the salsa circuit.

To summarise, I identified three key ways of doing being Cuban: through the verbal and visual repetition of one’s teaching as specifically Cuban, through the self-representation as cultural broker and, powerfully, through the performance of a specific embodied vocabulary. As Peterson (2005) notices: “If authenticity is constructed and subject to continual change, then it clearly takes an effort to appear authentic” (1086). Through such “authenticity work” Cubanness is constantly performed and the legitimisation as “better” is nurtured.

4.3 Expectations and negotiations of authenticity in salsa tourism in Havana

I will now turn to the encounters between European salsa students and their Cuban salsa teachers in spaces of salsa tourism in Havana. The logics of the affective economy of the salsa circuit are at work in these encounters, but under slightly different circumstances from their European equivalents, as they are usually framed as interactions between tourists and Cubans, and also draw on different expectations from both sides (4.3.1). The interactions therefore entailed manifold negotiations of the issues at stake (4.3.2).

4.3.1 “My goal is to dance like a Cuban”: European students’ expectations

Scholarship on tourism has underlined the importance of tourist imaginaries and expectations both in the holiday experience (Skinner 2011) and in shaping the choices made (Ana 2017). Similarly, Davis (2015a) underlines the importance of dancers’ “fantasies” in the “passionate encounter across many different borders” (181)

⁶⁵ The improvisation by a dance professional after a rumba workshop in front of his students in the following video can be analysed as a performance of the dancer’s skills and at the same time as a demonstration of a specific kind of sexualised (Afro-)Cuban masculinity: rebrand.ly/salsa-12.

between tango dancers. Urry (1995) states that expectations are constructed “through a variety of nontourist practices” (132), distributed through media, which construct the gaze. “Such practices provide the signs in terms of which the holiday experiences are understood, so that what is then seen is interpreted in terms of these pre-given categories” (Urry 1995: 132). During the salsa dance holiday I observed in Havana, I asked the participating students about their expectations before their travel to Cuba. The responses of male and female salsa students included arguments related to their imaginaries of Cuba as a travel destination as well as arguments specifically linked to the dance holiday as a way to witness “authentic Cubanness”. Salsa students’ imaginaries of Cuba as a travel destination included representations of Cuba as a “tropical paradise”. The announcement of the renewing of diplomatic ties between Cuba and the USA at the end of 2014, and thus between my two fieldwork stays in Havana, was also a topic among some salsa students. They wanted to see Cuba “before it changes”, an argument Ana (2017) analyses as the response to a “shattering” of a fantasy. As she argues, “the quest for the authentic had been doubled and supported by one of the most common assumptions that were still functional among tourists: that Cuba remained unchanged, ‘frozen’ in time and isolated from the rest of the world for more than half a century” (Ana 2017: 176). However, with the media coverage about the likely future changes, tourists felt the urge to travel to Cuba as soon as possible.

This was exactly the discourse of some of the salsa dance holiday participants: one of them told me that she had heard that one should travel to Cuba now (in 2015 and 2016), because “afterwards it will be over”. She was not interested in seeing a branch of H&M in the Obispo [a central street in Havana], so she had decided to come to Cuba before it changed. Such a “perpetual quest for unspoiled experiences and local colour” (Ana 2017: 176) builds on romanticised and nostalgic visions of Cuba.

In the search of “authentic experiences”, cultural tourism and particularly dance classes figure high in tourists’ imaginaries (see Picture 14). Taking dance classes and dancing with Cubans was therefore perceived as a privileged access to “the real Cuba”. Furthermore, for many European salsa students, a trip to Cuba is seen as a rite of passage in an individual’s salsa trajectory (cf Puccio 2000). Paradoxically, as

the Cuban interviewees insisted, among the island population other dance forms such as reguetón are more widespread than casino or salsa. Nevertheless, the visitors are looking for a genuine experience of taking dance classes and dancing with Cubans in Cuba. In this process, the rumba and other Cuban folkloric dances were seen as particularly difficult (“the most difficult dances in the world”, as one salsa student put it).



Picture 14 Salsa studio in Havana 2014 (© Joanna Menet).

Dance lessons in Cuba include the promise to “look like a Cuban”. Ana (2017) has described rumba’s function “as an embodied souvenir that makes ‘Cubanness’ available and, in a way, portable, through the body that experienced it” (178). Taking lessons with Cubans in Cuba for many salsa students entailed the promise of “authenticity”, a Cubanness that could be embodied and then be integrated in their

salsa dancing. In a similar vein, Manuela, another dance holiday participant, told me about her expectations:

I wanted to find out how people here move, where the movement comes from. I find it difficult to put this into words, but people here move their bodies beautifully. [...] Of course I also hoped to be able to take the movements with me, so that I can learn to move in this way, at least a little bit.

Salsa students travelling to Cuba thus hoped to have access to an embodied experience of Cubanness, accessible through dance lessons with Cubans, which is often a gendered phenomenon (as argued in section 3.2.2).⁶⁶

On the other hand, the encounters between European students and their Cuban salsa teachers and dance partners were also shaped by the huge economic disparities between them: for Cuban dancers and dance professionals, dance tourism in Havana allowed a privileged access to tourists. These interactions were not only used to access the European salsa circuit (as argued in Chapter 7), they also have the potential to provide Cuban dancers with foreign currency, and often gifts such as rum or clothes or other products that are hard to get in Cuba such as cosmetic articles, digital cameras or smartphones (cf Bodenheimer 2013). At the time of my visit a single dance lesson (usually about one hour) with one of the Cuban dancers cost 12 – 15 CUC (equivalent to 12 – 15 USD), and thus two hour-long lessons were equivalent to the average monthly income of 25–30 CUC provided to workers in state jobs.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Often, spaces of cultural tourism in Havana are also racialised, whereby otherwise disadvantaged individuals can capitalise on their skin colour (Ana 2017: 172). As she states: “In many instances, mediated by travel-guide and media discourses, blackness is semantically reduced and essentialized as a central feature of Afro-Cubanness” (Ana 2017: 175).

⁶⁷ As I observed, dancers who work in salsa schools have to deliver a large part of the fee to the owner, while others managed to build up a network of salsa students they then taught at their homes or in rented rooms in *casa particulares* (private rooms).

For Cuban dancers, engaging in the salsa tourism space therefore meant a privileged access to a lifestyle and opportunities they otherwise would not have.⁶⁸ The huge economic disparities lead to professional dancers with a diploma of folklore or contemporary dance working as dance teachers with tourists. One of these dancers I met during the organised salsa holiday was Olorun, a young dance professional who teaches tourists while being part of the Cuban National Folkloric Company. He told me during an interview after a dance lesson: “We professional dancers from the [Conjunto] *Folklorico*, like many dancers, we make a living from the classes with you. From classes with foreigners, I mean this is the economic income that brings more.” The encounters between salsa students and teachers were founded on highly diverging mutual expectations, which led to manifold negotiations, as I will discuss in the next section.

Roberto, a salsa student whom I met in Havana, explained exactly what he was looking for in the lessons in Cuba:

The basic step is one thing, but the other thing is how to move. There’s much more to it than just six basic steps and a wiggle of the hips. But it’s shoulder, arm, head, chest, exactly that’s it, I watch the details; how is he holding his knee, how is the foot, is he on his heel or the point. That’s what I try to imitate. If I like his style. I will never be able to do this and I will not compare with a Cuban, but my goal is at least to look like a Cuban, or try to look like this. That’s what I wish to take with me, dance wise.

4.3.2 “For them it’s just a job”: negotiating the “authentic experience”

The main point of discussions among the European dancers participating in the dance holiday in Havana was the ambiguous relationship built up with the Cuban dance teachers and dance partners. Manuela, who had come to Cuba “to learn more about Cuban people and their lives”, observed an ever-present “tourist–Cuban template”, which did not allow tourists “to meet them on equal footing”. Additionally, European dance students constantly asked themselves whether or not

⁶⁸ Meeting tourists in the Cuban case is complicated by the government’s control over *jinetismo* (literally translated as tourism “riding”, which includes hustling and prostitution), and its attempts to limit contacts between visitors and residents, as Simoni (2016) shows in his study on informal encounters in Cuba.

to trust their Cuban dance partners and believe their stories (for example of poverty), a feeling that Simoni (2016) describes in his study on informal encounters in Cuba. As he found, “avoiding cheating and deception tended to be among tourists’ major concerns” (Simoni 2016: 50). The salsa students’ romanticised quest for an “authentic experience” was disrupted by their feeling of “just being a tourist”. The disappointment was particularly present regarding the dancing experience.

Daniela, a holiday participant who had come to Cuba to improve her dancing through practice with experienced dancers, told me:

To be honest, I find it a bit disappointing. I mean I really hoped to be able to dance freely with them. And now I find that they [...] don’t make any effort. I mean, you can tell that this is a job. [...] sometimes I feel that for them it’s just a job.

The salsa students who were looking for intense emotional dance experiences were disappointed by the Cuban realities.

The gap between visitors’ expectations and their experiences also appeared when salsa students wished to go out dancing at parties. Most dance schools in Havana offer the services of Cuban dance partners not only during dance lessons but also for an evening at a party. Yaimara, who had organised the dance holiday, explained her view:

I find this means respect, and I find it is normal, when you wish to invite your dance partner, that you pay the entry fee, drinks and a salary of 10 CUC. [...] Because it is the time they take for you and they are with you 100%, you still learn a lot, even though it is not a dance lesson, you learn because you repeat the movements you learned in the class. And on the other hand, for Cubans here with the situation, they don’t have the chance to go to a *casa de la música* every day. With the problems and all, they prefer to give the money to their family, for food.

However, paying a dancer to accompany them to a salsa party generated unease among some of the female holiday participants. Exchanging money for a dance

seemed at odds with the expected authentic and gendered experience of a salsa night out.⁶⁹

Over dinner in the hotel, the topic was discussed in length. While some of the group found it “OK” to follow the rule of 10 CUC plus entry fee, drinks and the taxi, someone found it “too expensive”. One woman said this reminded her of an escort service, and said she would never invite a dance partner for dinner so that he comes dancing with her. Another woman found it “not authentic anymore” to pay for an evening with her dance partner. Despite these discussions, holiday participants managed to go out with their dance partners several times and usually expected their dance partners to join them whenever they suggested going out dancing.

As these discussions among female salsa holiday participants demonstrate, their gendered expectations entailed in the promise of salsa dancing in Cuba were complicated by the economic disparities between themselves and their Cuban dance partners. Instead of the expected emotional encounters, dancers had to deal with the concept of dance as a paid-for service. The conventions of the affective economy of the salsa circuit frame the exchange on the dance floor in non-economic terms. This convention is clearly disrupted in Cuba’s current space of salsa tourism. While salsa tourists looked for an encounter framed as “authentic” in terms of dancers’ mutual wish to dance together, the Cuban salsa dance professionals had to meet the tourists’ gendered expectations. In the salsa tourist dance spaces, salsa was usually performed as a heteronormative encounter, which entailed the idea of men being in charge of flirting (see Törnqvist 2012 for the same observation in the case of tango tourism). The economic inequality between the students and the teachers reversed the “classical” role-play of the men treating the women. Unable to perform economic agency, the male dancers usually insisted on seeing their dance students home to the hotel, even though they lived far from the city centre themselves. In this way, they negotiated the gendered expectations around the dancing.

⁶⁹ The following discussions reveal similar issues are at stake as at European festivals. These negotiations around the institution of *taxi-dancers* (see Cressey 1932, also Törnqvist 2012) are analysed in detail in Chapter 6.1.2.

Some of the Cuban salsa dance professionals also had to navigate their own working (and everyday life) schedule. Olorun, who is employed in a dance company and teaches foreigners, put it like this:

I mean, I teach classes with you in the morning but when I finish the class I need to go to work, you know? When I finish work I come with you to go out at night at the *casa de la música*. This means there are days that I work for the whole day.

When I asked him about the salsa parties, he told me that he did not like them at all due to the presence of *jinetes*:

Jinete is the person who is with a foreigner. At these places there are many of these people. I don't go to these places, I mean I never go, except for working. For example when you [the group] invite me to dance I go to this place because you invited me to go out dancing. [...] I go to this place because I work with you and because I go dancing with you specifically. [...] I don't like to go to these places, at all. I don't know, we dancers who are dancing all day long, for us dancing is not a way of having fun. I don't like the place, nor do I go there because I enjoy dancing, I only go there when I have to, for work. I am working with a student, with a group and they pay me to go there.

The 24-year-old Olorun distances himself from the practices of so-called *jinetes*. He understands his work with tourists as a job and necessity due to the economic situation. As a graduate dance professional working in an internationally touring dance company, he is able to access mobility and lead the life he dreams of without the help of a European girlfriend.⁷⁰

The misunderstandings and negotiations of the encounters on the Cuban dance floor were thus shaped by the diverging interests and expectations of the Cuban dance teachers and the European students. At the same time, such encounters allow

⁷⁰ Insisting on his professionalism, Olorun also told me that he was not interested in engaging in a relationship with tourists and "meeting another girl every week". Other Cuban dance partners in the group demonstrated less reservation and I observed and heard about several romantic relationships between European dance students and Cuban dancers during the dance holiday. In her study on tango dancers, Törnqvist (2013) addresses the "impossible romances" between tango teachers and their students in Buenos Aires, while Davis (2015a) has a more nuanced view of such relationships as a result of visitors' and locals' shared fantasies.

both parties to fulfil their fantasies – of an “authentic experience” as well as “a better life”, an argument Davis (2015a: 168) also makes for the encounters between Argentinean and visiting tango dancers in Buenos Aires.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the constructions of “authenticity” of differently positioned actors in the salsa circuit. As it has demonstrated, “authenticity” is negotiated and filled with different meanings in the salsa circuit. *Non-Latin* salsa dancers are undoing salsa’s supposed Latinness through their insistence on the learnable character of salsa. They furthermore construct a dancer’s “authenticity” as the property of an individual in relation to the dancing. They thus construct what Lindholm (2008) classifies as a specific form of authenticity: one of content. These findings mirror studies of salsa’s “globalisation” and adaptations in localised scenes, which have argued that salsa has been “de-ethnicised” (see for instance Urquía 2005). However, this chapter complicates this image: it demonstrates the ongoing strategies of *Latin*, and especially Cuban dancers to “re-ethnicise” salsa by claiming “authenticity” through reference to their country of origin and access to its essence, *sabor*. In this process, salsa dance professionals as well as their students rely on specific bodily movements drawing on rumba and *Afro-Cuban* dances (analysed as an embodied vocabulary) as a signifier of authenticity. This strategy draws on a “historical” authenticity (Lindholm 2008: 2).

In a study of Argentine “tango immigrants” in New York, Viladrich (2013) shows similar mechanisms. Tango practitioners from Argentina represent their dancing as the most authentic, implying that “those who were born and raised in Buenos Aires are the ones best able to understand the tango’s untainted spirit” (Viladrich 2013: 82). The tango performers she spoke with argued that “learning to dance tango goes beyond achieving technical mastery, as it requires the ability to grasp the inner spirit that is rooted in deep-seated Argentine sentiments” (Viladrich 2013: 83). The reference to the tango’s “real soul” (Viladrich 2013: 83) echoes salsa dancers’ conversations about the importance of *sabor*, which is also used in the branding of *Cuban salsa* as particularly “authentic”.

As this chapter has shown, *non-Latino/Latina* salsa dancers draw a boundary between themselves and *Latinos/Latinas* by claiming a better pedagogical technique, drawing on what I termed “teaching convention”. Confronted with these accusations, the Cuban interviewees positioned themselves as knowledgeable in terms of the current ways of teaching salsa. Although adapting their teaching techniques as well as their dance movements, they need to constantly (re)produce *Cuban salsa* as specifically Cuban and thus to engage in “authenticity work” (Peterson 2005) with and through their bodies. “Doing being Cuban” can be understood as a response to the boundary-making processes inside the salsa circuit as well as outside. In this process, for salsa dance professionals of Cuban origin, the performance of “Cuban authenticity” guarantees their participation and reputation in the European salsa circuit (as further developed in Chapter 8).

Chapter 5 Gendered bodies on the dance floor: doing, redoing and undoing gender in salsa dancing

This chapter focuses on the micro-level of interactions on the dance floor in order to explore how salsa dancers negotiate gender and which gender representations circulate in the salsa circuit.⁷¹ Salsa as a social practice is a site for the (re)production and negotiation of specific gender arrangements. In terms of dancing itself, salsa dancers rely on several “gender conventions” (Schulze 2015), two of which I will explore more deeply in this chapter: the leader and follower structure of the dance, and the gendered moves in the dance.

Scholarship on partner dance often regards the gendered dancing as reinforcing restrictive gender roles in society, because the male dancer initiates the dance moves, whereas the female dancer responds to the lead (cf Borland 2009). By contrast, as Borland (2009) summarises, in the cultural studies literature, “the more improvised, internally focused, unisex dancing of the 1960s is often represented as offering a new space for the enactment of alternative, egalitarian gender relations” (476). In literature on salsa, the gendered roles in the partner structure of dancing have also been addressed, often related to the question of public displays of female bodies and sexuality (Bock and Borland 2011; Bosse 2009; Skinner 2008). The gendered arrangements in salsa are described as “gender hierarchies that characterize the traditional roles of men and women in pre-feminist times” (Pietrobruno 2006: 19) or as “performance of submissive femininity and dominant masculinity” (Schneider 2013: 554). Furthermore, as some scholars argue, representations of gendered arrangements in salsa are often based on Western people’s conceptions of gender in Latin American countries (Schneider 2013). By taking gender hierarchies for granted and relating them either to the past or to an assumed “Latin culture”, these analyses stay silent about how contemporary dancers

⁷¹ Here it is important to keep in mind that my research field did not include explicit same-sex or LGBT salsa spaces, due to my focus on the transnational salsa congresses. Same-sex or LGBT salsa spaces do exist in several cities worldwide (see Boulila 2015) and at salsa competitions the category “same-gender” has been introduced since 2010 (McMains 2015: 138).

of both sex categories are involved in doing gender, how they make sense of these roles, and how they negotiate them.⁷²

A theoretical framework solely focused on fixed structures of dominance and submission not only bears the risk of overlooking the ongoing negotiations of salsa partnerships, but it is also unsuited to take seriously the actual embodied doing and experiences of research participants. Davis (2015b) makes a similar point for taking embodied experiences seriously in the analysis. In discussions of the doing gender approach, the importance of bodies has been highlighted as a resource for creating differences between men and women (eg Messerschmidt 2009; Villa 2010).

Focusing on the interactional level, this chapter does not approach the gender arrangements as stable, nor as the result of salsa dancers' socialisation, but instead is interested in how salsa dancers are "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987) on the dance floor. Some scholars have argued for the introduction of an approach of "undoing gender" (Deutsch 2007; Hirschauer 1994, 2001; Risman 2009). Hirschauer (1994: 679) suggests that, depending on the context, there exist different degrees of gender's importance, understood as a continuum of the salience of gender. In his conceptualisation of "undoing gender", the actualisation or neutralisation and even a neglect of gender become possible (Hirschauer 2001: 214). Risman (2009) points in a similar direction: "perhaps a criterion for identifying undoing gender might be when the essentialism of binary distinctions between people based on sex category is challenged" (83). Furthermore, the doing gender approach has been criticised for its "ignoring of the links between social interaction and structural change" (Deutsch 2007: 107). Deutsch proposes that researchers, instead of focusing on the persistence of inequality, should take into account how "the interactional level can also illuminate the possibility of change" (114). She likewise proposes to use the notion of "undoing gender" for social interactions that reduce gender difference (Deutsch 2007: 122). West and Zimmerman, in a later article (2009), negate the possibility of an undoing of gender; for them the term undoing "implies abandonment – that sex

⁷² McClure (2015) also problematises "the assumption that dancing salsa is about performing 'traditional' (Latino) gender roles" (8). While this chapter examines similar ethnographic situations at salsa events as McClure's study, I analyse them using different theoretical and methodological approaches.

category (or race category or class category) is no longer something to which we are accountable (i.e., that it makes no difference)” (117). They thus propose to use the notion of “redoing gender” for any interaction in which individuals are held accountable.

While West and Zimmerman’s argument in their 2009 article adds an important distinction between “undoing gender” and “redoing gender”, Hirschauer’s focus on the context in which the interaction happens seems relevant to this chapter’s discussion. While analysing salsa dancers’ embodied negotiations of gender, it asks if these practices can be considered as a doing, redoing or undoing of gender in the specific analysed interaction. The conclusion takes up the question of structural change and relates the doings on the dance floor to the transnational careers of salsa dance professionals (which will further be theorised in terms of salsa capital in chapter 8).

In this chapter I will thus explore the ways in which gender is produced in the setting of transnational salsa congresses. How are dancers doing gender and (re)producing the binary, heteronormative partnership (5.1)? How do they negotiate salsa masculinities and femininities, and challenge the routinisation of gender so that we can speak of a redoing or undoing of gender (5.2)?

5.1 Producing the convention of leading and following

The principle of a (heterosexual) couple is the basis of partner dances such as tango and all the standardised ballroom dances (see Davis 2015a on tango; McMains 2009 on ballroom). As already mentioned in Chapter 1, research into salsa has traced the couple formation back to European dance traditions brought to the Caribbean in colonial times (Daniel 2002: 43).

In the salsa circuit, the dance is taught as a partner dance, with one partner indicating the next moves and the other one responding to the lead. Dancers mainly touch their hands or the shoulders of their partner (which leaves space for improvisation with the non-touching body parts, particularly for more experienced dancers). The partnership in salsa is commonly framed as one between man and

woman (5.1.1) and between a leader and a follower, both roles being gendered and entailing specific responsibilities (5.1.2).

5.1.1 “Guys and girls are the fundamental basis”: forming salsa partners

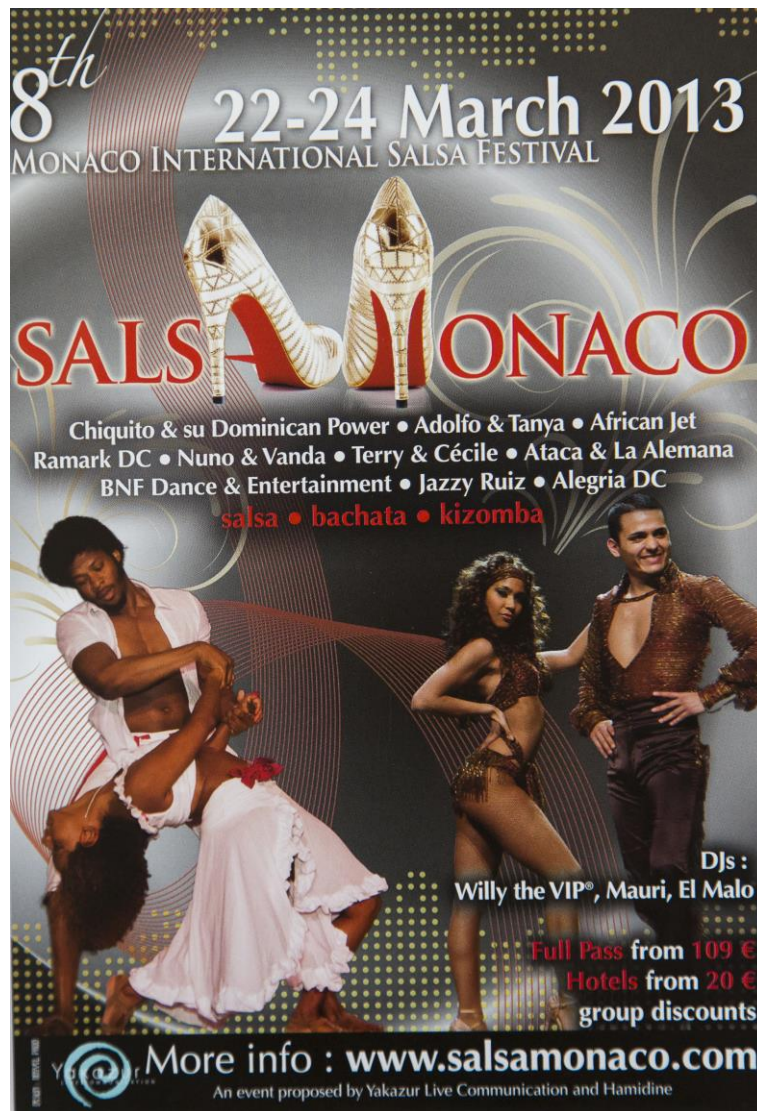
The second workshop I observe on this Sunday morning is announced as a “partnerwork salsa-tango” for the beginner/intermediate level. The room at the convention centre fills up with people, dressed distinctively: women wearing black leggings, a t-shirt and coloured high heels or flat dance shoes, men in t-shirts, sports trousers and trainers or black jazz shoes [special footwear for dancers with a flexible shoe sole]. A group of six young people approaches the stage, they all wear black shirts (the men’s: short-sleeved; the women’s: tank-top, tight) with coloured letters: Dubai Latin Fest. Two of them climb onto the stage while a third connects her smartphone to the sound system next to me. I tell her about my research and on my question she tells me that she’s from Spain but now lives in Dubai where she has joined a salsa dance company. During our short discussion, the room has filled up with more than 80 people, all standing in front of the stage, waiting for the class to start.

The young man on stage grabs the head-mic, puts it on and welcomes the participants. He asks “all the men” to go to the right side of the room, “all the ladies” to the left side of it, still turned to the stage at the front of the room. He then stands in front of the men, with his back turned to them, while his female dance partner does the same in front of the women. He starts counting in English: “one two three; five six seven”, and both instructors start doing steps on each count, followed by several turns. He continues, explaining verbally and through his body, what “the men” should do, focusing on the hands and arms. He then stops and explains what “the ladies” have to do, while his partner shows with which leg to do the steps in the turn and kicks the right leg behind her back. They repeat the sequence several times, always counting the steps, until the participants are able to follow their instructions. After several repetitions, the two dancers on stage turn around, now facing each other, and dance the same pattern together: starting in a couple hold, his right hand on

her left shoulder blade, her left arm on his right shoulder, their other arms at an angle between their bodies. He steps forward, she backwards, then she steps forward, he backwards, they turn around, he steps out with his right leg, she is at his right side, now the kick, with pointed toes she kicks between his legs, looks directly in his eyes, and they turn around again. After their energetic, elegant demonstration, the participants applaud. The instructor now asks them to “form couples” and I observe how several people partner up very quickly, taking each other’s hands or standing close (I assume they know each other and came to the workshop together), always a woman with a man, while others just stand still and look around, searching for a partner. Now several female participants have no dance partner and the teacher calls them to the front of the room, just next to the stage, where the remaining three female dancers of the group (all three long-haired and wearing tight leggings) take their hands and dance with them for the rest of the class.

(Edited field note, Salsafestival Switzerland, February 2015)

This field note from a workshop at a salsa congress shows in an exemplary way how the gendered arrangement of the partner dance is learned and the (heterosexual) couple is constantly reproduced (see Picture 15). In all the partnerwork workshops (where leaders and followers are taught a sequence in order to dance together) I observed, the teaching couple consisted of a woman and a man and performed set roles: the male dancer performed the leading role, the female dancer the following role. An individual who wishes to learn salsa is thus confronted with this partner structure and the gendering of dance roles (leader and follower) from the very first salsa lesson: there is a clear boundary between the two roles. Aspiring dancers are first placed into two dance-related categories (leader and follower) based on their sex category, often as explicitly as in the above example, where women and men first had to separate spatially. In a second step, they are taught how to enact the complementary set of steps and moves.



Picture 15 Flyer Salsa Festival Monaco 2013.

Salsa dancing can be regarded as a case of “institutional reflexivity” in Goffman’s sense. As he describes, institutional practices transform social situations into scenes of gender performances, in this process affirming beliefs about two different sexes (Goffman 1977: 325). To illustrate this argument, Goffman (1977: 319) describes a number of institutionalised frameworks in which gender can be enacted and which have “the effect of confirming our gender stereotypes and the prevailing arrangement between the sexes” as mechanisms of institutional reflexivity. Different practices or environmental settings, such as toilet segregation, are “presented as a natural consequence of the difference between the sex-classes, when in fact it is rather a means of honoring, if not producing, this difference” (Goffman 1977: 316).

Using Goffman's (1977) theoretical framework is helpful as it renders clear that the salsa dancing couple is not a "natural consequence" of biological differences, it is rather the product of these placement practices and the spatial division of two categories as well as the allocation of the leading role to men and the following role to women. The institutional setting, here the salsa class, informs knowledge about how things are done in salsa. Leading and following practices are based on this knowledge and they in turn help to reproduce the institutional framework.

Furthermore, instructors in all the workshops I observed addressed their students as "ladies and men" (or "guys and girls") when they set up to explain the different steps and arm movements of leaders and followers. The vocabulary of leader and follower (used in other partner dance contexts, for example lindy hop) was rare and instead the different roles were just called "dancing as a woman" or "dancing as a man", thus presenting it as a "natural" thing for a man to lead and for a woman to follow. The use of the gendered language instead of the notions of leader and follower naturalises the binary construction of the leader role as performed by men and the follower role as performed by women. In this way, this gender convention was just a given, for (most of) my interview partners, such as Ajay, an experienced salsa instructor who regularly teaches at festivals.

Joanna: So you said guys and girls... is that important in that world? In what ways?

Ajay: Well of course guys and girls are important because you have to dance with people who are from the opposite sex. So it's the fundamental basis, you need to have enough guys and enough girls to make salsa happen.

Ajay explicitly states the imperative to dance with someone of the opposite sex. In this way, salsa in European festival spaces is in most cases constructed as a dance between a male leader and a female follower, based on the convention of heteronormativity.⁷³ As West and Zimmerman (1987) conclude: "doing gender also renders the social arrangements based on sex category accountable as normal and natural, that is, legitimate ways of organizing social life" (146). Hence, salsa

⁷³ Drawing on Butler (1990), the concept of heteronormativity (Warner 1991) points to the belief of two oppositional genders related by heterosexual desire, taken for granted as the norm.

workshop and teaching situations are the sites in which students are placed in two groups – leaders and followers – based on their sex-category: men lead, women follow.

5.1.2 “Ladies, just follow his lead”: gendering leader and follower roles

Beginner salsa dancers do not simply learn steps and moves, the leader and follower roles are also imbued with different meanings. When salsa dancers learn how to lead and how to follow, they also learn how to enact salsa masculinity and salsa femininity, as each role is linked to “particular expectations and responsibilities” (McClure 2015: 90).

In most of the festival partnerwork workshops I observed, a huge part of the workshop time was used for explanations and demonstrations of the leading technique, principally steps and arm moves for the leaders. Students were told where to put their feet, how to hold their hands and on which counts to indicate a change of direction for the followers. In this way, the leading role was constructed as very active, whereas the task for followers was often reduced to “just follow his lead” (see Wiescholek’s 2003 article with this title). The followers were sometimes showed a specific step or move of *ladies’ styling* as in the field note above, where followers had to do a kick with one leg (a move inspired by tango dance and unknown to most salsa dancers, which thus needed to be demonstrated several times). Otherwise, followers were rarely addressed. Discussing the leader and follower relationship, dance instructor Marcos told me:

So imagine, guys have huge responsibilities on the shoulders. They have to think about the beat, they have to think about the step, they have to think about what’s gonna happen next, they have to think about you, and they have to think about the space around. And it’s a lot of tasks to manage in one single thing. And that’s the thing, for girls that is very important to learn: how not to think. To turn off autopilot, you know. Once that happens the guys will have the chance to experience what is the feeling of leading, and the girls what is the feeling of being led. And it’s a huge pleasure later on.

In Marcos' account the list of the leader's/men's "responsibilities" is long: the learning process for leaders is complicated by the importance of rhythmical and musical understanding (dancing in time), the execution and coordination of often-unfamiliar movements with the arms and legs, as well as the importance of the interaction with the partner and the dancers around, which is constructed as the leader's responsibility. As salsa social dancing is based on the improvisation of sequences of steps, leaders further have to anticipate the next move they wish their partner or themselves to do. Following, on the contrary, is here constructed as a passive reaction to the signals received. Although following needs a considerable amount of training as well, as followers have to keep balance even when spinning several times and include styling in their dancing, the role is often framed in terms of "no thinking". Followers are furthermore responsible for the working of the connection between the two dancers, meaning that they have to hold up a certain tension in their arms in order to react quickly to the leader's proposition.

The division of labour between the leader and the follower is not only a technical requirement of the two roles, but creates a general "silencing of female instructors" (McClure 2015: 90), which helps to create and maintain what I discuss as "hegemonic male salsa capital" in Chapter 8. In this way, the gendering of the leader and follower practices reflects gendered hierarchies of power, in which male dancers are placed in a "dominant" position and women dancers are placed in a "submissive" position (cf Schneider 2013). As argued above, it is precisely in this way that scholarship often analyses partner dances such as ballroom, tango or salsa. However, when taking into account dancers' affective experiences of the gendered roles, such clear-cut ideas are blurred.

Several dancers complicated the notions of leading and following and the way these practices are gendered, when talking about the experience of dancing. Instead of understanding the follower role as defined and restricted by the leader, some of the interviewed dancers spoke about their positive experiences of giving up control or being able to "lose oneself". A female dancer in her early fifties told me that she had started dancing after her divorce, and that in contrast to her job where she was the director of a small enterprise, in salsa she could just "drop off" her head at the

cloakroom “like a coat” and let herself be led. This desire to give up control was also expressed in a statement in a discussion on Facebook, concerning a “more democratic distribution of deciding how the dance will go and not just the leader totally dominating what happens from start to finish”. One answer to these attempts to “democratise” salsa was the following statement:

[...] The reason I enjoy salsa is because it gives me the opportunity to let go, submit and be swept around the dance floor in the arms of a man (or woman). It's almost meditative that feeling of giving up control. This might make me sound a bit old fashioned but I assure you I'm not! I use so much “male” energy in other parts of my life – taking charge, making decisions, trying to be “successful” – that I relish the experience of someone else being in charge. I can lead, I'm not a bad leader and it definitely helped my following to learn but it is not where my heart lives in salsa. Sweep me round the dance floor and do with me as you will! However, once the music stops I want equal rights again!!!!

(Facebook discussion)

This quote demonstrates that the follower role in salsa dancing can be experienced as “meditative” and this dancer relates it to the giving up of control – relating this indirectly to “female energy”. She draws a boundary between the dance floor and “other parts” of her life, characterising this other part as a place where she uses another type of “energy”. She also insists on the temporal and context-specific frame that allows for this experience: the dance floor. The quote stems from an experienced dancer who has also learned to lead, a practice I will analyse in the next section. Here I wish to stress the importance some dancers attach to the follower's position as one of deliberately giving up control, an embodied and affective experience that is placed in contrast to other social situations where gender is done differently.

The leader role, on the contrary, was predominantly described as “powerful”, “creative” and framed as active. But it also comes with restrictions, as Karl made clear when talking about his experiences in both roles:

I think it is different for men and women. [...] I really think it is a completely different feeling, honestly I envy you, 'cause you can just let yourself go in music and the lead.

Whereas as man you always have to think about what am I going to do next, what will follow, it's quite technical.

Again, Karl uses the naturalising language of “men and women” in order to speak of the leading and following role in salsa dancing. He had the experience of dancing as a follower himself and clearly found the two roles different. Like other leaders, he describes leading as “technical” (a highly gendered notion itself) and as a state of mind where one always has to think about what comes next. Like Karl, Patric (a long-term dancer and casual teacher) told me that he would actually like to follow more often because of the different feeling. But in his experience, other men didn't like to dance with him and lead him, which hinders him from doing it more often.⁷⁴

As the discussion demonstrates, a focus on the affective experiences of dancing allows for a nuanced understanding of the leader/follower roles. While the leader/follower structure in salsa may reinforce hierarchies between men and women, the dancing also creates experiences of flow in the role of a follower (see Chapter 3) and a sense of restriction in the role of a leader. This finding parallels McClure's (2015) analysis of social salsa dancing. McClure's detailed study focuses on gender and sexuality in salsa dancing, analysing the bodily practices as a mode of subjectification linked to normativity and at the same time as a mode of resistance and self-transformation. Drawing on observations, interview excerpts and her own dancing experiences, her work is mainly centred on the “relations between bodies, selves and others” (McClure 2015) and concludes:

A Foucauldian/Butlerian reading of the power relations in the heteronormative dance partnership suggests that women are constrained by the expectation that they will follow. However, a Deleuzian reading instead positions the follower as particularly able to operate in a present-centred mode of being and open to the possibilities for unpredictable new becomings, while the leader is constrained by his responsibility to generate and direct the momentum and flow of the dance (McClure 2015: 48).

⁷⁴ The reluctance of men to dance salsa with other men indicates the heteronormativity in salsa dance in the salsa circuit. For a further discussion of heteronormativity in salsa spaces, see Boulila 2015; McClure 2015; McMains 2015.

Salsa dancers engage in processes of meaning-making regarding the gendered roles and experience them in different ways. A tension becomes apparent between a liberating experience on an individual level and a reproduction of gendered power relations on the level of the dance structure. While this tension becomes particularly apparent on a theoretical level, some salsa dancers also negotiate it in embodied ways.

The following sections will further analyse how the gender arrangements in salsa dancing are experienced and negotiated in processes of doing, redoing and undoing gender, thus challenging the routinisation of salsa's gender arrangements in specific gender conventions.

5.2 Negotiating the gendered dance partnership

Salsa dancers participating in the salsa circuit position themselves in relation to the gendered arrangements in salsa dancing and their assigned role in different ways. Many interviewed dancers related the leader/follower relationship in the dance in one way or another to gender or a "Latin culture": some believing there are essential differences between men and women, and viewing salsa as a natural expression of these differences. Others told me about a tension between salsa dancing and ideas of gender equality. They expressed a similar dilemma to that which Davis (2015b) notes among tango dancers (not least herself), between a feminist stance including "political and normative commitments" and the "passion" generated through gendered practices in partner dancing.

Dancers' views on salsa dancing can be subsumed into three broad practice-related perspectives, varying in their degree of essentialisation: the first one reinforcing gendered categories (5.2.1), the second one potentially challenging them (5.2.2) and the third one undoing them (5.2.3 and 5.2.4). As I will demonstrate, the experiences and perspectives of female dancers appear to vary depending on their level of competence in dancing as well as concerning their positions in the salsa circuit (students or salsa dance professionals). By contrast, male dancers in my sample tend to hold similar views independently of their status in the salsa circuit. I will now

explore these three perspectives and discuss some of their implications for the doing, redoing and undoing of gender in an embodied way through salsa dancing.

5.2.1 “A nice role play”: reinforcing the gendered categories

The stance that most amateur dancers took was the position that following in dance as a woman and leading as a man was somehow a “nice role play” between two individuals of the opposite sex. This is the case for Manuela, the only novice dancer in my interview sample. She told me why she liked being asked for a dance and being led in salsa:

Manuela: On the one hand I think it's old fashioned [laughs], but on the other hand it's beautiful, because somehow it is in line with this salsa feeling. Elsewhere we as women are not that feminine anymore, especially in Switzerland, in the job, everywhere we have to function. The difference between men and women is not really made anymore. So I like it that there is a space where this exists, where this... even though it is old fashioned, but it's still beautiful. And somehow I also think it's exciting, precisely the game between man and woman, it is like part of it, it's in dancing, the man leads, and you have to let yourself be led, then you really are the woman. [...] It is part of it.

Joanna: And how does it feel when you dance like this, as a woman, as you said?

Manuela: I like it very much. Yes. That you really get the chance in your everyday life to really be a woman, to dress nicely, to move feminine and to let yourself be led. In the beginning that was very difficult for me, to let them lead, because somehow, I also grew up, with my mother, she is a real power woman, she is the boss in the house [laughs]. And she always taught us to take this role ourselves, to be independent, do what I want and don't really be feminine. But I am not really like this. I mean, I am not the type of woman who wants to have a career or to take a somewhat male role. Not at all. I am way too sensitive [laughs]. [...] That's why I like it that there is a place where one can still really be a woman, where it is accepted.

From this account we learn that salsa dancing can be experienced as a sort of “compensatory space” for young, highly educated women like Manuela, who holds a Masters degree and works in the communications department of a university. In her

view, her upbringing as an “independent” and “not feminine” woman initially hindered her ability to learn how to follow in the dance. A potential conflict between independence and the follower role is dissolved in her affirmation that she is not a career-oriented type of woman (“I am not really like this”). She does not completely adhere to what she conceives as a male role in her professional life; instead she fully embraces the possibility salsa opens up for her to “really be a woman”.

This echoes Davis’ findings in her study on transnational tango dancing. She writes about a female dancer wherein “performing femininity becomes a way to express part of her self-identity that she has had to keep under wraps in her work situation and everyday life” (Davis 2015a: 108). Similar to these tango dancers, some of the female interviewees actually liked dancing salsa not in spite of but precisely because of its gender arrangements. For them, salsa opens up a space where they can dress up and behave in ways they would not in other social situations and they clearly mark the context of salsa as specific and different from other social situations in their life. In this way, salsa becomes a “game” (Villa 2003), a point I will further discuss below.

Some male dancers and leaders took a similar stance. In the interview with Patric about the history of salsa and the meaning of the roles, he said:

Patric: These roles still exist. Through the dance they are probably more defined or forced. You really have to live it, you can’t just... as a dancer, the one who leads, you really need to be a bit macho. You have to perform this role, even though you might not be like this, you have to assume the role [...] You can express your femininity and as a man you can express your masculinity, by leading her, saying where to go, it is defined by the dance. I believe this is OK, really.

Joanna: So you’re comfortable with this?

Patric: Yes I am. You just shouldn’t adopt this too much in your own life. You shouldn’t believe, once you go out [of salsa] that you can be that decisive besides dancing. But I don’t think this could happen. I rather believe that you can’t do it enough, or not in this way and in dancing you can experience something that is also healthy, I think. It also fosters self-confidence [...] I believe this is also natural to some extent and should be like this and should stay like this.

Patric interprets the performance of salsa femininity and masculinity as part of the necessary “role play” in salsa dancing. Again, the couple is heteronormatively constructed as consisting of a man and a woman, and both have complementary responsibilities. Referring to salsa femininity and masculinity Patric reflects on the possibility that individuals “might not be like this”, underlying the playful character of the dance situation as a performance of gendered roles. By drawing a clear distinction between dancing and the outside world, he confines the embodiment of a certain type of masculinity to the salsa space as it might potentially lead to conflicts “besides dancing”. Like Manuela, he separates the salsa space from other social settings. He also uses the term “natural” to describe leader and follower roles, referring to essential differences between the two categories of men and women, based on a view of two complementary and essentially different gender categories, and perceives the role play as a “healthy” compensation.

In salsa, the gendered role play is not only naturalised but, as Patric’s reference to salsa masculinity as “macho-like” suggests, constructions of gender in salsa also intersect with specific representations of “Latinness”. In the interview, Patric associates salsa with the history of *Latinos* and relates the leader/follower structure to a specific kind of masculinity. While drawing on exoticising projections, he considers the embodiments of this type of salsa masculinity as complementary to his everyday life.

In all the above accounts, the construction of salsa as “different” from other social situations (mainly work) is striking. Villa (2003) analyses a similar phenomenon in tango, which she describes as a relatively autonomous, mimetic world of game, interrelated with other existing worlds. As she argues, to stay in the game, the actors (the amateur tango dancers) consciously distance themselves from their everyday practices (Villa 2003: 136). They engage in playful gendered performances of tango femininity and masculinity precisely because they do lack such clear rules of the game (at the roots of tango passion) in their everyday lives (Villa 2003: 154). Davis similarly argues that

tango cannot be viewed as a reiteration of traditional gender relations that existed in another time and place. Nor is it simply a reflection of relationships between men and

women as they exist in late modernity. Rather, tango provides an opportunity for contemporary individuals to experience something that is missing in their everyday lives. It offers them an escape from the norms of equality that facilitates their desire for passion (Davis 2015a: 126).

According to Davis (2015a), tango gender relations can be understood as a compensation for some of the costs of late modernity. In this way, for some of the salsa students, the gender conventions in salsa are seen as a game with specific rules, taking place outside of their everyday lives, and enabling affective experiences they are missing otherwise. However, as I have argued before, the gendered (and exoticised) role play is not the only element that attracts dancers to engage in the salsa circuit, and not all dancers accept the so far described (re)production of gendered roles, as the following two sections demonstrate.

5.2.2 “You can switch the roles”: disentangling sex category from gender

The second stance dancers took regarding the gendering of the leader and follower roles was a de-essentialised vision of leader and follower skills, not relating them to sex category. This vision was usually taken by more experienced dancers or salsa dance professionals. Although in salsa the leader role is constantly constructed as masculine and the follower role as feminine, some dancers are experimenting with a role switch, and thus potentially challenging the naturalisation of gendered dance roles and sexuality. As West and Zimmerman write, when an individual “identified as a member of one sex category engages in behaviour usually associated with the other category, this routinization is challenged” (West and Zimmerman 1987: 139). The role switch in salsa potentially allows for a disentangling of leader/follower roles from sex category and the challenging of the heteronormative structure of salsa dancing.

Based on my own experience and observations, it takes anything from several months to several years of practice until an individual is able to dance in a way that is considered advanced. In salsa dancing, actors usually learn one of the two roles and must invest a considerable amount of time to improve in this one role. Due to these learning practices, a switch of role requires training in order to be enjoyable

for dancers.⁷⁵ I will now turn to these practices of switching and analyse in which contexts they happen. Here I am interested in the ways they are framed and legitimated and the potential of a role switch as a challenge to the routinisation of gender in salsa partnership. Salsa dance professional Maria (whose story will be introduced in Part III) expressed the potential as follows:

Joanna: It's about the gender in the dance, so for you, what is a good female dancer like?

Maria: You know, for me it's not really about gender in this dance, even if of course the dance as salsa has a really, I mean, the genders are really defined in the dancing, yes. [...] But if it's coming about the dancing by itself [...] since the dance is a couple dance, so you enjoy and you communicate with other people, so the joy is together. [...] And for this you have tools, the leader has certain tools, the follower has certain tools. And you use these tools to get simply what you want from dance, which is simply the pleasure and the joy of communicating. So it's hard to say [...] what is a good female dancer, because I know also females that are really good leaders, I was dancing, here is one of them, a friend of mine from Spain, she is just really awesome as a leader so I dance with her as well. So that's what I'm saying, that about the dancing by itself, you can switch the roles as well and it's fine, and it's still dancing.

In this interview extract I gendered salsa dancers in my initial question about “female dancers”, whereupon Maria negated the importance of gender in salsa. She rather sets the emphasis on the communication between two individuals, being achieved through differently used tools by leaders and followers. In a next step, she dissociates the leader and follower roles from sex category. Sometimes dancers switch roles, thus disrupting dominant conventions of who is supposed to lead and who to follow based on sex category. The heteronormative structure of the dance and the standardisation of gender is challenged as the equation between sex category and role is cancelled.

⁷⁵ As McClure (2015) explains: “A leader switching roles for the first time is unlikely to be at all skilful as a follower, but, crucially, there is a basic level of competence which enables them to immediately get out on the dancefloor and dance socially” (155). However, according to McClure, even experienced followers may have more difficulty to switch and lead because leading involves generating patterns of movements that are only developed through a learning process.

During my research I observed several times women leading another woman during a festival party or in the workshops, or a man following another man.⁷⁶ Drawing on Butler (1993), Schneider (2013) qualifies such non-heteronormative dancing in salsa as “queer performances”, as they have the potential to question normative behaviour. However, as in Schneider’s study (mirroring McClure’s (2015) findings), at the observed events such a partnering was usually framed as a transgression of “normal” salsa behaviour and needed justification or legitimisation in several ways. In this way, the “subversive potential of non-heteronormative performance” (Schneider 2013: 565) in salsa is questionable, as it actually reinforces the binary gender category.

Maria continued her explanations about the role switching, saying that it was something people did “just for fun”. She thus framed the situation of a man following or a woman leading as something entertaining that should not be taken seriously. The gender convention is reinforced through the marking of the situation as an exception and thus defining the boundary. This was also the case in the situation I described in the field note in Section 5.1.1: three female dancers who were recognisable as salsa professionals each danced as leader, constructing a teacher/student relationship. This happened in several classes I observed, and through the workshop context and the hierarchical position these dancers had as instructors (or as part of a salsa dance company), leading was marked as a skill that more experienced dancers were able to acquire. Nevertheless, the role switching of female dancers becoming leader was situationally framed as a necessity, the usual argument being that “there are not enough men”, so there were not enough leaders available. Female dancers were thus supposed to dance in the leader role only as long as there were not enough male dancers to lead them. In workshops where female participants outnumbered male participants, the imbalance was either resolved through experienced female dancers switching, or by instructors asking male dancers to change partners after several minutes, and dance with two female dancers. In this way, the gender convention of men leading and women following

⁷⁶ I never observed a woman leading a man at a party, which might be due to the practical difficulties of identifying who leads whom in a dance couple, from the position of the observer.

was not disrupted. Boulila's (2015) analyses of how similar situations marginalise lesbian and bisexual women who want to lead.

The need to legitimise a role switch also became clear in the interviews and discussions I had with salsa dancers. I asked several instructors about their experiences in class.

Joanna: Did you ever have girls who wanted to learn how to lead?

Marcos: Oh yes. Because you know sometimes you have on average much more girls than guys, and I had been experiencing many girls that are really really good leaders. And I think it's much more, they are much more sensitive, much more smoother as leader, because they know what is the feeling of [...] leading well or badly, you know. And I think, a guy who has experienced how to be led, they become really good leaders, because they have more consciousness you know. They feel, OK this is painful, this is not comfortable, you know. I personally have been dancing as a girl many times, just to check it out how it feels.

Marcos, who is a regular instructor at salsa events and gives classes where he lives, here uses several strategies to legitimise a role switch. Like several other instructors, he proposes that men learn the follower role in order to become better leaders. Likewise his own dancing "as a girl" is framed as a necessity in order to become a better leader. In a similar way, Karl explained: "There was a time when I actually danced as a woman, for me it was just about improving my lead. So virtually a man led me and I could experience how is it as woman." Through the framing of the role switching as part of enhancing the leader's competence, it is, again, clearly marked as a context of learning and thus not as a "real" salsa dance situation. McClure (2015) had a similar experience during her research, stating: "This interpretation serves to legitimise switching roles in a way that avoids challenging the gendered and heteronormative structure of the dance" (161). By constantly marking women leaders and men followers as exceptions, the binary gender structure of salsa dance is actually validated; in other words, although dancers challenge the routinisation of gender, the heteronormative and gendered structure is upheld.

5.2.3 “A conversation instead of a lecture”: undoing gender

The third perspective dancers take complicates the notion of the gendered role play, which was until now understood as a dance between an active leader and a passive follower. As the next quote demonstrates, some followers also try to open up agency for both partners, in their discourse about salsa but also in an embodied way on the dance floor. They thus attempt a blurring of the opposition between the gendered roles of leading and following. Thus, Laura, an experienced dancer and teacher, stated on my question about the gender roles in salsa dancing: “[In my classes] I always say: the man says what one dances and the woman says how. Of course the man is the leader, that’s clear, the woman has to follow, but just the way she wants to [laughs].”

By attributing the woman/follower with agency to actually shape the dance, Laura here interprets the relationship between leader and follower in a slightly different way. Several followers I talked to described their dancing experiences as actively taking part in and influencing the dance. In this process, the skill level a dancer has acquired seems to be the decisive element, as McClure (2015) also argues. Isabelle, an experienced follower and instructor in a local salsa school, explained:

I mean, as a woman you are restricted. The man leads, decides which moves he wants to dance, if you want or not. So you are very limited. But nevertheless, as a woman it’s your job to make the best of it. [...] You can just let yourself be led and that’s it or you bring your style into it, so you can express yourself anyway. And that’s what I love about it, once you’ve got this, it’s a process and of course you need to have a certain level; before you are concentrating on being led, react etc. But then, when the man lets you go and then I am free. And actually I am a free spirit and that’s my moment. And although you are free, the connection has to be there. ’Cause you have to be able to react when he comes and gets you again. It doesn’t matter if you are led or free, it’s always this interaction. [...] Yes, and it’s my expression [...] what I bring into it and how I interpret the music. And that’s me. Independently of whom I dance with.

Isabelle first uses terms like “restriction” and “limitation” but then extends the follower’s repertoire, saying she can also bring her “style” into the dance and “express herself”. She can especially do this during the moments of the dance where

the leader releases her and she dances freely. In social salsa dancing, the moments of breaking up the partner hold are filled with small, quick steps and isolated movements of body parts such as legs, arms, the pelvis or the upper body – which are usually called shines, footwork and/or *ladies' styling*. Although Isabelle loves these moments in dancing, she nevertheless insists on the importance of a partner during them. She understands the male leader as facilitating her expressive performance and the interest of salsa dance lies precisely in the interaction with or “connection” to a partner. She describes herself as a “free spirit” but nevertheless prefers dancing with someone else.

Another important element allowing for the expression and interpretation of the follower is the way the leader conceives of their leading. An often-stated argument during workshops concerning leaders is that they should always “adapt” to the follower and not just do whatever they wish to do. Leaders are thus urged to respond to followers. Regular festival-goer Candice talked about “new possibilities” when I asked her to elaborate on the type of dances she liked:

You know, when you dance with someone, there's lead and follow, he leads you follow. When you get to the next level, then you dance with the music, you're not just doing steps anymore, you're playing with the breaks, you're responding to music. And then there's the whole thing playing with your partner. And for me the most responsive guys are the ones who play with the music, they listen to the music but they also listen to you as a follower. So they are saying OK, you heard something I didn't hear, I'm gonna adjust to that. I'm gonna give you space to do something here, I'm gonna let you influence the dance. And I'm gonna hold you in a way that you've got more freedom and you can do other things. And instead of leading as an order or an instruction, I'm gonna lead as a, I'm opening you up to new possibilities, so it's an attitude thing.

In Candice's account, it becomes clear that dancing with the music is an important part as well as what she calls “playing” with her partner. Like Isabelle before, she links these two processes to a certain level of competence. Candice likes to influence the dance herself, inspired by her own understanding of the music. In order to do this she needs a responsive partner who allows her the space to do it. By redefining

the follower role as active and the leader role as responsive, she breaks with the common understanding of the leader/follower relationship. Building on West and Zimmerman's (2009) reformulation of their approach of doing gender, this challenging of the routinisation of the gendered arrangements can be analysed as redoing gender. The basis of salsa – leading and following – is still upheld, but the ways they are embodied differ from the above-mentioned situations. In this way, leaders and followers with a certain skill level are able to redefine their dance relationship as a partnership rather than a hierarchical relation between leader and follower. In her analysis of lindy hop, Wade (2011) also argues that more advanced dancers use connection “to create a single dancer that cannot be fragmented into a leader and a follower at all” (237).

There are dancers who not only try to enlarge the follower role but clearly formulate a critique of salsa's leader/follower structure, such as the dancer who initiated the Facebook discussion cited in Section 5.1.2, asking for a less dominating leader. Negotiations about the leader/follower structure and related salsa masculinity and femininity are taking place between dancers with different experience levels. In this process, female dance professionals play an important role in criticising and sometimes potentially redefining the dance. This became clear in the interview with Lavinia, who was born in Mexico and later moved to Italy to start a transnational career. Asked for her motivations to travel in the salsa circuit, she told me that she wanted to challenge common representations of “Latin culture”:

I want to give a strong and a right way of sharing my culture, my Latin culture. You know, I'm saying: 'I'm Mexican, I'm Latin, I'm a woman' [...]. To be honest, because, I am Mexican right, so the Mexican, some, not everyone, but some of the Mexican people that had been here, had created a particular image of being Mexican. So for me I think not all Latin people are lazy or irresponsible or alcoholics, or these negative situations. And not all women are just sitting and not working by themselves and not strong enough to do their own thing, I think we can work, we can also be strong and say what we think, and feel, yes this is the way I'm feeling, I wanna do it this way. You know, these stereotypes. I want to show that there is no stereotype. That Mexicans and women, we can also be this way.

Lavinia here reclaims an identity as a Mexican woman that challenges discriminatory stereotypes of “Latin people”. She also depicts the image of a passive Mexican woman, an image she wants to change through her dancing and choreography work. Lavinia was asked to choreograph a group consisting of only female dancers, and she told me that she wanted “to do something different, instead of a lady, booty, sexy style. You know, that’s like a stereotype”. Instead, she describes her choreography as a “powerful, energetic” dancing. Nevertheless, Lavinia also dances as a follower with her dance partner, something she describes as one of her “main difficulties”. She wishes to have equal standing.

Joanna: And is this possible in the dance?

Lavinia: In the dance, physically, no. Because someone needs to follow, if not, it would be a fight. Of course if you have the capacity and the professionalism to also learn the figures, it will create more connection, but as a role yes, physically, you have to receive the command.

We did not have the time to discuss the question of why she had to be the one who follows in dance (and not her dance partner), but to me it seemed that Lavinia accepted her role in dancing as part of salsa under the condition that she had an equal share in other domains of the professional dance partnership, such as the choreography of the pieces she performed with her dance partner and their dance group.

Other female dancers do try to actively change the gendered structure (which is possible only once they have acquired a certain reputation in the salsa circuit). I will illustrate this with the case of Nara, a salsa instructor and performer whom I introduced in Chapter 4. She is one of the few professional female dancers who pursues a solo career and who is regularly invited to teach and perform at salsa events worldwide.

So for the most part, salsa is, like everyone always thinks about the women, oh they are beautiful women and this and this and this. But if you think about the way most of it is structured, like if you think of partner names, most of the time it’s the man’s name that holds weight. And it’s a leader, even though the follower embellishes and

creates these beautiful things, it's still the lead determines what's gonna happen, right. So in that sense it's kind of male dominated, given, or leader dominated, let's say instead of male dominated. 'Cause that's even when women are leading we still expect the leader to know what to do for everything.

In Nara's experience, although women are highly visible in salsa, they are not in charge when it comes to dance partners and the dancing itself. Here, she links male "dominance" to the ways leader and follower roles are enacted in salsa dancing. In a second step she revises her statement and explains that the domination is linked to the leader/follower structure of dancing, so that even when a woman takes the lead, the problem stays the same. Nara has thus developed her own discourse about the leader/follower structure and actively tries to change the perceived male-dominance in the salsa business, on one hand through travelling as a (successful) solo instructor, on the other hand through the way she dances. She thus deliberately tries undoing gender (Hirschauer 2001) in an embodied way. We discussed her views on gender relations in salsa and she mentioned that they were quite controversial and that she needed to have a "thick skin". On my questioning what was controversial about it and in what ways she wanted to change things, she explained.

I mean one of the contested points in my dancing is the lead and follow relationship, which for the longest time, and still, predominantly is viewed as the leader dictates what's happening in the dance, so it's not so much of a conversation as much as it is a lecture. And I think I saw it that way too when I first started dancing, until I got bored with that relationship and was like OK, now that I know more, I have more things to say. I don't wanna just sit here and listen to you speak the whole time. Specially if you think of an entire night of dancing. Maybe one song is five minutes, but if you think of four hours of dancing and just four hours of sitting there and listening to someone speak and not getting a chance to say something, it's one no fun, and two, it's not my personality. 'Cause I always have a thing to say, even if I don't know anything. But now as I got better, I started to learn more, then I had more questions to ask, more things to suggest. And that view of the relationship between the leader and follower as a conversation instead of a lecture is still kind of controversial. Because there are a lot of leaders, especially people that have been around for a long time, that view that: no, you're breaking it, that's not what you're supposed to do. You know, you're supposed

to embellish what the lead, the spaces that the lead provides you, not actually take those moments yourself. And in that way I would say, there are no other females in salsa that do that [...] So in that way I feel like I've changed that and I know there are other women dancing now that kind of use what they've seen with my dancing and my approach to it as a doorway, or a gateway for them to express themselves as well.

Nara here uses the metaphor of dancing as a dialogue, proposing that the relationship between a leader and a follower in salsa dancing should be reinterpreted as a conversation where both partners take part (see Picture 16).



Picture 16 Enjoying a dance moment (© Steven Isaacs).

She gets criticised by longer established dancers in the salsa circuit, who accuse her of “breaking it”, meaning breaking the connection that the follower is supposed to maintain. Followers are taught to react to the leaders’ signals in order to establish a “connection” and keep it up for the rest of the dance. The imperative for a connection in order to enjoy the dance results in an interpretation of followers’

active participation as “bad” dancing.⁷⁷ At the same time, Nara is a successful solo artist and has a large fan base of dancers who wish to learn from her. Talking to Nara’s students after one of her workshops at a festival, I realised how much they liked her for demonstrating such “new ways” of dancing to salsa music. She perceives herself as pioneering a new way of dancing salsa.

Through her critique and changing of the structure of the dancing itself, Nara is not only undoing gender but also redoing the ways salsa works.⁷⁸ This becomes clear through the negative reactions she gets from established dancers, whom she overheard talking about her, calling her dancing “no salsa” anymore. The established dancers try to delegitimise Nara’s dancing, engaging in struggles over the power to define what salsa is and what it is not. (Un)doing gender and what could be termed “doing salsa” are related processes, as individuals try out new ways, challenging current salsa conventions. In such struggles, individuals with higher salsa capital (see Chapter 8) may take the risk to challenge the organisation of the salsa world.

5.2.4 “I don’t shake my hips all the time”: from *ladies’/men’s styling* to body movement

This section addresses a second gender convention of the salsa circuit: gendered dance movements. In salsa dancing, not only leader and follower roles are gendered, but also specific movements of certain body parts. Explicit addressing of the ways men and women are supposed to move in salsa are frequent. The verbal reminder “ladies: sexy, men: macho!” was expressed during workshops at festivals, and the teaching practices also involve body movements clearly designated as either female or male (see Picture 17).

⁷⁷ See also McClure (2015: 103) for an elaborate discussion of these processes in terms of power relations between dance partners in social dancing.

⁷⁸ In her article on tango dancers, Villa (2003) presents the practices of switching roles and of changing the partner structure of dance, arguing that the latter can be seen as a “subversive strategy” in Butler’s sense, a strategy she as feminist sociologist wishes to implement. However, similar to the negative comments Nara is confronted with, Villa argues that the blurring of the leader/follower structure leads to other tango dancers not recognising the dance as tango anymore (Villa 2003: 153).

Ladies' styling and, to a lesser degree, *men's styling* classes form an integral part of salsa festivals' workshop offering. The focus of these classes lies on learning a sequence of steps and movements, including big moves with the hips, isolated movements of the upper torso, caressing of the hair and upper body as well as the all-present arm movements with wrists bent and fingers spread.⁷⁹



Picture 17 Learning salsa femininity, Berlin Valentine Dance Festival 2018 (© Steven Isaacs).

⁷⁹ In her ethnography of salsa in Los Angeles, García (2013: 103) theorises the “shift of bodily emphasis from hips to arms” as a move toward upward mobility in the local hierarchy. She draws on Desmond’s (1997) observation that as dance styles travel across borders, dance forms associated with “lower class populations” are often desexualised. However, the arm gestures in salsa’s *ladies’ styling* classes are clearly meant to be “sexy”, as demonstrated in the following video: rebrand.ly/salsa-13.

Female dancers were often told to practise these movement patterns in order to make their dance look “sexy”, highlighting parts of the female body such as hips, buttocks, breasts and arms. In her study on salsa in New Jersey, Borland (2009) analyses the “sexy woman” stereotype as related to the representation of the “hot Latina”, circulating in media and popular culture, and which is (re)produced through salsa’s *ladies styling*. There exists a vast literature on the (historical) “fetishization” (Piedra 1997), “exoticization” and “sexualisation” of the Latina body (García 2013: 102), whereby particularly the hips and buttocks are theorised.⁸⁰

On the contrary, looking at salsa solely from a gender perspective, McClure (2015: 129) analyses *ladies’ styling* in salsa as part of wider cultural representations of femininity and does not refer to it as related to exoticising processes. My observations of *ladies’ styling* classes and interviews with salsa dancers indicate the importance instructors place on the expression of a specific type of femininity, which in some cases draws on exoticising representations of the “hot Latina” but most often revolve around the importance of the apprenticeship of mastering one’s body. While some dancers (such as Anna, quoted in Chapter 4) clearly ethnicise the practice of salsa dancing, for many others salsa’s *ladies’ styling* is related to something they “naturally” possess as women.

Paradoxically, the *ladies’ styling* classes in salsa underline that femininity has to be learned, as the mastering of *ladies’ styling* is not regarded as “natural” and instructors rather insist on the technical aspects of the gendered moves. One instructor reminded her students: “You can’t let yourself go. All the magic happens when you can control your body!” The mastery of performances of salsa femininity requires hours of training and bodily control. In this way, female dancers learn to internalise body moves they can later include in their dancing and insert in the moments of the dance when the leader releases the partner hold – those instances Isabelle (quoted above) called her moments of free expression (see Picture 18). For some dancers the performance of a specific type of femininity is related to a space of

⁸⁰ See, for example Blanco Borelli (2016). In her book *She is Cuba: A genealogy of the Mulata Body*, the critical dance scholar builds a theoretical framework based on the hips, which she calls hip(g)nosis, “a feminist response to the mere objectification of the dancing *mulata*” (Blanco Borelli 2016: 13).

expressive freedom and self-esteem, which for them comes with the cultivation of their body.⁸¹



Picture 18 Ladies' styling workshop, Berlin Valentine Dance Festival 2018 (© Steven Isaacs).

This paradox of salsa *ladies' styling* has been analysed from a feminist perspective with reference to the imperative of self-cultivation in neoliberalism. Drawing on theories of post-feminism, McClure (2015) argues that *ladies' styling* serves as a mechanism to produce a specific “sexy” brand of femininity. In an understanding of individuals as responsible for their own self-cultivation, “ladies' styling can be read

⁸¹ This dovetails with Borland's (2009) analysis of salsa dancers in New Jersey, and her argument: “The structured and differential nature of the gendered exchange, which positions men as leaders and women as followers, paradoxically also offers a space of expressive freedom for women, since the recovery of partner dancing in this milieu allows women to engage in an admittedly exoticised but powerful expression of sexuality” (Borland 2009: 488). See also Skinner 2008.

as a response to the neoliberal imperative for women in particular to work on and transform themselves according to ideals of femininity” (McClure 2015: 129). This process can be understood as a shift towards a post-feminist “resexualisation of women’s bodies” (Gill 2003). Accordingly, as McClure (2015) concludes: “feelings of pleasure and empowerment associated with being sexually desirable are recruited to re-configure sexual objectification in terms of a freely choosing neoliberal feminine subject” (129). This analysis is helpful in understanding the paradox of female dancers experiencing the performances of a specific salsa femininity as empowering. At the same time, it leaves little room for an analysis of those voices that attempt to redo or undo gender in embodied ways, which is the main goal of this chapter.

In contrast to the numerous *ladies’ styling* workshops offered during my research, *men’s styling* workshops were rare.⁸² In those workshops, similar to the *ladies’ styling* workshops, participants were taught dance technique (turning), and the highlighting of specific body parts, particularly the shoulders.⁸³ While *ladies’ styling* classes and *men’s styling* classes (re)produce a specific understanding of salsa femininity and salsa masculinity, other workshops were designed to improve the isolation of body parts, usually called body movement, and they addressed female and male dancers alike.

There are dancers critical of the above definitions of salsa femininity and masculinity, especially some dancers of the younger generation of professionals. I already cited the case of Lavinia, who built up considerable reputation with her powerful and unconventional salsa performances. Nara’s case again illustrates well how gendered dance moves are currently negotiated in the salsa circuit:

So that for example, for the longest time in salsa, anytime I would see women dancing, it’s always like really delicate, always using their hands in this fashion [showing her two hands, fingers stretched out], or always moving with the hips and things like this that are feminine by this very narrow definition of femininity. Same thing goes for the men, their narrowly defined masculinity of being strong and brute almost. Whereas

⁸² One reason could be that the masculinity in salsa dance is already performed through the leading role, as Schneider (2013) argues.

⁸³ For a demonstration of men’s styling after a festival workshop, see the following video: rebrand.ly/salsa-14.

for me, my opinion of self-expression for the man and for the woman is going through a range of emotions, and we are not defined, like me being a strong person and me being angry or me being funny and joking around doesn't make me any less of a woman. For a man to be sensitive on the dance floor and to be delicate and elegant doesn't make him less of a man. And to define ourselves by oh, "men is macho, woman is like delicate", it is not contributing to the growth of an art form. Which should be about self-expression, it should not be about defining limitations to it, you know. So in that sense I'm also kind of going against the norm. Because I dance, I goof around, I do a lot of like, silly moves, people are like: oh, that's not very feminine. I don't shake my hips all the time, why, because I have no reason to do it, there's nothing in the music that makes me wanna go wam wam wam with my hips. So I'm not gonna create that movement. If the music is very strong then I'm equally strong in my movements and for most men [...] what I'm doing is so taboo, you know, it's just like [...] this is blasphemy, this is not what salsa is about.

In her account (as well as her dancing) Nara dissociates gender from salsa moves. She challenges "the essentialism of binary distinctions between people based on sex category" (Risman 2009: 83) and could be understood as undoing gender in Risman's terms. However, Nara's non-essentialist position in terms of gender has led to her being accused of lacking femininity by other (male) professionals. As she told me, she is sometimes asked: "Why don't you just move like a woman?" Nara is thus held accountable for not dancing in a way that is usually constructed as female. "If we do gender appropriately, we simultaneously sustain, reproduce, and render legitimate the institutional arrangements that are based on sex category. If we fail to do gender appropriately, we as individuals – not the institutional arrangements – may be called to account (for our character, motives, and predispositions)" (West and Zimmerman 1987: 146). Following West and Zimmerman (2009) I therefore argue that in the above example Nara is redoing gender, as she is still held accountable for gender.

In a similar vein, the winner of an international salsa competition, a male dancer who performed a solo dance, prompted an online controversy: two of the established male dance professionals based in Europe quickly posted a video on YouTube and their Facebook account and explained how male dancers in salsa are supposed to move. Indirectly, the winner of the competition was thus accused of doing it wrong,

because he did not hold his arms in a clear 90-degree angle but rather moved the arms while dancing, reminiscent of *ladies' styling*.

As these incidents demonstrate, dancers (of both sex categories) who challenge the gendered conventions of dance moves are held accountable for their doings. At the same time dancers like Nara cater to the growing number of salsa practitioners interested in the communication between dance partners and musical understanding (rather than the performances of masculinity and femininity). Over the period of my research I observed an increase of festival workshops in “body movement”, “spin technique” or “musicality”, where aspects of body control and dance moves were learned without gendering them. In the situation of the workshops, in which they are accepted, these may be interpreted as gender-neglecting (Hirschauer 2001) dancing and thus a way of undoing gender in salsa.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the gendered interactions of salsa dancers on the dance floor. Drawing on theoretical approaches of doing, redoing and undoing gender it has analysed the ongoing negotiations of gender conventions in the salsa circuit. Based on observations at workshops and interviews with salsa dancers and dance professionals, I have argued that salsa dancers constantly do gender when engaging in the salsa partnership.

Literature on partner dance has often analysed the gendered leader and follower structure as “reinforcing restrictive gender roles” (cf Borland 2009). While adding an important feminist critique, these analyses usually stay silent about the reasons for engaging in such activities. Furthermore, they not necessarily discuss how the gender conventions are upheld. This chapter therefore offered an in-depth description and analysis of the ways in which salsa dancers are doing, redoing and undoing gender, thus adding to the extant literature on gender and social dance as well as the vast scholarship on doing and redoing gender (West and Zimmerman 1979, 2009) as well as undoing gender (Deutsch 2007; Hirschauer 1994, 2001; Risman 2009). The focus on gender conventions in salsa dancing here allowed for a particular attention on the ways in which (un/re)doing gender works “with and

through” bodies (Messerschmidt 2009: 86), thus responding to calls to include the body more in analyses with the theoretical framework of doing gender.

As I have shown, dancers engage with the gender conventions, and in particular the leader/follower structure in different ways. Those who perceive of it as a “nice role play” discursively embed it in other times (the past) and sometimes project it on “Latin culture”, while constructing clear boundaries between the salsa space and other social situations of their lives, especially the workplace. Distancing themselves from their everyday practices, salsa dancers mark the gendered role play as a “game” (Villa 2003).

However, there are many dancers who challenge the gender conventions in salsa, either through role switching or a redefinition of the partner structure of the dance. As shown in detail, role switching always needs some kind of legitimation or justification (see also McClure 2015; Schneider 2013). The potential of challenging the heteronormative structure of salsa is thus disrupted. Salsa dancers engage in a redoing and even undoing of gender in embodied ways when redefining the partner dance as “a conversation instead of a lecture”. In some situations, dancers are able to create a connection between two dance partners, in which the connection with the music and the dance partner are the focus, and gender is neglected (Hirschauer 2001).

At the same time, dancers who challenge the gendered dance moves are in some circumstances accused of lacking femininity or lacking masculinity. In this way, they are held accountable for gender. Furthermore, dancers who redefine the gendered leader/follower structure are also accused of not dancing salsa anymore. It is not gender accountability but “salsa accountability” that is here negotiated. A possible reason for the resistance against such redefinitions may be the following argument: as Becker (1982) observes, to challenge conventions is an attack not only on these conventions but also on the organisation or social structure of the world in question. As Nara’s case illustrates, salsa dance professionals (when endowed with a high amount of salsa capital) are able to initiate structural change: precisely through her insistence on redoing and undoing gender, Nara was able to build her career in the salsa circuit so that today she is one of the few female salsa dancers who has

managed to build up a long-lasting successful transnational career as a solo artist. Hirschauer (2001: 228) argues that social change in the private relations between couples may bring a change in the organisation of the public labour market. In a similar vein, Nara's story may be interpreted as an example of how (re/un)doing gender on the dance floor actually changes not only the structure of salsa dance but also the gendered hierarchies at play in the construction of a transnational career in the salsa circuit, as further discussed in Chapter 8.

PART III

TRANSNATIONAL CAREERS OF SALSA DANCE PROFESSIONALS

Introduction to Part III: conceptual notes on transnational careers

Part III of this study offers an analysis of the careers of salsa dance professionals of different nationalities from a transnational perspective. As the extant literature on salsa suggests, salsa dance professionals often develop local careers, characterised by their specifically local outreach in terms of students, reputation-building processes and the dance professionals' teaching activities concentrated in one place, usually a dance studio in a city.⁸⁴ However, due to salsa's successful development in many cities of Europe, North America and Asia, a new type of salsa dance professional has come into being: so-called *travelling artists*. To shed light on this so far understudied type of professional career, which often involves a large amount of cross-border mobility and reputation-building processes in different places, this study addresses the transnational careers of salsa dance professionals. Salsa dance professionals include the self-identified *travelling artists* who perform and teach salsa on a weekly basis at different festivals as well as dance studio owners who travel to salsa festivals to teach, both of whom make a living from salsa dance, mainly through teaching salsa in different places. I opted for the term "salsa dance professional" instead of "professional dancer" to underline the importance of other salsa-related activities and income-earning strategies in salsa dance professionals' careers, mainly teaching. Through this approach I also revise prevalent framings of salsa dance instructors as *stars*, to allow for a sociological look at the work necessary to achieve fame.

My theoretical framework builds on the classical sociological concept of careers (Becker 1963; Hughes 1958) as well as more recent adaptations in studies of the sociology of art (Menger 1999; Wagner 2016) and migration (Martiniello and Rea 2014). Chicago sociologists such as Hughes (1958) developed a broad and flexible concept of career, used in the analysis of social organisation in general. In this line, Becker (1963) analyses the careers of dance musicians as a series of statuses and positions, while at the same time analysing individuals' adjustments in terms of self-

⁸⁴ Though this ideal-typical definition of a local career focuses on the local outreach of salsa dance professionals' activities, their practices often also include participation in online networks as well as the construction and maintenance of transnational networks in the salsa circuit.

conception. A career is thus not understood as a movement from one hierarchical level to the next; instead, the concept entails an objective and a subjective dimension. A career can be understood as a sequence of status passages, including the objective change in position and the subjective dimension of actors' own interpretation of it.

Drawing on this conceptualisation of careers, I will discuss the dilemmas salsa dance professionals face and the ways they adjust in order to pursue a transnational career in the salsa circuit. In this thesis I identify three status passages: becoming a salsa dance professional, accessing the (European) salsa circuit, and building up reputation (discussed in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 respectively). These passages are not always as clearly separable as presented, and may sometimes overlap temporarily, but for analytical purposes they are here distinguished. It is important to keep in mind that the careers of salsa dance professionals happen outside enclosed organisations (see also Kirschbaum 2007) and therefore differ from the careers analysed in recent sociological and anthropological literature on professional dancers such as Laillier (2011) on ballet dancers at the Opéra de Paris, Marion (2012) on ballroom dancers in the “worldwide competition circuit”, and Wulff (1998) on ballet dancers at ballet companies in London, New York, Stockholm and Frankfurt. Nevertheless, the cited literature is taken into account to discuss similarities and differences in the careers of salsa dance professionals as compared to other professional careers in dance.

To analyse salsa dancing and teaching in the salsa circuit in terms of a profession I reconceptualise careers as transnational. “Transnational careers” are characterised by the transnational networks salsa dance professionals build up, the importance of geographical mobility and the importance of non-local forms of reputation building.⁸⁵ Through their mobile practices, salsa dance professionals link different hubs and actors of the salsa circuit to each other. Including a transnational perspective in the analysis of careers makes it possible to combine a focus on

⁸⁵ Such a clear-cut separation of career types is only helpful on a conceptual level, and what I refer to as local and transnational careers may overlap.

individual action with a focus on social structural dynamics (see also Martiniello and Rea 2014).

Becker (1963) analysed the careers of dance musicians as a deviant occupational group, “a group of ‘outsiders’ that considers itself and is considered by others as ‘different’” (101). By using the concept of career to analyse transnationally active salsa dance professionals, I do not intend to categorise their activities as deviant. Instead, the analysis of (transnational salsa) careers, in Becker’s sense, may be useful to better understand how particular forms of bodily practices are considered as belonging to a certain national territory as well as to specific (gendered) bodies. As a result of this, dancers often struggle with the non-recognition of salsa in European public spaces and cultural funding policies, as discussed in Chapter 6. In the discussion of the first status passage, I will look closely at how actors become salsa dancers and adjust to such perspectives.

Visible cross-border mobility is central in salsa dance professional’s transnational careers. Nevertheless, not everyone has the ability to actual be mobile and travel across state borders. I therefore deploy the already introduced “regimes-of-mobility framework” (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013), which addresses the relationships between mobility and immobility, affirming the importance of social fields of differential power. This perspective makes it possible to take into account different forms of salsa dancers’ mobility in one theoretical framework while addressing multiple forms of power such as legal status, which enable or hinder an individual’s travels (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013). In Chapter 7 “Access to the European salsa circuit”, I will demonstrate how salsa dancers navigate the different possibilities of becoming mobile and the strategies they deploy in order to access the (European) salsa circuit, which are closely linked to an individual’s mobility capital (in terms of networks, financial means and the legal right to travel).

Although the salsa circuit is not regarded as “different” in the ways Becker (1963: 101) describes the dance musicians’ circuit, salsa dance professionals perceive the salsa circuit as “a small world” separate from other domains of society. In terms of economic capital and reputation, it can best be grasped as a form of alternative economy, what I term the “affective economy” of the salsa circuit, similar to that of

the jazz musicians Becker studied in the 1950s. In Chapter 8 “Building up reputation”, I will discuss the ways dance professionals build up and maintain “salsa capital” inside the salsa circuit, including networking strategies and mobilising other forms of symbolic capital.

Before analysing the three status passages identified as crucial for the construction of transnational careers, I present portraits of three salsa dance professionals and their transnational careers diachronically. These career descriptions highlight the three main status passages – becoming a salsa dancer professional, accessing the salsa circuit and building up reputation – and strategies used to construct a transnational career, all of which will be discussed in detail in the following chapters. The diachronic presentation here allows the construction of a clearer image of transnational careers, before they are disentangled and transversally discussed in the following chapters.

Marcos: “Salsa is making me travel all over the world”

The first time I tried to meet Marcos was at a small festival in Munich, but the interview was cancelled because he and his dance partner had to take an earlier flight than initially planned so they left the festival and sent me a message from the airport. I finally met him several months later at the Berlin Salsa Congress. It was a Sunday afternoon, he had performed a show the night before and taught his workshop that morning so he was interested in giving me an interview.

Becoming a dancer

Marcos, 31 years old at the time of the interview, is a *travelling artist*, dancing at salsa events every weekend during the spring and twice a month during the rest of the year. He enthusiastically told me about his motivation to travel to salsa events:

When I teach, I like to teach things that are functional for social dancing. That's what it is, I don't speak so many languages but because I know how to dance, I can connect with everybody, it's a huge tool of communication. Regardless of who you are, or where you're from. This connects people, and yeah it's a great tool, it's making me travel all over the world somehow, and I enjoy it a lot.

Like all the other interviewed dancers, Marcos here uses the metaphor of language to describe what salsa means for him. Being a salsa dance professional not only allows him to meet and connect to other people. It also made it possible for him to become mobile, something that was not taken for granted when he was a child. Marcos grew up in Guatemala and for a long time travelling was only a dream, as he stated: “it's not so common for a Guatemalan guy to be out traveling. We are not so many out there.”

Marcos started dancing salsa at the age of 12, helping his mother who ran dance classes for tourists. In the mid-1990s, a wave of couple dances like merengue spread throughout the Americas and formed part of Western tourists' expectations of their travel experience. Although Guatemala is not usually placed on the imaginary salsa map, his mother's dance studio catering for tourists was successful. Marcos thus went to school during the day and worked as a dance teacher in the evenings.

Through his teaching activities, Marcos had privileged access to foreigners who wanted to learn Latin dances. At the age of 17, he befriended a Japanese traveller who took lessons with him. When this friend had to go back to work in his job in a cultural centre in Japan, he asked Marcos for help in becoming a salsa teacher in Japan. Judging his friend's knowledge as insufficient, Marcos told him that he needed more time to teach him. His friend proposed that Marcos goes to Japan and stays there for three months. He invited Marcos to live in his apartment and asked him to help him out with building up salsa classes.

I was like, “why not?” After high school I didn't have any plan, I was fed up of studying and working at the same time, so I said, “OK, I'll do it”. And I went, without knowing that I would really like it. [...] After two months, I said to him: “listen man, I don't want to go back. There are so many opportunities here that I don't have in my country, I want to stay. So what can I do?” He said, “Well, you have two options: either you get married here, or you have to fix your papers with a contract.” And marriage was not an option, and I was not interested, I was 17 years old, so I said, “I want to try applications”.

Once Marcos was in Japan, he realised that there existed a market for salsa teachers like him and so he decided to try to stay. But in order to settle there, he needed to

get a residence permit, which was impossible without a certification of his status as a professional dancer. He went back to Guatemala, where he was able to obtain a diploma certifying his musical and dancing skills, through the help of his mother and his aunt (a music teacher), and finally obtained a working visa in Japan for one year. He worked for a company and after four years he got a permanent visa. He then changed cities, formed a band and opened his own salsa school. Through his dancing at various salsa events in Japan, he started to build up his reputation.

Accessing the salsa circuit

In Japan, salsa dance events and academies had existed for several years, but as Iwanaga (2014: 214) states, in 1999, just one year before Marco's arrival, "salsa's popularity intensified". Around this time, information on salsa events in Japan became widely available and salsa festivals were organised for the first time featuring New York-based salsa dancers for their workshops. As Iwanaga writes, "the Japanese Salsa Congress has played a significant role in uniting Japanese salsa lovers with the global salsa industry" (214). This congress was an important event for Marcos personally, as it led to another meeting that changed his career. Marcos was asked to translate Japanese to Spanish for an influential American salsa event organiser. On this occasion, the organiser saw him dancing what was – at that time – an unusual salsa performance: instead of dancing with a woman, he danced with another man and they included samurai swords in the performance. Marcos was convinced that it is thanks to this innovative performance that he was invited to perform at events in the US.

There Marcos met his brother again, seven years after he had left Guatemala for Japan. In the meantime, his brother had followed their father to Sweden, where he had studied dance and opened a salsa studio as well. After their reunion, his brother asked him to come to Sweden and teach in his studio. Marcos remembers:

But I was feeling lonely in Japan, after 8 years already, I was tired. And I had never been in Europe, so [...] I said: "I close the school, and I will move to [city in Sweden] with you". So he opened a contract and I, no I didn't close the school, I just gave it to

my students, who were good, and I moved my stuff and I just moved to Sweden. I started to work with him in the same company.

For the second time in his life, Marcos moved to a new country, this time through the help of his brother who was already established in Sweden and was able to help him with an initial working contract in his dance school. Marcos later worked in several other dance schools and at the time of the interview he had regularised his status and obtained a Swedish residence permit.



Picture 19 Salsa dancer performing a solo show on an outdoor stage, SBSF Šibenik 2017 (© Steven Isaacs).

Building up reputation

Once in Europe, Marcos started to build up a reputation as a dance professional in the European salsa circuit. He used a strategy he had already applied in Japan: networking. In his own words:

After a while, if you finally manage to establish a kind of reputation let's say, you actually have the possibility to choose where you wanna go. And that's a good thing because everything is based on networking. [...] You need a network. So networking,

many times you can actually invest. You pay for your own ticket, you go and you present yourself. That's how everybody does it at the very beginning. If you wanna sell yourself, you have to start somewhere. And the best way to do it is just dance with people and, you know, try to start promoting yourself that way. But that's the thing. Sometimes I know organisers but I have probably not been there yet but I know them. So sometimes I say, "listen, I haven't been there yet, let's make something together. I bring you this, this is what I offer, what do you offer?". You make a deal.

For Marcos, the importance of networks is obvious and he strategically uses his dancing and communication skills to promote himself. In this way, he was able to create a network of salsa contacts and people who booked him for other events. This was only possible once he had danced at salsa events in Europe: his physical presence in the European salsa circuit was thus a condition to start his transnational career in Europe.

Yaimara: "Everybody here has got this energy"

I first met Yaimara in a salsa *movimiento* (movement) workshop I took in a Swiss city at the very beginning of my research project in 2013. I met her several weeks later for a first interview, during which she told me that she organised dance trips to Havana. Over the following two years I encountered her several times at salsa events, and we usually exchanged some words. We also stayed in contact on Facebook and when I had the opportunity to travel to Cuba for a dance trip in Havana in August 2015, I asked Yaimara if I could "follow" her and the participants of her organised dance trip. She agreed and during the dance holiday we had several informal discussions and I conducted a second semi-structured interview with her.

Becoming a dancer

Yaimara, who at the time of the first interview was 26 years old, was born in an outer neighbourhood of Havana and grew up in a family of musicians and dancers, seeing people dance and listening to music from a young age. In the first interview, Yaimara told me about her grandfather, a dancer and musician who is still today often cited as an important figure in the institutionalisation and implementation of the rumba

as a national Cuban dance form by the revolutionary government. After the Cuban revolution in 1959, the government was keen to establish a National University of Dance, including so-called folkloric dances. They chose dancers mainly living in underprivileged and black neighbourhoods to help establish the school's programme, which was supposed to represent the Cuban people, including dance and rhythm traditions recognised as *Afro-Cuban*. Yaimara's grandfather was one of these dancers and she still capitalises on his name. Her grandfather had many Cuban students, young dancers who wanted to learn from him. He was also asked to teach foreign students on salsa holidays organised by Cubans living in Italy in the 2000s. Yaimara helped her grandfather teach the classes, thus realising what she wanted to do later.

You know, when I was a child, there were always many schools coming to take lessons with my grandfather. And they always told me about it, I was so interested and asked many questions: what is it like there? Can you go somewhere to dance? And they told me, "there and there", and where you can go dancing and that there are festivals. And I was like, "hey, I absolutely want to go to a festival" [laughs].

She decided to become a musician and dancer, and joined a performance group of folkloric dancers. With this group, Yaimara performed in Havana and other places in Cuba, and at the age of 21 she had the opportunity to go to Singapore with a group of musicians and work there for a year. During this time she learned English, a skill she later used once travelling and teaching in the salsa circuit. She didn't like living in Singapore, so she returned to Cuba and continued with the first group until she met her future husband Felix, a man from Germany. After their marriage, she moved to Germany (as analysed below), where she soon started teaching in an established salsa school.

Accessing the salsa circuit

At the same time as Yaimara started teaching locally, she also started to travel to festivals.⁸⁶ A friend of her family who already taught at European salsa events for

⁸⁶ In the next chapter, the strategies and networks Yaimara mobilised to gain access to the salsa circuit will be discussed in detail. To avoid repetition, I keep this part short.

many years, helped her in this. He partnered with her and asked a festival organiser to invite Yaimara to his event.

And this person [event organiser] had invited him [her friend] and he told them they absolutely had to invite me as well. I had been in Germany only for a few months and he told them to invite me, so this was my first festival in Europe.

In this way, Yaimara was introduced to the organiser of a festival in Finland through a friend she had known for many years. She performed with him and thus gained visibility and new contacts in the salsa circuit.

Building up reputation

Once she had performed at a salsa event with international outreach, Yaimara started to build up her reputation in the salsa circuit.

People started watching the video on the internet, and I also wrote to some organisers that I had come from Cuba, that I am a dancer and that I'm interested in festivals, having heard good feedback about their festival, and that I'd like to work with them. So some of them said they already have the artists for this year, but next year they wish to work with me, others said, "yes, we would like to book you", etc.

Yaimara was thus able to perform at several events in different European countries and build up her name as a specialist in Cuban dances in the salsa circuit. Thus, she draws on a specific version of "Cubanness", constructing her dancing as a particularly "authentic" form of salsa. Furthermore, once in Europe, Yaimara quickly realised that there was a growing interest in the *Afro-Cuban* and folkloric dances she knew from her childhood. Parallel to her teaching and performance activities in Europe, she started to organise teaching opportunities at European festivals for her family members and friends still living in Cuba.

However the process proved to be difficult and too expensive, as Yaimara told me in the interview I conducted with her in Havana:

I had organised a tour in Europe with my family and of course everything cost us a lot. So I said, now we're gonna make an exchange, now we're gonna bring European

people to Cuba. Because we can't bring all the artists to Germany, it's too expensive, we don't have sponsors. So I'm gonna bring the people to Cuba!

Practically, Yaimara includes many family members and friends in the organisation of her dance holidays: her cousin organises the Cuban side while she is in Europe, her mother and her aunt cook, her sister leads the warm-ups before the classes and her father and grandfather teach lessons. Befriended dancers teach the lessons and a large number of "Cuban partners" are hired for every group in order to accompany the foreign dance students during the lessons.

German people like learning, they can get to know my city: I as a Cuban can show them my home country, and that is important to me. Especially the people I teach, for example at [name of dance school in Germany], so they can understand where I've got all this energy I have while teaching. That's not only me, everybody here has got this energy! You just don't see it because you're in Germany. So I wanted you to understand why, where it comes from, this having fun while we dance, it's joy, you don't always have to concentrate so much, and uh, no laughing, no fun, no relaxing. It's different for us!

Yaimara's mobility allows her to stay connected to what she views as the roots of her art (the older generation of teachers in Cuba), which she then uses in her teaching in the European context. The "energy" and "fun" Cuban dancers are said to express form part of Yaimara's self-presentation as being particularly well placed to guide foreign salsa students.

Maria: "I caught the virus"

Maria quickly answered my request sent via Facebook to meet her for an interview and we met on a Saturday evening at a salsa event. She had performed the night before and I had participated in her workshop on the same day. For the interview, she proposed to meet in the lobby of her hotel where we could talk with little interruption from other dancers.

Becoming a dancer

Maria, a 33 year old salsa dancer has her own company as a “freelancer”, working in different dance schools and at festivals as teacher and performer, often together with her dance partner. Born in Poland, Maria had musical and dance training during her childhood in different dance forms and sports. Besides regular school, she did a few years of ballet classes, then took piano lessons, and later tried acrobatics. At the age of 19, she moved to a Polish city to study and discovered disco dancing, which she describes as “something closer to a video clip dance or something like that. So it was fun.” She joined a group and started competing on a national level with the dance company, while doing a Master’s degree in marketing and management. At the age of 25, a friend invited Maria to a salsa party and she got into salsa dancing. Drawing on her skills in dancing, she learned quickly and was soon asked to dance with a salsa company, as well as to perform and teach in a salsa studio in the evenings.

I was so hooked up to the salsa and so, you know, I caught the virus, so I wanted to learn as much as possible. And after experiencing my first festival in Warsaw [...] I liked it so much! And I was working, so I had my finances [sorted], so I could spend money on travelling on the weekends, so I started to travel pretty much.”

In 2005, when Maria first experienced salsa, it was not very common in Eastern European countries; the first big salsa event took place in 2004. After realising that salsa events took place in other European cities, Maria started participating at salsa festivals all over Europe. She was “hooked” and realised how much she liked dancing and teaching salsa, a motivation that is still important to her, as she mentioned during the interview.

My motivation, the part of this whole job that feels most comfortable for me, is teaching. Definitely. Sharing the knowledge and teaching is the best part for me. I like it very much. And also sharing this culture, since I was caught up by salsa as a social experience, I liked this part very much as well, that you can just go out and dance, simply.

Maria thus started performing and teaching salsa at various events in Europe, and slowly building a professional identification with her work as salsa dance professional which includes a large amount of teaching.



Picture 20 Salsa dance professionals draw on ballet and other dance techniques, show at SBSF Šibenik 2017 (© Steven Isaacs).

Accessing the salsa circuit

Unlike Marcos and Yaimara, to access the salsa circuit, Maria relied on her economic and legal capital, which allowed her to travel to an event as a participant. In terms of access to the European salsa circuit, geographical distance and restricted mobility is the main difference between Latin American and European salsa dance professionals. With Poland becoming a member state of the European Union in 2004, and the subsequent free movement of EU nationals, traveling to and working in other EU member states became an option for European dancers like Maria. In the first years, she just travelled on the weekends to participate at salsa events in other European countries:

It was pretty a lot, like once a month. [...] So I was taking classes as much as I could and I was dancing, dancing, dancing. And meeting people. So during these three years because of my travelling and also because of working with the group [name of dance company], I met a lot of people. Many of my friends from now, I just know them from that time. [...] a lot of these artists, I met them at that time.

For Maria, the contacts she made during the years of travelling by herself to events were an investment not only in her dancing skills but also in the network, and thus decisive for her work as a freelance dancer later on. Novice dancers need to invest in their career and build up relationships with other actors in the salsa circuit. Later on, these ties often prove fruitful for collaborations and the exchange of information. Today Maria builds part of her teaching opportunities on the contacts she made during the years of self-invested participation at salsa events.

Building up reputation

At one salsa event Maria met her future dance partner. As part of a dance company, Maria had performance and teaching experience, both skills that were in demand. Her new dance partner was based in Norway and offered her a job in the dance studio as well as a partnership to travel to events. She accepted the offer and moved to Norway, a step that raised no difficulties in terms of residency or working rights, thanks to Norway's association to the EU. After teaching for a while in Norway, Maria was able to build up a small network of local students, with the help of established salsa studios. Unlike other salsa teachers, she did not learn the local language but teaches in English. At the same time, she travels to salsa events in Europe and elsewhere several times a month.

When we discussed the different skills she needed, Maria told me that office work forms an important part of her daily schedule:

This is the time I'm spending usually in the daytime, before the classes or before rehearsal, or in the evening sometimes, but mostly in the daytime. Answering emails, contacting people if something's needed. I also on top of... I also do some graphic design, I also do my own flyers, the website I did by myself and all that stuff. But I'm doing it because I like it, not everybody is doing it but I like it so I spend time on that

as well. That's how it goes, on top of dancing, sometimes you also have to do other things [laughs].

To build up reputation and construct a transnational career, dance professionals need to do many more “other things”, as the following chapters will discuss.

The focus on these three careers has opened up the main themes of the next three chapters, which deal with one aspect of the transnational careers of salsa dance professionals.

Chapter 6 Becoming a salsa dance professional

In this chapter I discuss some elements involved in the process of becoming a salsa dance professional. Other studies of artists' careers largely focus on the apprenticeship of a particular music or dance technique (eg Wagner 2015 on violinists) in enclosed organisations. To account for the variety of salsa dance professionals' backgrounds, their non-linear career paths as well as the specificities of the salsa circuit, this chapter rather concentrates on the process of professional identification, the "affective labour" (Ditmore 2007) it necessitates (6.1) and negotiations involved in embarking on a professional career (6.2). Furthermore, it discusses the income-generating activities that salsa dance professionals build up (6.3). Drawing on literature in the sociology of art, namely work focusing on artists' careers, this chapter looks at the beginnings of salsa dance professionals' careers in terms of entering a profession. I discuss economic aspects of dancers' career paths, including the effects of salsa's low status in European countries' hierarchy of performance arts.

6.1 Professional identifications in the affective economy of the salsa circuit

In contrast to other artistic and professional careers, the career as a salsa dance professional is not regulated through a professional educational institution, as there are no qualifying studies in salsa dancing. The entry into and development of a career in the salsa circuit is a non-linear process, during which individuals develop an understanding of themselves as salsa artists. As this chapter argues, aspiring salsa dance professionals develop professional identifications based on a specific idea of "vocation" related to the affective economy of the salsa circuit. Section 6.1.1 looks closely at the changing process of identification when taking up salsa as a profession, while Section 6.1.2 argues that one of this profession's specificities is the affective labour dancers need to execute, particularly relevant in the negotiations of the "convention of tangible salsa stars".

6.1.1 “Then it truly became my life”: salsa dancing as vocation

As already mentioned, for Becker (1963) careers consist of a simultaneous learning process of the practice (as an individual moves from one step of the career to the next) and of a change in social identification. Status passages include a “fundamental change in an individual’s identity, an alteration in the person’s conception of self” (Barley 1989: 50). This section focuses on salsa dancers’ changing identifications in the process of becoming a salsa dance professional: first, the rejection of previous career paths, second, and related, the construction of a salsa career as a vocation, and third, the importance of friendship-making with other salsa dance professionals. In addition to the model of career that Chicago scholars developed, I thus point to the importance of social relationships in the process of change in an individual’s self-identification.

The interviewed salsa dance professionals often recalled their first encounters with salsa dancing as a life-changing event, a phenomenon Quayson (2014) also found in his study of Accra’s salsa scene. He uses the term “conversion narrative” in order to characterise salsa dancers’ stories about their first encounters with salsa, due to the “sharp before-and-after quality of the stories” (Quayson 2014: 169). As biographical research has shown, individuals reconstruct their life history and constantly reinterpret experiences and events. “The present perspective determines what the subject considers biographically relevant, how he or she develops thematic and temporal links between his or her various experiences and how past, present or anticipated future realities influence his or her personal interpretation of the meaning of his or her life” (Rosenthal 1993: 61). Salsa dance professionals reinterpret their biographies in a similar manner with a strong before-and-after distinction.

Alicia: So I was dancing since I was 6 years old, and I loved dance, but I did ballet for ten years. So when I changed country to study, I met salsa and all the other dances, and of course I went crazy, I really loved it. And then, one day, [...] at the university, Iannis came with his dance partner at that time, and I was like, wow! [...] And then a whole new world opened for me. And I went like, I think the next day, I went to his class, to his dance studio. And after that I was ready to change my whole life.

Joanna: What kind of changes or implications did it have for your life?

Alicia: Oh, everything! My whole orientation changed, OK I already knew that I loved salsa and it wouldn't be just a hobby. But then it truly became my life. Like, it's what I do in the morning, afternoon, nights, on the weekends, every every every day of the year. And it's truly amazing! I've been doing this now for five years and I want to keep doing it, like, for I don't know, forever.

Alicia's narrative includes this first encounter with salsa, in her case following the move from Cyprus to a Greek city for university studies. Once Alicia had met her future dance partner Iannis, she started to enter this "whole new world" and decided to take classes. Looking back on this during the interview, she describes this decision as a dramatic change in her life. The initial contact is thus followed by an intense period of acquiring the skills needed to dance. At this stage, dancers with experience in other dance forms are often advantaged. During the same phase, novice dancers get to know other dancers and dance professionals, thus enlarging their social networks. After her meeting with Iannis, Alicia went to his studio, where she picked up salsa quickly as she already had a background in ballet. Eventually she became Iannis' dance partner and at the time of the interview they taught classes in a Greek city during the week and performed at events at weekends. Like Maria in the portrait above, Alicia stresses the gradual shift from salsa dancing as a hobby to it becoming a serious and time-consuming professional activity, including many new friendships. In this way, the mobile salsa trajectories of serious salsa students gradually develop into professional careers, with the partial or entire abandonment of other professional careers and jobs.

Becoming and identifying as a salsa dancer is a step on the path towards a new professional identification. In this process, individuals may give up studies or a job for a dance career that may entail economic hardship. Furthermore, the choice of this career is likely to call for justification in relation to non-dancers, as salsa professionals often experience a lack of public recognition (see Section 6.1.2). In the interviews with dancers who had made salsa their full-time profession, two elements were particularly stressed in the process of adapting to their new professional identity: individuals who had given up jobs criticised their previous income-generating activities, and all dancers I interviewed insisted on the importance of

following their “passion”. This is exemplified in Clara’s statement below, which demonstrates her distaste for her previous tasks as an office worker in a construction company.

Of course there are some negative things, but, out of all the things that can go wrong, nothing is as bad as sitting in an office for 40 years without a clue what you are doing there. Where you do something just because you have done it for the last ten years and you will be able to do the same for the next ten years for sure. But nothing is as bad as that.

Clara is a dance studio owner and professional dancer based in Germany. Her partner Gary, who grew up on a Caribbean island and got into salsa during his studies in the Netherlands, was also very clear about his career choices. He began dancing salsa in the Netherlands, spent some months in New York to improve his dancing and, once he met Clara, moved to Germany to live with her:

I was a banker, quit my studies as accountant [...]. But I never had any regrets, I mean I threw away four years [of studies] but I don’t regret it. Then I started from zero in Germany, with classes, also started my solo career, it wasn’t easy, that wasn’t easy at all.

Although Gary admitted that the construction of his career as salsa dance professional entailed hardship and many difficulties, he presented his choice as the only right one, as he would not have liked to continue working “in an office” for the rest of his professional life. Although not all my interview participants actually gave up their jobs or studies (some of them kept a secondary job), the salsa dance professionals I spoke to generally described the decision to become a salsa dancer as a step towards a more interesting and rewarding life in terms of self-actualisation. Thus the element of passion for salsa dancing recurs. As already seen, this element is particularly important in the conversion narratives of salsa dance students. As the interviews with salsa dance professionals revealed, it also serves as an important argument to legitimate their career choice.

There’s a risk of things going wrong and you take that risk because the reward is much greater. And for me the world is great. I love teaching, I love social dancing, I like

being in this energy, positive people, and people that also wanna be here, it's a nice place to be and it's very fulfilling. [...] You find the things so that you can continue to do what you love. And that's for me, I really enjoy this scene, I love what I can do for it and I love what it does for me. (Nara)

In dancers' explanations, "to do what you love" was often assessed as more important than the difficulties arising from a transnational career. In this sense, salsa dance professionals resemble other actors in the creative industries (encompassing activities and work strongly related to art, cf Mathieu 2011), as well as in other highly mobile careers. Wagner (2016) bases her work on the socialisation and professional trajectories of elite musicians and scientists on the following understanding of creative careers: "The particularity of the creative career consists in the extraordinary commitment individuals display toward their chosen occupation, more specifically, their focus on the creation of the new products or new forms of old products and their involvement in daily activities oriented to 'innovation'" (Wagner 2016: 193). In his study of contemporary dancers in France, Sorignet (2014) also points out the importance of understanding dancers' careers in terms of a vocation. The dancers were less preoccupied with regard to financial difficulties than to self-fulfilment. In a similar vein, Laillier (2011) demonstrates the dynamic process of vocation of ballet dancers at the Opéra de Paris. He introduces the term "vocational rationalisation" to point to the importance of vocation that justifies dancers' commitment, as it is precisely through this commitment that dancers hope to realise their "calling" (Laillier 2011: 494). Although, based on my data, I cannot offer generalisations for all salsa dance professionals, the idea of a dance career as a possibility for self-actualisation was prominent. This point is illustrated by Andy, a *travelling salsa artist* based in London:

You know, why would I wanna stay in London and dance, when I can go to another country and dance, everything paid for, you know. I'm not driven by money and stuff like that, I'm just driven by my passion. I guess one day it will go, but right now it's still on the high [smiling], very high.

The "passion" for salsa that dance professionals refer to can be understood as a prime motivator to pursue this type of career. At the same time, running across the

transcripts as a common theme, the passion narrative could be read as a particular strategy of presenting themselves as legitimate salsa professionals. As I have shown in Chapter 3, part of salsa's affective economy is precisely based on the importance of the expression of emotions of its practitioners. Being passionate about salsa as a profession is one more element of stressing one's professional status in salsa.

The analysis so far has demonstrated the importance of a specific narrative about salsa careers as being a particular form of vocational career. In the shaping of such ideas, other actors play an important role. I will now turn to the final element in salsa dancers' process of shaping their professional identification, which seems particularly important: other salsa dance professionals. Friendships and sometimes romantic relationships with other salsa dancers may be crucial to developing a shared identity as salsa dance professionals. In her study on friendship-making and network formations of highly qualified migrants in Britain, Ryan (2015: 1676) points to the importance of having friends with the same profession in the shaping of a shared professional identity. For the teachers in her study, the presence of other teachers in their friendship network was important in the process of identifying with their profession (Ryan 2015).

The same holds for salsa dance professionals: as is evident from the already quoted salsa artists, other dancers were crucial in gaining access to the salsa circuit. Alongside those more practical matters, the exchange with other dancers also influenced the construction of a new professional identification. Clara explained how she was caught between her job and the dancing, and how other dance professionals encouraged her to quit her job: "They told me, 'you don't feel good, you need to change something' and so I did it". Exchanging and sharing experiences with other dancers travelling in the salsa circuit is also an important motivation for salsa dance professionals to participate in salsa congresses, where they can meet like-minded people whose careers are also constructed on the ideal of following their passion.

So far I have discussed salsa dance professionals' entry into salsa dancing as well as the ways they deal with their changing professional identifications, particularly in terms of their positioning towards other members of the salsa circuit. In addition to Chicago scholars' model of career steps, I argued that friendship-making with other

salsa dance professionals was important not only in terms of job opportunities but also in the gradual development of an identity as salsa dance professional, thus including a classical argument of social network analysis in the analysis of careers.

6.1.2 “You need to know how to sell yourself”: salsa dancing as affective labour

The moment salsa dancers decide to make a living from their dancing, they enter a market logic, which includes offering services to paying clients. Drawing on the concept of “self-commodification” (Bunten 2008) in tourism, this section argues that in the process of becoming a salsa dance professional, individuals need to engage in a specific form of “affective labour” (Ditmore 2007).

Building on Hochschild’s (1983) work on the “emotional labour”⁸⁷ of airline attendants, Bunten analyses “self-commodification” among Native American professionals in the cultural-tourism business. For Bunten (2008), self-commodification “involves any type of product performance that requires the individual to adjust his or her values, emotions, or both, to achieve an economic goal” (381). This section shows that salsa dancers’ construction of a “commodified persona” (Bunten 2008) not only includes the marketing of specific services but also contains a specific form of “affective labour”.

The notion of affective labour is employed in different ways in various fields of study, (see Gregg 2009 for an overview of the different definitions in media and cultural studies). While feminist studies have highlighted the significance of “emotion work” and “emotional labour” (Hochschild 1983) in care and service jobs since the 19070s, more recent theorisation dealing with the “immaterial labour” of the contemporary workplace (Hardt 1999; Lazzarato 1996) builds on principles of post-Marxism. With this “affective turn”, studies on sex work combine these approaches and draw on an understanding of affective labour “as work that aims to evoke specific behaviors or sentiments in others as well as oneself, rather than it being merely about the

⁸⁷ Hochschild’s (1983) widely-cited concept of emotional labour describes the process by which workers are expected to manage their feelings and expressions in accordance with employer-defined rules.

production of a consumable product” (Ditmore 2007: 171). I build on these authors to demonstrate the significance of salsa dance professionals’ affective labour.

In the field of affect studies the debate about a clear distinction between emotions and affects is on-going (see Baier et al. 2014). In general, affect theory “tends to emphasise relationality and sensation, and explores the capacity of bodies to affect and be affected by other bodies, both human and non-human” (McClure 2015: 53). In other words, while “emotion is treated as a social or cultural expression of feeling and refers to the ways these feelings are managed in public spheres“, affect “is generally considered to be the physical response to feeling, linked to the biological body“ (Davis 2015b: 18). Contrary to the notion of emotions, the notion of affects thus locates feelings as experiences in the body and includes the possibility of affecting others, which is central in the processes discussed in this study.

In discussing the salsa dance profession, Maria mentioned the most common services salsa dance professionals offer to festival organisers:

It depends whatever it’s gonna be, [...] because you might be invited to the event for many different reasons. Because the event has different parts, they wanna fill up the different parts, some are invited because they are known for great shows, some because they are great teachers [...]. Social dancing and socialising with people, this is another story, you can see a lot of people having these skills, to pull up the party and just make it a great atmosphere [...]. So this is also a huge quality that the organisers need as well. So there are many ways to make your own mark and deliver the service that might be needed.

What Maria here calls services (show dancing, teaching and dancing socially) are the three basic tasks salsa dance professionals perform to sustain their livelihood.

Furthermore, salsa dance professionals need to develop a set of entrepreneurial skills such as the design of websites, flyers or a Facebook profile to market their product. Besides such classical marketing strategies necessary in every economic activity, salsa dance professionals often talked about the need to “sell themselves”. Ajay framed this idea of adjusting the self according to the logics of the affective economy as follows:

If you've done ten shows and done ten events and no one is inviting you, you need to do better. You need to evolve, change something about yourself as an artist. It's not just your dancing, it's your personality, it's who you are as a person, it's how you deal with people, how you communicate, it's language, it's all about stuff. You need to understand, "what can I do to make myself more likeable to the community".

As Ajay here explains, in developing a "commodified persona", salsa dance professionals develop entrepreneurial and social skills such as communication. Furthermore, they adjust their own persona to and shape their self-presentation according to the demands of the dance students and congress organisers. Dancers thus need to work on their person; they need to manage the expression of their own emotions according to the conventions of the affective economy of the salsa circuit. Furthermore, they are also held responsible for the affective responses of the spectators (during a show) and salsa students (during social dancing).

In the interview with Valentina, co-organiser of a large salsa congress, I asked her about her understanding of a "good" salsa artist. In the following interview extract she explains which types of salsa dance professionals she invites to her events.

For me, a top artist is someone who really lives [all of] this, who lives this music. Not someone who just does a show with great technique with the latest steps he just made up or learned somewhere, but someone who interprets a story. Not the one who impresses you as a spectator with the splits [...] but [rather] with the emotions you have. There are people giving you so much with so little! And that is what I look for, as the guest is highly sensitive to this. And if the person is also a great teacher, then you are good for me. In this world you also need to be an entertainer, you cannot be a wallflower, you have a function, you are a personality, you need to know how to sell yourself. When you have all of this, then for me you are an artist.

As this salsa event organiser makes clear, to be invited to an event, salsa dance professionals are not only expected to have dancing and teaching skills, but also a whole set of embodied personal characteristics. To be accepted as salsa artists, dancers have to "live this"; they must embody the ways of being an artist. In Valentina's reasoning, when on stage during a show, artists need to affirm their passion for and vocation of salsa, as it is not the technical mastery (such as the

splits) but the ways the dancer “interprets a story” that will emotionally move or affect spectators. In this way, Valentina relegates the responsibility for the emotions felt by the spectators of the show to the dancers on stage who, through their dancing, have the power to affect them. Furthermore, salsa dance professionals are supposed to be skilled entertainers, a related task that consists of affective labour, as entertainers in the salsa circuit are usually defined as the ones who “get the party started” (see Picture 21).



Picture 21 Flyer Croatian Summer Salsa Festival 2015.

There is a second way, in which salsa dance professionals engage in affective labour: what Maria above calls “social dancing and socialising with people”. Social dancing, which implies dancing with festival attendees during the night’s parties, is a

specificity of the salsa circuit. While the first two skills mentioned in Maria's above quotation (show dancing and teaching) are remunerated and rendered explicit in signed or oral contracts between dance professionals and festival organisers, the third one – dancing socially – is only implicit.

The importance actors in the salsa circuit put on dance professional's participation in social dancing – the “convention of tangible salsa *stars*” – often creates tensions. In an organised discussion round I observed at a festival, one of the topics was announced as “the problem of non-dancing salsa superstars”. The moderator introduced the topic by telling the attendees that it was a pity that *salsa superstars* would not dance with festival participants anymore. In the following discussion, one of the organisers clearly stated that he invited an artist only if he knew that the dancer in question would also dance with the paying guests. Then the discussion centred around the question of whether dance professionals should be forced to dance with amateurs by contract and thus be paid for it. The majority of attending amateur dancers and organisers were against regulating the question on a contractual basis. The moderator closed the discussion round as follows: “you like to dance with *salsa stars* but you want them to do it because they like it – and not because they are paid for it”.

As this short summary of the discussion makes clear, salsa dance professionals are not only expected to perform and/or teach at salsa events, they are also supposed to engage in an interpersonal relationship with amateur dancers who are eager to dance with a *salsa star*.⁸⁸ In the context of salsa dancing, this relationship is necessarily highly gendered. As studies of affective labour argue, the relationship with clients is particularly significant: “Affective labor especially makes use of the interpersonal skills often as part of entrepreneurialism, where the relationship with clients and potential clients is paramount” (Ditmore 2007: 171, building on Lazzarato 1996). If dancers fail to adhere to this “convention of tangible *salsa stars*”, their reputation may be in danger, and they run the risk of not being invited to subsequent salsa events anymore.

⁸⁸ This is an example of how “salsa capital” inside the salsa circuit is actually transferable into economic capital; insofar as recognized *stars* are sometimes paid for dancing with amateurs (see Chapter 8).

Nevertheless, salsa dancers who consider themselves artists, are reluctant to dance with paying festival participants, a task they consider not being part of their art. Many dance professionals therefore prefer to stay behind the scene with other dance professionals, thus demonstrating their status as salsa artist. Furthermore, in informal discussions, female dancers mentioned the risk of injuries through dancing with inexperienced leaders as well as tiredness after a long day of teaching, rehearsing and performing as reasons for their absence during festival night parties. Some artists compromise to some degree by dancing in public but choosing their dance partners from the circle of more experienced dancers they already know. Nevertheless, as the above described discussion round revealed, dance professionals are often expected to participate in festival parties as dance partners, a request several of my interviewees took seriously, as they told me that they were “good social dancers” who danced a lot with participants, thus presenting themselves as tangible *salsa stars*.

It is precisely in this area of tension between dancing as a service that is paid for and dancing as an interpersonal encounter that the affective labour has to be performed. Although salsa dance professionals have many reasons not to dance with members of the public during festival nights, the expectations of this profession do include dancing with paying salsa students, which can be analysed as a form of affective labour. Following the logics of the salsa circuit’s affective economy, the gendered dance partnership between two salsa dancers is framed as the result of dancers’ wish for the dance interaction. When the economic transaction is emphasised instead of the affective relationship, this convention is disrupted. From the perspective of the students, the exchange on the dance floor should ideally not be framed in economic terms, as this reduces the dancing experience to a “product” bought in a market transaction.

In the literature, a similar phenomenon has been discussed in regard to so-called *taxi-dancers*, who sell their company as temporary dance partners to visitors of the opposite sex (see Cressey 1932 on female taxi-dancers in the taxi-dance halls of Chicago, or, more recently, Törnqvist 2012 on male taxi-dancers catering to foreign women in the tango dance-halls of Buenos Aires). Although there is no direct

economic exchange for a dance between a salsa dance professional and a salsa student in the context of a festival (as the transaction of money occurs through the intermediary of the event organiser), the above described discussion demonstrates the similarities with the institution of the taxi-dancers, as the boundaries between professional (and sometimes even contractually regulated) obligation and leisure, or between economic and affective relationships are blurred. Dance professionals are not only expected to dance with festival participants, they are also expected to “like it” and thus need to engage in affective labour. Salsa dance professionals at European festivals thus experience a similar dilemma as the professional dancers in Havana’s salsa tourism space.⁸⁹

To access paid jobs in the salsa circuit, dancers thus develop entrepreneurial skills and promote themselves, by developing their personality and focusing on one of their skills: performing salsa shows (sometimes competitions), teaching workshops or dancing socially. Furthermore, becoming a salsa dance professional includes an entrepreneurial approach to the self, as dance professionals not only change their social role from a dance student into a dance professional, but they also need to adapt their self-image, entering an entrepreneurial logic to construct a commodified persona, relying on the execution of gendered affective labour. The demonstration of passion and love for salsa as well as the imperative to engage in affective labour both point to the importance of the affective economy of the salsa circuit.

6.2 Negotiating the salsa dance profession in Europe

This section explores the ways salsa is negotiated as a profession in relation to other social fields in European societies. It takes up a common complaint that salsa is not recognised as an art form in the US (see also McMains 2015: 98) and asks how salsa dance professionals based in Europe deal with the supposed lack of recognition. Section 6.2.1 addresses salsa’s absence of what Bourdieu (1993: 51) termed “bourgeois legitimacy” in the European context and the ways dancers struggle with the

⁸⁹ In Havana, where the phenomenon of taxi-dancers being paid for services such as accompanying (foreign) students to salsa parties is common, I observed a similar framing of the negotiations around this type of service (see Chapter 4.3.2).

supposed non-recognition of salsa as performance art. It also explores ways in which this non-recognition might influence salsa dance professionals' careers.

Section 6.2.2 asks which people actually develop a professional career in salsa, briefly discussing the socio-demographic backgrounds of salsa dance professionals. In this way, I point to the gendered, class-based and racialised global power hierarchies in terms of different positions and available job opportunities, which may influence salsa dancers' career decisions.

6.2.1 “Salsa is not recognised yet”: struggling for legitimacy outside the salsa circuit

The status passage from student dancer to salsa dance professional needs not only a reconfiguration of one's own professional identity inside the affective economy of the salsa circuit, but dancers also need to position themselves in relation to non-dancers and their perceptions of salsa. Accordingly, nascent salsa dance professionals need to navigate historic representations that distinguish between art and popular culture, a distinction related to power relationships in a given society (see Bourdieu 1993).

Several salsa dance professionals told me about their negative experiences with non-dancers because they had to explain their profession as well as the fact that they can make a living out of salsa. Clara described salsa's lower status also compared to other, more institutionalised dance forms:

And it is because salsa will probably always stay underground, at least what we actually see. [...] Unfortunately, whenever someone asks you, “what do you do” – “well, I’m a dancer”. The very moment I have to tell them that I’m a salsa dancer, they are like: [in a doubtful voice] “OK?”. If I’d said that I’m a ballet dancer or jazz dancer or modern or whatever, they’d respect me more. It would be another impression than when I say I’m a salsa dancer.

In Clara's view, salsa should have the status of ballet, jazz or modern dance, which are all dance practices that have been formalised to a certain degree as well as institutionalized at universities or dance schools (see eg Wulff 1998 on ballet) and are recognized as performing arts.

Clara's position mirrors many dancers' wish to be respected through salsa being perceived not only as entertainment but also as an art form that is performed on the stages of prestigious venues. Indeed "the stages on which salsa dancers perform tend to be those constructed in hotel ballrooms for the duration of a salsa congress, not established theaters" (McMains 2015: 317). Dancers' quest for legitimacy indicates a hierarchy of performance practices in the US as well as European countries.

In his analysis of the artistic field, Bourdieu (1993) distinguishes three competing forms of legitimacy: "specific legitimacy", "bourgeois legitimacy" and "popular legitimacy". In Chapter 8 I will closely analyse the recognition granted to salsa dancers inside the salsa circuit, which Bourdieu calls specific legitimacy. In this section, I focus on the legitimacy related to the non-recognition of salsa dancers: the lack of bourgeois legitimacy. Bourdieu describes this as the:

principle of legitimacy corresponding to "bourgeois" taste and to the consecration bestowed by the dominant fractions of the dominant class and by private tribunals, such as *salons*, or public, state-guaranteed ones, such as academies, which sanction the inseparably ethical and aesthetic (and therefore political) taste of the dominant (Bourdieu 1993: 51).

Although Bourdieu's model was developed to analyse the field of cultural production in a specific national frame at a specific historical moment, it is helpful in situating contemporary salsa dancers' dilemma in terms of public recognition. The designation of salsa dance professionals as *artists* indicates their self-identification as producers of art, which they perceive as qualitatively different from "mere entertainment". In many interviews the idea of salsa being an art form emerged as an important category of making sense of one's life as a dancer and an artist. Dancers who develop professional careers in the salsa circuit therefore have to position themselves in relation to salsa's poor public recognition, which translates into lack of support from powerful institutions. This was also made clear in a short discussion I had with Marcos at the end of the interview, in which he thanked me for having chosen salsa as a research topic: "I feel really really happy that someone wants to take this topic for a project like that." Thus he addressed my role as an academic researcher, standing for the state-guaranteed institution of a university, and took the

research on this topic as a certain acknowledgement of the importance of salsa as a legitimate art form. As we continued to discuss research on salsa, Marcos compared salsa with jazz music, reminding me of the history of this musical form that first had to gain legitimacy and then gradually became institutionalised with music academies in many countries. In the eyes of its adepts, salsa thus lacks the bourgeois legitimacy that grants academies and institutional support to specific musical and performance arts such as jazz or ballet.

Furthermore, salsa's lack of bourgeois legitimacy is also revealed in the absence of economic capital provided by public institutions. All the organisers of salsa events I talked to told me that it was difficult to obtain sponsorship money for salsa events. Valentina, co-organiser of the longest-running salsa event in Switzerland, explained to me: "Because in our business you practically never find sponsors. This is impossible and it is like this in every country." On my asking if she ever tried to get money from a cultural funding institution, Valentina stated: "For the Swiss state it is just a dance: 'oh yes, Latin America, that's cute'. But it is not like Swiss wrestling or something. There they put in the whole budget, against this you have no chance." Valentina refers to the nation state and cultural policies that define which cultural events are worth supporting. In her perception, salsa in European countries is seen as a foreign dance, minimised and not taken seriously by cultural institutions. Mentioning the example of Swiss wrestling, a popular sport especially in rural regions of Switzerland, she refers to the stereotypical image of Swiss events. Indeed, as Becker (1982) argues: "Governments may regard the arts, some or all of them, as integral parts of the nation's identity, things it is known for as Italy is known for opera, and subsidize them as they would any important feature of the national culture that could not support itself" (181).

As this discussion exemplifies, salsa events in European countries are based on private sponsorship, thus depending on "popular legitimacy", which Bourdieu (1993: 51) defines as "the consecration bestowed by the choice of ordinary consumers, the 'mass audience'". Hence, in terms of public recognition, salsa's relatively recent arrival as compared to longstanding local cultural practices may play a crucial role. Furthermore, from a nation state's perspective, "cultural funding" programmes are

designed to support national artists (see eg Lipphardt 2012 on the establishment of EU funding schemes and the importance of national citizenship in acquiring them). During this research I have never heard of salsa dancers being part of a funding scheme in Europe. Salsa dance professionals work as freelancers or entrepreneurs, a point that Yaimara, who had experienced state subsidisation in Cuba, criticised:

It would be great if there were an institution or something for dancers. Not only German, but the possibility for dancers from other countries, not only Cubans, just other countries, to pass an exam or something and then to teach or perform somewhere. And it would be subsidised; this would be great if Germany could do this. But I know there are other priorities.

For Yaimara, compared to her experience of support in Cuba, this situation is linked to the non-recognition of salsa artists in Germany. Although similar criticism may also be widespread among professionals in other artistic domains, such as performance or music, the described challenge of becoming salsa dance professionals points to the ongoing negotiations in a (nationally defined) society of what is legitimate art. In many socialist countries, creating national dance academies and funding their artists was a declared goal of the government to enhance “national culture”. This phenomenon is known from Eastern European countries (Buckland 2006). The revolutionary government in Cuba also established institutions to educate dancers in specific dance forms and, once they had graduated, subsidised them during their activities, while at the same time regulating their travels. In this way, Becker’s (1982) observation of the importance of political and administrative leaders for the functioning of art worlds still holds true: “The merging of politics and aesthetics thus affects what can be counted as art at all, the reputations of whole genres and media as well as those of individual artists” (166).

To summarise, this section has demonstrated in which ways nascent salsa dance professionals negotiate their professional identities outside the salsa circuit. Some salsa dancers are able to gain considerable reputation inside the salsa circuit, including economic rewards. However, as salsa has no institutional anchor in any European country, this achieved symbolic status is not recognised in other social fields (the national or local context these dancers live in).

6.2.2 “I was a squatter”: salsa dance business as an economic strategy

The negotiations of salsa’s definition and its inclusion into the canon of acknowledged art forms in a European context also influence the question of who actually becomes a salsa dance professional. Although I did not collect quantitative data on salsa dance professionals in the European salsa circuit, there are some tendencies that hint to the class-based, gendered and racialised character of salsa as a profession, which I will briefly discuss here.

Several dancers told me that they liked dancing and might teach a lesson once in a while, but they preferred to pursue their professional careers in other domains and keep salsa as a semi-professional or leisure pursuit alongside their main professional activity. This was particularly the case of European-born male dancers holding jobs in non-salsa-related fields.

A special case in my sample was Indian-born Ajay, a *travelling artist* with considerable symbolic capital in the salsa circuit who manages to combine his salsa career with a mainstream career in business with an international company.

Ajay: I have at least three jobs. But most people do salsa full time, if they are dancers, they’ll do dancing full time, basically.

Joanna: Why do you do it differently?

Ajay: I guess it’s a personal choice because I do salsa for my passion, for my hobby, for my love for the dance and for the culture and for the music. I also have a regular mainstream education, I have a passion to be part of a corporate environment and to do what I do in my regular job and to grow in my career. I don’t feel comfortable with the idea of giving up either of them, so if I like doing both, I have to balance it.

As Ajay’s case exemplifies, a career in the salsa circuit is not always chosen as an income-earning strategy. For Ajay, who had accumulated considerable cultural capital (an MBA) and worked for an international company, giving up his “mainstream” career was not an appealing option. However, in contrast to other dancers, he was able to combine travelling to salsa events with employment in an international company. Other dancers engage in a full-time career in salsa for a limited period of time.

Several of the European-born female dancers I talked to planned to finish their studies later, or engage in other professions at a later stage of their life. I observed more European female dancers than male dancers engaging in professional salsa careers. There may be several reasons for the observed differences between European male and female salsa dancers. The precarious financial situation involved in an independent salsa career and availability of other employment opportunities may be one of them. Furthermore, gendered representations of dance as a female activity also seemed to play out in the decision of whether to become a salsa dance professional. Thus, several of the interviewed male dancers told me that they felt they were not taken seriously as male dancers. One dancer told me that he had to deny accusations of being homosexual in his family context. Studies in other dance worlds have shown that boys and men engaging in dance classes or a dance career are often viewed as not being masculine enough (see eg Sorignet 2010 on the contemporary dance scene).

By contrast, for dancers with less institutionalised cultural capital or whose formal education is not recognised, particularly after they have moved to a European country, other job opportunities are restricted. At the same time, salsa has become widely known as an expression of “Latinness”, so that in many European cities migrants from Latin American countries are associated with the dance (for instance, Lundström 2009 analyses how young Latina women are confronted with and have to negotiate popular representations of *latinidad*). For many dancers of Latin American origin, starting a dance career therefore represents an alternative to an otherwise hardly accessible labour market. A dancer of Cuban origin told me that although he only had a basic understanding and no real training in dancing before moving to Europe, his new friends pushed him to start teaching salsa, which he eventually did. He improved his dancing skills through lessons and is now highly sought-after, teaching at many events in the European salsa circuit. Ernesto, a Uruguayan dancer in his late forties who came to Europe as a political refugee, shares a similar story. He proudly told me:

I have to tell you, before doing salsa I was in a very precarious situation. I was a squatter here; I got state aid. But now I am the living proof that with Cuban [salsa] one can make a living, just by being invited to festivals.

Also for some of the interviewed female dance professionals, dancing and teaching salsa was perceived as one of the only possibilities to make a living, especially in the European context. As Yaimara put it: “Dancing is the only thing I know”. Due to the representations of salsa as a gendered and culturalised practice in Europe, for Latin American migrants with little or unrecognised institutionalised cultural capital, teaching salsa presents an economic strategy. However, the salsa circuit first has to be accessed, whereby regimes of mobility (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013) regulating the travels of passport holders of Latin American countries are highly significant.

6.3 Salsa dance professionals’ income-generating activities

The construction of transnational careers enables actors to accumulate reputation or salsa capital (see Chapter 8), which is transferable into economic capital up to a certain extent, since famous dancers find a constant demand for their work. Hence, as already mentioned, although salsa dance professionals claim a status as artist, most of them do not make a living out of their performing (in contrast, for example, to ballet dancers) but rather out of teaching salsa to paying students. To become a salsa dance professional, dancers therefore need to have income-generating activities.

As studies of artistic labour markets have shown, artists often face considerable risk due to the uncertainty of the fields they work in; therefore they often follow a strategy of holding multiple jobs (Menger 1999: 562). Here, teaching the specific skills of the practice is a frequent strategy (Menger 1999: 564). As argued in chapter 4 in regards to the importance of the “teaching convention”, becoming a salsa dance professional therefore includes developing skills not only in dancing, but importantly also in teaching. Teaching salsa dance is often learned on the spot, through imitation of one’s own teachers and particularly other salsa dance professionals active in the salsa circuit. There are several strategies salsa dance professionals follow to make ends meet through teaching. These income-generating

activities are sometimes combined; sometimes they follow one another in the course of a dancer's career. Basically, salsa dance professionals either travel as salsa artists, often combined with teaching locally as freelancers (Section 6.3.1), or they own (and teach in) a dance studio (Section 6.3.2). In this section, I will discuss the rationale for taking up each of these activities and the ways they are related to different degrees of geographical mobility and different social networks, as each one requires and results in different degrees of local rootedness and transnational connections.

6.3.1 “You don’t have a regular contract”: travelling as *salsa* artist

As mentioned before, *travelling artists* are highly prestigious dancers, whose photographs figure on the festivals advertisements, thus attracting salsa students to a particular event. Most of them are based in one country, moving to other places several times a month for the duration of a weekend in order to work. Once they have obtained residency rights in a country in Europe, they work mostly at salsa events in Europe, with occasional events in other countries.

Lavinia, told me about the places she had performed and taught salsa with her dance partner:

We can go all around Europe, we also went to Japan, we went to Turkey, we went to Australia, to Dubai, to Russia, ehm ... Lebanon, Israel, Africa – I mean that's a continent but we went to Morocco. Yeah, like I think to each continent we have gone at least once, in one country.

Some salsa dance professionals also tour for longer periods, for example if they are invited to teach in a school for several weeks, or if organisers of different events jointly pay for the travel and accommodation of an artist living on another continent. In this way, dancers based in the USA (in this study Nara), Singapore (in this study Ajay) or in Australia are also present on European festival stages and dance floors, as well as European dancers at Asian festivals.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ For a video of two *salsa stars* based in Europe, filmed after their workshop at the China Latin Dance Festival, see rebrand.ly/salsa-15.



Picture 22 Flyer Lebanon Latin Festival 2016.

Although becoming a *travelling artist* and developing a transnational career is often cited as a dream for many salsa dancers, the material conditions are rather precarious even for those who have gained considerable reputation inside the circuit. Salsa events are not a stable source of income, and personal networks with event organisers and other actors play a crucial role in organising jobs. Job opportunities for salsa dance professionals thus often depend on the organisers and their interests and calendar. Sometimes events are cancelled at short notice due to financial difficulties. In these cases, the invited artists don't get paid for their work. Several of my interviewees told me about such difficulties, such as Clara who mentioned several occasions she and her partner Gary got no payment for their work:

Two years ago, we worked five weekends for nothing because they couldn't pay us. Later we saw the money, for two [of the weekends], some of them couldn't pay for us or only half of it, or whatever. But there's nothing where you can say, "OK, we can count on this".

Several of the interviewed dancers told me about such experiences with cancelled events or work they had done remaining unpaid. Other dancers also mentioned the unstable working conditions, such as Yaimara: "The thing I find most difficult with dancing is that you don't have a regular contract, it is hard. Because one month you can have a lot and the other month nothing, you have to be careful."

To diversify their income-generating strategies, many salsa dance professionals therefore teach not only at salsa events but also locally during weekdays, for example in the salsa studios of others. This is the case for Maria, who set up her own small company in order to formally freelance with different schools. Thus she teaches regularly alone as well as with her dance partner in the city where the two are living. Based in Norway, Maria and her dance partner often travel to other dance schools in Scandinavia and other European countries, but also to bigger events where they teach and perform. Although she works half the weekends in a year, she does not like the idea of making a living only out of these jobs. Instead, she insists on keeping her regular students and teaching locally: "I don't think I would feel comfortable relying only on the events, it would be too stressful. So having a more steady base like classes or another job is definitely needed." As a freelancer without her own studio, Maria is able to combine the need for a regular income with the wish for a transnational career.

Dancers who start building up professional careers thus often concentrate on the organisation of their travelling and establishment of transnational networks and have to find ways to teach classes in someone else's dance school or in a rented room during the week.

6.3.2 “Either you are on the move or you manage a school”: owning a dance studio

Since the salsa wave in European countries of the late 1990s, salsa dance studios (also called dance schools) have flourished in many European cities. They range from a one-room studio up to several rooms where more than one class can be taught at a time. In order to open up their own studio, dancers require not only economic capital, but also the necessary legal status, organisational skills, local networks and teaching experience. Therefore, dancers at the beginning of their career rarely choose to open up their own studio, as they first need to acquire these resources. Nevertheless, several of my research participants mentioned this type of business, some of them being owners of a dance studio, others planning to become so or having already closed their studio and moved on.

Several of my research participants considered the dance school as a stable source of income, where they depend on themselves instead of others to invite them to teach. Discussing this point with Iannis and Alicia, a Greek salsa couple performing and teaching together, Iannis said: “That’s why we have the studio. I mean it’s like, it gives a little bit of security, although it’s hard in Greece to have a small business, with the taxes.” Although it brings a lot of work under difficult conditions, Iannis considers running a dance studio worth it because it provides some security, even though the economic crisis in Greece has affected his business. He plans to continue teaching salsa and considers his studio a good place to do this on a regular basis.

After several years of teaching salsa in different German cities and at festivals, Gary and his partner Clara decided to open a studio. Although they continue travelling to festivals, they manage their studio in a German city. For them, the studio has advantages in economic terms, as Clara explains:

The dance school is “stable”, in quotation mark, it’s between 150 and 170 people [students], sometimes more, sometimes less, the money arrives most of the time, with few problems, but at the beginning or in the middle of the month it should be there, that’s what you can count on.

In order to make a living out of dancing, Clara and Gary follow a two-fold strategy similar to Alicia and Iannis: on one hand they rely on the regular income of their

dance studio, on the other hand they travel to events to teach and perform. For them, running a studio has the advantage of a more or less regular income, especially compared to jobs at salsa events.

The decision to concentrate on a local business is often taken after a transnational career as *travelling artist*, and the decision to run a studio and settle down is also linked to age and gender. The case of Anna is illustrative of this. Anna runs the studio on her own and employs several teachers, managing “a little enterprise”, as she says. Her decision to settle down and stop travelling was also linked to her wish to have a family and become a mother, something she did not want to combine with a transnational career (see also the analysis in Section 8.1.4). She thus decided to open up a school and stop working at festivals: “Either you are on the move internationally or you manage a school, you can’t do both.” The difficulties lie in the necessitated personal presence in order to keep students and get oneself known locally. In this context, the reputation gained in the (transnationally oriented) salsa circuit is not directly transferable, as local students don’t necessarily know about their dance teachers’ transnational activities (see also Chapter 8).⁹¹ Furthermore, once a studio is running, owners have to attract new students constantly while keeping old ones in order to gain a regular income. Asked if she ever thought about opening her own school in Germany, Yaimara replied:

I’ve really thought about this but at the moment I don’t have the time. Because during the week I am at [name of a big dance studio in a German city], I could do this as well in my own dance school. But on the weekends I am away, at festivals. That would really stress me, because it means that I need employees to do the administration, for example if someone is sick in a couple class and I have to organise a temporary partner. So I would need someone for the whole organisation, it needs a lot of force, a lot of energy, a lot of time for everything. And at this moment I have so many other things going on.

Yaimara refers to a practice I experienced several times, with schools organising an equal number of students for the couple classes. As she explains, being the owner of

⁹¹ This is different in the case of salsa schools in Havana, which rely on the influx of salsa students from abroad and therefore deploy strategies to attract them.

a studio demands not only a lot of administrative work but also a lot of work in terms of building up local relationships with students in order to keep them coming to classes as well as attracting new ones. Teachers of local schools usually organise monthly or weekly parties in their location, and go to other parties with their students regularly. Similarly, in a study on Argentinean tango performers in New York, Viladrich (2013) notes that the dancers' work involves "a steady investment of time, energy, and even money, as they must attend tango parlors regularly for the sake of displaying their tango skills with peers, as well as dancing with current and potential students" (80). This work in terms of presenting oneself and networking is crucial in order to run a local dance school.

This strategy of salsa dancers' economic activities – owning a dance school – is place-bound and based on local networks with organisers of local salsa nights, as well as a network of local students. (The most prestigious salsa dancers teaching in New York or Milan do have visiting students coming from outside, but most dance schools rely on the local salsa scene.) Opening a dance school is an investment in economic terms and an option only for dancers with at least a residence permit in the country in question, as seen in the case of Marcos who had to wait to become a resident of Japan before he opened his own studio. Furthermore, opening a dance studio needs business and other skills such as knowledge of the local language.

As this brief discussion of the different income-generating activities of salsa dance professionals shows, the establishment of a transnational career relies on the acquisition of various resources that can be deployed differently in different places. In order to travel, salsa dance professionals need to build up reputation in the salsa circuit and a transnational network of peers and event organisers to secure job opportunities. Nevertheless, relying solely on such irregular jobs at salsa events is often regarded as too uncertain. Salsa dance professionals therefore often hold secondary jobs. Owning a salsa studio is one possibility to secure a more regular income, while at the same time relying on local resources such as networks and relationships to local salsa students and events. All in all, salsa dance professionals often perform independent, self-managed work building on various skills.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an analysis of the first status passage of becoming a salsa dance professional. As argued above, becoming a salsa dance professional in Europe involves negotiations of a new professional identity, which is related to salsa's lack in "bourgeois legitimacy" (Bourdieu 1993). Transnational salsa careers can be understood as a particular form of vocational careers. They are legitimised by a strong narrative of passion, adding to the discussion of the belief in specific values (see Chapter 3) at the base of the affective economy of the salsa circuit. The motivations of salsa dance professionals thus resemble those of professionals in other performance arts such as ballet or music (Laillier 2011; Sorignet 2014; Wagner 2015). On the other hand, as I have shown, salsa dance professionals become entrepreneurs of themselves, as they develop a "commodified persona" (Bunten 2008) and engage in "affective labour" (Ditmore 2007) to sustain their livelihood with salsa. They have to negotiate the gendered "convention of tangible salsa *stars*" in order to build their careers. In this respect, professional careers in the salsa circuit differ from other professional careers in dance, music or performance as studied in the above-mentioned literature. Indeed, the independent, self-managed work shares similarities with the careers of capoeira instructors in North America, explored by Robitaille (2013).

In her study, Robitaille (2013) frames capoeira as a "cultural resource", and analyses Brazilian *mestres* (teachers) and the ways they engage in capoeira in North America as a context of "transnational neoliberalism". She describes the network facilitating the transnational "exportation" of capoeira at large, arguing that within this network, it is the labour of each *mestre* that transforms capoeira into a resource that ensures individuals' livelihoods (Robitaille 2013: 161). The Brazilian capoeira *mestres* locally organise their schools as small enterprises within a neoliberal economy. While the work of salsa dance professionals resembles the one of the described Capoeira *mestres*, this study demonstrates the importance of vocation and a specific salsa imaginary of an Esperanto of the body instead of a "cultural resource", due to this study's different framing of salsa as a bodily social practice.

As argued, salsa dancing and teaching become an economic strategy to improve their situation for a diverse range of people with different socio-economic and national backgrounds (see also Viladrich 2013 for a similar observation in regards to tango dancers). In the process of the decision to become a salsa dance professional, class-based, gendered and racialised global power hierarchies in terms of different positions, available job opportunities and regimes of mobility are at play. For male dancers with European nationality, a seemingly precarious professional career in salsa is seldom attractive while it can be a good opportunity for male dancers with Latin American origin. Similarly, Latin-American-born female dancers often adhered to a salsa career as an opportunity. Alongside different access to jobs, the gendered representations of dance in general and the gendered-racialised representations of salsa dance in particular are probably among the reasons for this imbalance. While dancing is often portrayed as a female activity, age is a limiting factor for female dancers more than for male dancers. In the salsa circuit, many young female dancers of European origin engage in salsa and start performing and teaching salsa for a while, before they focus on local careers or other jobs.

To start building up the activities described in this chapter, salsa dance professionals need to access the salsa circuit, a process that often includes many obstacles, as explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 7 Access to the European salsa circuit

Access to the salsa circuit, and in particular to the prestigious European salsa circuit, is regulated through diverse elements whereby relationships with strategic actors (dance students, more experienced dancers, event organisers) as well as the possibility of travel play a crucial role. The ways dance professionals build up ties to these specific actors will be discussed in Chapter 8. However, before being able to establish ties with relevant actors of the European salsa circuit, aspiring salsa dance professionals need to be able to create opportunities to meet them. Dancers living in Europe and possessing sufficient economic means and time to travel to salsa events, do so as much as possible to maximise their exposure in the salsa circuit and thus their chances to be seen and invited by a more experienced dance professional or event organiser. However, aspiring salsa dancers living outside Europe have to overcome several barriers in order to access the European salsa circuit.

I will now turn to the salsa careers of non-European dancers and look closely at the social networks and other resources they mobilise to access the European salsa circuit. In this chapter, I combine perspectives and findings from the field of mobility studies with the already developed theoretical framework of transnational careers. Drawing on the concept of “mobility capital” (discussed below), this chapter sheds light on an important aspect of salsa dance professionals’ working conditions and careers that is completely absent from public tales of salsa as an inclusive moment where “everybody can participate” as well as in literature on salsa which usually presumes the participation of *Latinos/Latinas* and *non-Latinos/Latinas* in the transnational circuit. In this literature, salsa dancers’ mobility across national borders is implicitly taken for granted and their strategies usually remain unacknowledged. The same holds for much of the literature on other “mobile professionals” (be it so-called highly skilled or others). Focusing on actors that actually are mobile, studies tend to neglect the fact that this mobility is not automatically granted but has to be obtained by many, thus glossing over an important aspect of unequal access to resources.

As Shamir (2005: 200) claims, “the differential ability to move in space—and even more so to have access to opportunities for movements—has become a major

stratifying force in the global social hierarchy". In a similar vein, Mau et al. (2015) speak of a global "mobility divide". They demonstrate that while citizens of OECD countries can largely travel visa-free to many parts of the world, nationals from non-OECD countries face high levels of travel restrictions (Mau et al. 2015). Passports and the visas they contain also structure individual salsa dancers' short-term travels as well as their long-term mobility to a considerable degree. To travel to European countries, passport holders of many Latin American countries have to obtain a tourist visa (Neumayer 2010), which generally allows for a stay of 90 days. Once this period is over, dancers can either leave the country or overstay their visa and have to find other ways to consolidate their legal status.

In recent approaches to the study of mobilities, mobility has been conceptualised as a capital in Bourdieu's sense (Kaufmann, Bergman, and Joye 2004; Moret 2016; Sheller 2011; for an overview see Jayaram 2016). Kaufmann, Bergman, and Joye (2004) define this ability to move, what they call "motility", as "the capacity of entities (eg goods, information or persons) to be mobile in social and geographic space, or as the way in which entities access and appropriate the capacity for socio-spatial mobility according to their circumstances" (Kaufmann, Bergman, and Joye 2004: 750). In this framework, the potential to be mobile is as important as the actual act of moving. As Sheller (2011) writes, mobility capital can be conceptualised "as the uneven distribution of these capacities and competences, in relation to the surrounding physical, social and political affordances for movement (with the legal structures regulating who or what can and cannot move being crucial)" (5).

Furthermore, the concept of motility links spatial mobility to social mobility, "as the ability to be mobile is related to the ability to deploy strategies to improve one's situation" (Moret 2015: 188). Drawing on what Cresswell (2010) terms "the politics of mobility", Moret (2016) theorises mobility "as an element of social differentiation involved in the production of power relations and inequalities" (1458). In this perspective, mobility is seen as an unequally distributed resource "that can, under certain conditions, be mobilised and transformed into social and economic advantages" (Moret 2016: 1458), and thus becomes mobility capital.

As this chapter demonstrates, salsa dancers of non-European origin are endowed with different volumes of mobility capital. Many of my research participants first had to acquire the necessary skills, contacts and legal documents before they were able to access the European salsa circuit and build a successful transnational career, thereby drawing on other resources. In this study, mobility is thus understood as a capital that can be acquired (through the deployment of other forms of capital, such as social capital) as well as mobilised and converted into other forms of capital (such as reputation in the salsa circuit, and/or economic advantages).

This chapter includes a second argument put forward by scholarship of “mobility studies”: it brings together forms of mobility that are usually conceived of separately, such as tourism, migration or circular mobility, in one theoretical framework (see also Dahinden 2010; Schapendonk, van Liempt, and Spierings 2015). In my research, this was particularly striking in the encounters and relationships built between tourists from European countries and their Cuban salsa teachers. The tourist’s mobility is normalised whereas the teacher’s wish to partake in mobility as part of a “cosmopolitan lifestyle” was often hindered by diverse exclusionary mechanisms of “migration regimes” (Amelina 2017). In bringing together this theoretical argument with a focus on the transnational careers of salsa dance professionals, I am able to add a better understanding of the construction of such careers. Drawing on Martiniello and Rea’s (2014: 1089) insights in their discussion of “migratory careers”, I acknowledge not only individual characteristics such as nationality, marital status, level of education, age and gender but I also take into account the role of the state “as a key actor that structures the context of reception or departure of migrants” in one analytical framework. To account for the interdependency of the various forms of mobility I suggest the notion of “entangled mobilities”, which will be further theorised in the conclusion of this chapter.

In the following, I look at three consecutive phases of the process of accessing the salsa circuit. The first phase is of “imaginative travels” to account for the importance of imaginaries in salsa dance professionals’ careers (7.1). The second phase I explore is the ways Cuban dancers first gained access to the European salsa circuit and the strategies they mobilised (more or less successfully) during the process. To illustrate

this second phase (7.2), I draw on the individual cases of selected dancers, which I chose based on their relevance (Flick 2014) and variation (Becker 1998), as detailed in Chapter 2 Methodology and methods (Section 2.3.2). The third phase I discuss is the way in which Latin American dancers consolidated “legal capital” once in Europe in order to be able to continue their transnational career in the salsa circuit (7.3).

7.1 Latin American salsa dance professionals and their imaginaries of a “cosmopolitan lifestyle”

The majority of the salsa dance professionals born in a Latin American country that I interviewed had already danced salsa or similar dances in their home country. Before they started their transnational careers as salsa professionals, usually initiated by migration to a European country, they imagined being mobile and had ideas of other possible places to live.⁹² Salazar (2011) defines such historically laden imaginaries as “socially shared and transmitted (both within and between cultures) representational assemblages that interact with people’s personal imaginings and are used as meaning-making and world-shaping devices” (576). There are various motivations to cross borders and live elsewhere and imaginaries of other places and lives play an important role in this process, as scholarship on migration and mobility has demonstrated (Riaño and Baghdadi 2007; Salazar 2011). In their analysis of transnational spaces, geographers have argued for an inclusion not only of “the *material geographies* of labour migration” but also “the *symbolic and imaginary geographies*” (Jackson, Crang, and Dwyer 2004: 3). Contrary to a simplistic understanding of people migrating solely due to economic hardship, these imaginaries that inform the choices of individual migrants should thus also be taken into account when analysing dancers’ careers.

The research participants mentioned how they had imagined salsa in “Europe” (imagined as a geographic unit) and their own careers as salsa dancers while they still lived in their country of origin. The “cosmopolitan lifestyle” the interviewed salsa dancers imagined entails two dimensions: ideas of professional opportunities in

⁹² In his discussion of different “scapes”, Appadurai (1990: 296) also proposes to explore the links between imagination and social life, as actors navigate scapes and build “imagined worlds”.

the (European) salsa circuit and the dream of travelling. Furthermore, part of such imaginaries was also openness to meeting new people and newly arising opportunities (which shaped later mobility). While the notion of cosmopolitanism is used in many different ways in the literature,⁹³ a thorough discussion is not the goal of this section. Rather, understanding cosmopolitanism as a “practice which is apparent in things that people do and say to positively engage with ‘the otherness of the other’ and the oneness of the world” (Nowicka and Rovisco 2009: 2), the idea of a “cosmopolitan lifestyle” is here used as a descriptive notion to account for my interviewees’ claims to ideas of being mobile and meeting “others”.

The next section (7.1.1) considers the two dimensions of the imaginaries of a cosmopolitan lifestyle before I turn to a detailed discussion of the strategies some Cuban dancers mobilised to access the European salsa circuit.

7.1.1 “I knew that in Europe there was more salsa”: imaginary travels

Salsa dancers living in Latin American countries often knew about the European salsa circuit through the internet (via YouTube and Facebook) or the stories of others. Alejandro, a salsa dance professional who was born in Costa Rica, worked as a dance teacher in a dance school for tourists in Costa Rica, where he befriended some Swiss students who suggested he should come to Switzerland. I asked him about his plans before leaving Costa Rica and he told me that he thought that he would be able to teach and compete in other European countries:

I knew that in Europe more salsa was going on than in Costa Rica, 'cause everything is open, you can do competitions and congresses everywhere. This didn't exist in Costa Rica or in Latin America. When I left, there were two congresses: one in Puerto Rico and the other one somewhere in America, not many. [...] Nowadays you have congresses in Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Peru, everywhere. At that time, they didn't exist yet. But in Europe they existed already, in Italy, in Germany, even in Switzerland.

⁹³ Beck and Sznaider (2006), for example, argue for a “methodological cosmopolitanism” in social sciences, while Nowicka and Rovisco (2009) distinguish between cosmopolitanism as a practice and as a moral ideal.

Before I came here they already existed and I knew that. And most important was that I had good friends from Switzerland. So that's why I'm here now.

As salsa congresses proliferated during the early 2000s in many European countries, Alejandro perceived Europe as more interesting in terms of salsa activity than Latin America. As he told me later on, though he knew about salsa congresses going on in the US, he had no chance to enter the country as he was not acquainted with dancers who would invite him to a salsa event. On the other hand, once in Switzerland with a tourist visa, he knew he would be able to travel to salsa events. In this sense, "everything is open". He had knowledge of salsa competitions and planned to participate in them to build up his reputation. Furthermore, Alejandro's explanation also identifies the importance of social ties – his good friends from Switzerland – in the construction of his imaginaries. Though not all dancers had such a clear idea of how they would proceed once in Europe, imaginaries of professional opportunities linked to salsa in Europe played an important role in their decision to try their luck in the European salsa circuit.

Moreover, several of my interviewees dreamed of mobility from an early age. Yaimara had started imagining her own travels early: "When I was a child, I always knew that one day... I always wanted to travel, get to know cultures and people". This underlines the importance of imaginaries of a mobile lifestyle including travelling and the chance to "get to know others".

As the discussed cases illustrate, imaginary forms of participation in the salsa circuit are possible even for individuals who do not physically cross state borders. Urry (2007) also discusses the possibility of "imaginative travel" and states: "Such travel can sometimes substitute for physical travel [...] but more often seems to generate the desire for travel and for being bodily in other places" (169). In terms of salsa dancers' identifications and constructions of belonging, imaginary forms of mobility

and participation in the salsa circuit may be of high significance.⁹⁴ However, this “imaginary mobility” is not the same as physical, geographical mobility, which in some cases leads to the construction of successful transnational careers. In this way, imaginaries precede travels but they cannot replace them in terms of the accumulation of mobility capital.

The imagined mobility is further characterised by an idea of openness to self-transformation through mobility. Lavinia, a dancer born in Mexico, met her Italian dance partner at a salsa event in Mexico when she was 21 years old. He asked her to move to Milan to work with him and his dance company. Although in this case, the mobility had not been imagined as part of her career, in Lavinia’s narration it became a decisive element of self-transformation.

Joanna: Can you tell me some more about the decision to move to Milano?

Lavinia: Yes? Because of my personality, I always love challenges, like, when someone tells me, “let’s try to do this”, I will try it. Maybe after, I won’t like it, maybe after I will, maybe not very much, but I always love to try things. And when this proposal came out of nothing, when you didn’t expect, that someone could say, “move to the other part of the world”, I said, “why not”. [...] it was, you know, such a big opportunity, maybe to open my mind or my world. [...] And now, it’s five years that I’m here.

In this case, although she had not imagined it as part of her career from an early age, Lavinia embraced the idea of moving to Europe and participating in the salsa circuit as an opportunity and experience for personal development, to “open her mind”.

A part of Lavinia’s imaginary was her openness to newly arising opportunities. The above quotation also illustrates how salsa dancers’ career plans and goals changed with new experiences and unforeseen opportunities, for instance arising out of encounters with new dance partners. Becker (1963) did not conceive of careers as

⁹⁴ As has been argued, “virtual travel” (Urry 2007) is also a form of mobility interconnected with the here-described “imaginative travel”. As McMains (2015: 268) shows, online connections between dancers based in the USA and in Europe indeed played an important role in the development of the European salsa circuit in the early 2000s. However, when it comes to access to the circuit, “virtual travel” does not appear to be of particular importance in my data. In this, the limited cases and the overrepresentation of Cuban dance professionals in my data may also play a role, as these dancers often had no access to the internet in their own country, unlike the dancers based in the USA studied by McMains.

linear processes, and the same holds for transnational careers of salsa dance professionals: they develop over time and allow for adjustments.

7.2 A Cuban case study

In Chapter 3 I discussed the importance of salsa hubs outside Europe, and in particular Havana, in salsa dancers' imaginary salsa map. Many salsa dance professionals in the European salsa circuit are of Cuban origin. I will now turn to the conditions dancers had to meet and the strategies they mobilised to access the salsa circuit, with a focus on Cuba for the reasons outlined above. This section discusses the manifold ways in which four emerging dance professionals in Havana mobilised specific resources, which in turn allowed them to access the European salsa circuit.

Before they could build up the necessary networks, dancers generally had to move from a village to Havana, where salsa tourism is established. As scholars of mobility studies have pointed out, internal movements such as going to live in a city can sometimes imply bigger changes than the crossing of a border (see Kalir 2013). For these dancers, their move to Havana and their activities in the informal spaces of dance tourism implied a decisive change in their career path. During this time they were able to build up relationships thanks to their teaching activities, which provided them with resources for their next career step. Gaudette (2013) shares a similar analysis in regards to Guinean jembe musicians who wish to achieve global mobility through playing this drum, and for whom being "in the right place at the right time" is crucial (Gaudette 2013: 304). Similar to the musicians in Guinea who strived to be present at jembe workshops in Conakry, the Cuban salsa dancers in my study had endeavoured to enter spaces of dance tourism in Havana where they could meet tourists. Once established as teachers of salsa dance in a tourist context in Havana, they had a privileged access to visitors.

As argued above, the ability to move entails three elements: access, competence and appropriation. Access to different forms and degrees of mobility is constrained by options and conditions (Kaufmann, Bergman, and Joye 2004: 750). In the case of Cuban salsa dancers, legal documents and economic means to leave the country, cross national borders and enter other states are crucial resources. The second

element, competence, refers to the skills and abilities social actors need in order to be mobile. Kaufmann, Bergman, and Joye (2004) mention physical ability, acquired skills such as “specific knowledge of the terrain” and organisational skills needed to acquire information (750). Besides physical ability, the dancers of this study needed skills specifically related to the acquisition of information in terms of their next move. The third element the authors mention is appropriation, which involves the ways actors consider and select specific options. “All three elements of motility are fundamentally linked to social, cultural, economic and political processes and structures within which mobility is embedded and enacted” (Kaufmann, Bergman and Joye 2004: 750). However, I would argue that this model of motility omits an important element: the imaginaries of other places and different lives. Based on the above discussion, I would add imaginaries as a fourth element of motility, in line with Appadurai’s (1990) and Salazar’s (2011) argument of the importance of the imagination in structuring human mobility.

By considering mobility as an unequally distributed resource that needs to be acquired, as well as an asset that may lead to the improvement of one’s situation, this case study demonstrates that Cuban dancers need to actively strategise in various ways to be able to access the salsa circuit. In this respect, as I will demonstrate, the mobility of others, in particular European salsa dancers, was often the condition to allow for the mobility of Cuban dancers, either through an invitation, (7.2.1), or a marriage, (7.2.2). Established networks of salsa students in Europe and cultural capital were also a door-opener to access the salsa circuit (7.2.3). However, in many cases the imagined move to Europe – and thus access to the European salsa circuit – does not work and dancers remain “stuck” at the edge of the salsa circuit (7.2.4).

7.2.1 Juli: “They helped me a lot”: mobilising friendship networks

Before my first research trip to Havana, I asked dancer friends and dance studio owners in Switzerland for their recommendations for dance teachers. All of them mentioned Juli’s school in Havana as a place to take lessons, which demonstrates her efforts in building and sustaining networks in Switzerland. In Havana, I took several

lessons with Juli and other teachers at her school. I met Juli for an interview at her house in central Havana, after a day of work in her school.

Juli started dancing at young age and later enrolled at the university to study dance at the National Arts School (ENA). During this time, in the early 1990s, she also started to teach foreign visitors and to build up contacts: “I studied in the ENA, but I had many family problems, I didn’t have any money, I had to work. So I left the ENA, I went to Switzerland and worked, you understand.”

Due to economic difficulties, Juli had to interrupt her studies and followed an opportunity to go abroad and teach dancing:

The first time I went was in '98, I went to Switzerland. I knew two Swiss guys, Harry and Frank they are students of mine. They are very good people [...]. I went to Switzerland, gave classes with Barbara, a dance teacher in [Swiss city], she had a dance school. Barbara organised some work for me in Switzerland, in 1998, and I worked in Barbara’s school and slept at the house of my friend Harry and it was a great time. Because I worked a lot and I was very happy to be able to go to Switzerland, to get to meet good friends and to earn some money. I don’t know, I made 1000 or 2000 francs [at the time 1500 or 3000 Euro], it was a lot of money 'cause here I had nothing. I will always be very grateful to Harry and Frank who helped me with this. I was there for three months, I worked with Barbara for one month and then I worked in other places as well, in [a smaller Swiss city]. There was a project of intercultural exchange, with an official contract with the state. They helped me always for the official part, the legal part, the school [name of Swiss dance school run by Cuban-born dancers]. Therefore I am very grateful to [name of dance school] because they helped me a lot. She’s a very good friend of mine, she helped me a lot, until this day.

Like many other dancers, Juli managed to meet enthusiastic students who invited her to travel to Switzerland and helped her with the administrative and practical questions. The money was not a lot in the Swiss context but it was a significant sum in Cuba, which allowed Juli to contemplate opening her own dance studio in a central house. She also relied on the help of others in her network to deal with the paperwork to get an artist’s visa that allowed her to travel out of Cuba to Switzerland. She had an artist’s contract with the Cuban government, declaring her travel as “intercultural exchange”, one of the rare possibilities to leave the country

legally during this time. In Switzerland, she obtained a tourist visa of three months. During this first trip, with the help of her former students, Juli taught successfully in different places in Switzerland and made new connections. Building on these, she was able to leave Havana again for a three-month visit to Switzerland one year later and then continued her teaching visits to Switzerland, and soon France, Germany, Spain and Denmark, extending her network of interested schools and students every time she was there. Soon, dance students who saw her in Europe started travelling to Havana in order to take classes in her school, attracted by her personality, dancing and teaching skills. After several years of travelling back and forth between Cuba and Europe, Juli was able to buy a house in Havana and subsequently enlarge the dance school with several floors. She relied on the help of her mother and her cousin in order to look after the school while she was abroad, as well as on her friend, a lawyer who helped her deal with the Cuban bureaucracy.

Juli met her future husband during one of her teaching tours in Switzerland. Ten years after her first trip to Switzerland, they married and later had a child. Her husband also supports her teaching activities with his own network and knowledge of the language, and helps her organise teaching opportunities. Since her marriage, Juli spends half of the year in Havana and the rest of the year in Switzerland and Europe. This rhythm of a to-and-fro movement between two places allows Juli to keep her dance studio in Havana, where she manages a group of around 15 teachers and 10 assistants. During the interview she also stressed the importance of living near other family members and the emotional costs of being away from Cuba.

At the same time, Juli's physical presence in Europe for several months of the year allows her to make more money than in Cuba as well as to attract new students to Havana. As she told me, her Swiss residence permit enables her to travel to other countries more easily and with fewer visa restrictions and difficulties than with the Cuban passport alone. When I met Juli, this model had worked for six years, but as their daughter grew older, she and her husband started to discuss where the child would attend school and the place the family should mainly live.

These snapshots of Juli's transnational career demonstrate the ways in which dance professionals are able to mobilise networks they built up in Havana to access the

European salsa circuit. Only the initial invitation from someone established in Europe provided Juli with the opportunity to demonstrate her skills in dancing and teaching in dance studios and at small festivals in Europe and to subsequently enlarge her network of inviting dance studios and festivals. Juli's story also reveals the ways in which dance professionals can mobilise resources located in two places: not only did she develop her own career as a salsa teacher in Europe but at the same time she also attracted European students to Havana, where she built up a successful school with many Cuban teachers. In the literature, this form of regular movements between two places that Juli adopts has been called "circulation" (Duany 2002), "commuting" (Nowicka 2013) or "pendular migration" (Morokvasic-Muller 1999). It allows actors to build up "mobile livelihoods" through a strategy that extends the means of subsistence across borders in situations where economic opportunities are not distributed equally between places (Duany 2002).

After a while, Juli's dance studio became a salsa hub, bringing together Cuban dance teachers and European students. She proudly told me the names of all the Cuban dancers who had left Havana due to an invitation from or marriage with a European student they had met in her school. Despite this apparently successful transnational career, Juli experiences the incessant travel as extremely exhausting and is always under pressure to keep up her contacts. In her case, the mobilisation of her large network of people in Cuba and Switzerland enable her to keep up this business.

7.2.2 Yaimara: "I found my *media naranja*": mobilising family networks and transnational marriage

Alongside cultivating friendships with foreigners, marriage was another strategy that often stood at the beginning of a transnational salsa career. Especially in the Cuban context, since the economic crisis in the 1990s and the increase in foreign tourism, marriage has become a way of leaving the island for many people. As Fernandez (2013) writes: "Both kin-making and cultivating friendships with foreigners have become key strategies for Cubans to ensure their own and their family's well-being" (281). For Cuban dancers, marriage is not only a way to leave the country, it is also a way to enter (and remain in) Europe legally. In fact, for people of non-EU origin countries, marriage is often a way to extend their legal stay in Europe and benefit

from the family reunification rights conferred to spouses of EU citizens (Andrigokopoulos *forthcoming*). Due to Europe's selective migration policies, "family migration is one of the only remaining open channels to enter Europe as the right for family is an international human right and regulated in Europe through the directive on family reunification" (Moret, Andrigokopoulos, and Dahinden *forthcoming*). The significance of a marriage with a European citizen will be demonstrated with the case of Yaimara.

Yaimara met her future German husband, Felix, who was interested in Cuban music and dance when he was in Havana to interview Yaimara's grandfather. They became friends, and whenever Felix was in Havana Yaimara helped him with his research projects. After a while they realised that they wanted to live together and Felix invited Yaimara to Germany. "He wanted to invite me so that I could find out if I actually liked Germany or not, so he invited me." But the couple could not obtain a visa for Yaimara. They tried a second time, but "the embassy said no. Then he [Felix] said: 'OK, so I will come to Cuba, we will marry, so they can't say no anymore'". The couple thus married in Cuba but it took another six months before Yaimara could leave the country. As scholars of cross-border marriages have pointed out, "bringing spouses from elsewhere into a European country is increasingly difficult, as many EU Member States have been tightening regulations governing spousal immigration" (Charsley 2012: 8). Thus, going through the family reunification process is often an expensive and time-consuming enterprise, as Fernandez (2013) demonstrates for Cuban marriage migration to Denmark. This was also the case for Yaimara. As a further complication, she had applied for a Cuban foreign residency permit (*permiso de residencia en el exterior*), which (until 2013) was necessary to leave Cuba legally and at the same time retain one's residency, inheritance and property rights (cf Fernandez 2013: 277).

Once Yaimara had obtained all the necessary documents, she settled in Germany where she soon got a job at a big dance school and after a while she started teaching regularly. She was also introduced to the festival circuit through an old friend of the family and thus started her career as a *travelling artist* at European festivals, while teaching almost every day of the week in the dance school. After some years she also

started to organise dance holidays in Cuba, mobilising her networks in both places, bringing European salsa students to Havana.

Looking at Yaimara's transnational career, the marriage with a German, the mobility capital she thus acquired and the subsequent relocation to Europe proved to be a turning point and the moment that opened the door to her successful transnational career. In this way, Yaimara's story reveals the importance of "kin-making" (Fernandez 2013) as a strategy to access Europe and its salsa circuit – not exclusively, but importantly for Cuban dancers.

Although I asked dancers a general question about how they had come to Europe and, due to time restraints, did not ask for an in-depth story of how they met their partners, Yaimara felt the need to label her marriage as a "love marriage". During our stay in Havana, and without me asking her, she told me:

I am married because I love my husband! You can see how many people one can get to know here, there are many tourists, but this was never important for me. When I found my half-orange⁹⁵, I went with him.

Yaimara distanced herself from a supposed instrumental vision of marriage, a practice I also encountered in discussions with other salsa dancers. Though marrying a European is a common practice for both male and female dancers, many interviewees were somewhat hesitant to openly tell me in our first encounter that they were married, had come to Europe through the legal route of family reunification and had obtained residency rights through marriage. This reservation can be interpreted, first, as a result of public discourses about so-called fraudulent marriages and the politicisation of transnational marriage in many European countries (Beck-Gernsheim 2011). As Bonjour and de Hart (2013) demonstrate, increasingly restrictive family migration policies have been implemented in many European countries over recent years. This migration policy-making is shaped by and informs constructions of collective identities, through gendered and ethnicised practices of "othering" (Bonjour and de Hart 2013). Marriage migration is often normatively evaluated because of its "affinity to instrumental motives that represent

⁹⁵ Yaimara said "meine orange Hälfte" in German, which is a direct translation from *mi media naranja*, used in Spanish to describe "one's soulmate".

a violation of the Western ideal of love, the breaching of a cultural taboo” (Beck-Gernsheim 2011: 61). The salsa dance professionals I interviewed know about the politicisation of transnational marriage and distance themselves from practices that could harm their image.

Second, this also points to the entanglement of emotions and instrumental or strategically motivated practices (see Charsley 2012). As critical scholarship on marriage demonstrates, the categorisation of “sham” versus “genuine” marriages draws on a distinction between interest and emotions (Andrikopoulos *forthcoming*). However, as Andrikopoulos (*forthcoming*) argues, “material and emotive resources” may circulate between spouses. Though a marriage may provide Latin American dancers with considerable advantages in terms of travel opportunities, residency rights or economic gains, the emotions involved should not be overlooked and Yaimara’s insistence illustrates the significance of emotions in her marriage in her understanding and self-presentation.

7.2.3 Juan: “I started touring in Italy with the Tropicana”: mobilising cultural capital

For dancers with a professional background in dance or music, including a diploma from one of the national universities or art schools in Cuba, there exist other possibilities to leave the country and travel: the state grants selected artists and musicians a foreign residency permit to live abroad (Fernandez 2013: 277). Numerous Cuban dancers in the European salsa circuit do have formal training in so-called folkloric dances in the Cuban National Folkloric Company, the National Art School or graduated from the Cabaret Tropicana School in Havana and first travelled to Europe through official “cultural exchange” arranged by the Cuban state. Several of the interviewees left Cuba for the first time on an organised tour with their dance or music ensemble. Juan’s story reveals that this touring stood at the beginning of his transnational career in the European salsa circuit.

Juan, at the time of the interview in his late forties and often cited as being among the most influential professional dancers of *Cuban salsa* in Europe, grew up in Havana. He started dancing in a *casa de cultura* and became part of a group exhibiting performances for tourists in Varadero, the main tourist hotspot in Cuba at

that time (at the end of the 1990s). He started to make a living from dancing and soon became a member of the dance group at a well-known cabaret. Through his visibility as a dancer of this group Juan eventually became a dancer at the renowned Cabaret Tropicana in Havana, a theatre offering dance spectacles since the 1940s. In the beginning of the 1990s, dancers from this company were touring in Europe (Juan mentioned Italy, Spain, Switzerland and France). On one of these occasions, the director of the company was asked to recommend two Cuban dancers who wished to teach dance in Italy. Juan seized the opportunity and started teaching dance in Italy, travelling back and forth between Cuba and Italy for several years.

Juan: He suggested a couple to teach in Italy: salsa, Cuban dances. My teacher [name] proposed me and another girl [...] and so my career in Italy and in Europe started, let's say from a professional perspective, solo. [...] Then I got to know many people, because I worked across Italy, I started working in discos, did animations, taught. I started working in various schools. [...]

Joanna: So, the Tropicana was finished?

Juan: I did six months in Italy, then I went back to Cuba to dance in the Tropicana, to see my family. And sometimes I did three months in Italy, then three months there, three months here... And from this moment my story here in Europe started.

After several years Juan decided to stay in Italy full time. He married an Italian and slowly started to enlarge the circle of his own students and later founded his own school in Milano. He started with 200 students, and at its best times the school had about 1000 enrolled students. He also founded a dance company with Cuban dancers and nowadays he performs on festival stages worldwide. Juan himself became an important figure and his studio became a hub for other dancers who followed him to Italy, and especially Milan, which subsequently became a spatial hub for salsa dancers of *Cuban salsa*.

Gaining access to the circuit through tours with a dance company is not uncommon for Cuban dancers. Similar to the two women before, Juan also had to build up networks and legal capital in Italy before he was able to start his own dance business and the subsequent transnational career. The strategy of leaving Cuba with an

officially state-sponsored company is possible for dancers with formal dance training and a diploma, whereas dancers like Yaimara (and to a certain degree Juli) had to rely on the informal networks and their reputation built up in Havana itself.

As Juan's case demonstrates, the cultural capital institutionalised in the form of a diploma is convertible into mobility capital. Another dance professional Vilson, whom I met in Havana, also rendered this explicit during the interview. Vilson, a member of Cuba's national dance ensemble *Conjunto Folklórico* in Havana, had already toured and taught *Cuban dance* in several European countries (mainly in established dance academies), always returning to Cuba after some weeks. When I asked him about his travels, he told me that for him leaving and returning to Cuba did not entail difficulties, at least not in terms of the necessary legal documents.

I never had any problems, as I am a personality of the culture of this country I never had any problems, I left, came back, left again. This happens a lot more with the *bailadores*, they don't have a title, they are not graduated, you know? They have more problems to leave than the professional *bailarínes*.

The distinction between professional dancers with institutionalised cultural capital (*bailarínes*) and the ones who have learned to dance "on the street" (*bailadores*) here becomes an important criterion in the ways mobility and thus the European salsa circuit is accessed, as it influences the possibility of leaving Cuba through official routes.

7.2.4 Wilfredo: "Up to now I haven't had the opportunity to travel": teaching at the edge of the salsa circuit

The previous cases demonstrate different strategies to leave Cuba and access Europe, all of which were important turning points in terms of the dance career in the salsa circuit. In this last part of what I call the Cuban case study, I will turn to those dancers whose strategies to leave the country and start a dance career outside Cuba do not work. They are "stuck" at the edge of the salsa circuit, taking part through teaching tourists but unable to move outward – as exemplified by the case of Wilfredo.

I met Wilfredo during an organised salsa holiday where he assisted as a dance partner for the female participants during the lessons. In his forties, Wilfredo has been dancing and teaching *casino* for over 20 years, after he had learned to dance “on the street”. He never received formal training but danced in several show groups that performed in Varadero and Havana, both tourist hotspots in Cuba. Unlike Juan, he never danced in the Tropicana or another official dance company and had no diploma. Wilfredo, a *bailador*, was keen to present himself as a serious dancer throughout the interview with me, insisting on his professionalism with visitors, despite having no diploma to prove his skills. He referred to his Cubanness, and positioned himself as an authentic dancer: “because *casino* is mine, it’s Cuban. No one can take this from me, it comes from my soil”.

To distance himself from the numerous young men who, in his view, only dance to get to know tourists, he also positioned himself as a good teacher who knew a lot about the dance and wanted to share it with interested people. During the interview he criticised other Cuban teachers who, without having his knowledge of dance, did the same job in order to “be with tourists to have a better life” and ultimately “get a visa and get a passport”. In his view, some young men in Havana are hired as dance teachers even though they do not dance very well just because they are needed as teachers for a tourist group. Talking about these men, he said:

But the person doesn’t come with this idea. You know why? Because you are giving them the passport and you are giving them the visa and everything you are giving them directly into their hands.

Wilfredo, who has been dancing and teaching in Havana for many years, saw the informal encounters made possible during dance classes in Havana as a clear opportunity for some to leave the country. He has witnessed numerous times how young men who taught dance in Havana left the country because they had married one of their female students and, less often, young women who had married their male students. Wilfredo, instead, has rarely had the opportunity to travel and has only left Cuba twice. The first time was when he was working as a tourist entertainer on a cruise ship and the second time when he travelled with a performance group Juli had organised to Europe. Wilfredo came back to Cuba and continued teaching

salsa to tourists in a dance school in Havana as well as working as a dancer for organised salsa holidays. His second attempt to teach at a small salsa event in Switzerland, organised by Juli, failed due to the denial of the necessary visa: “It’s not that I wouldn’t like to travel, it’s that up to now I haven’t had the opportunity to do it. One day it will come, I don’t despair. I know that someday I will be able to do it.” Although Wilfredo would like to partake in the European salsa circuit, he has no possibility of doing so. Conscious of the economic differences between himself and his European salsa students, he was very clear that he would like to travel or live abroad only if he could also work there:

I’d like to [travel], but for work. I don’t like to go on holidays. You know why? The moment I go on holidays, I depend on another person. You understand what I mean? The bills go on you. For example, you invite me and the bills are for you. [...] I like to have my own. I’d like to buy a bottle of water and I buy it. If I’d like to buy a pair of flip-flops, I buy them. I don’t need to wait for you to come from work and I sit around, chatting or watching the computer or the TV, or sleeping or eating, [wait for] you to buy something for me. No! I have two hands and two feet.

Wilfredo is well aware of the difficulties he could have finding a job elsewhere and he wants to stay independent. In his statement, he points to the economic disparities between the European researcher or an eventual European girlfriend and himself. He also told me about his dream of having his own dance school in Havana, but for the time being worked in Juli’s school as well as joining groups like the one organised by Yaimara.

Wilfredo was able to access these job opportunities through his early contacts made at a young age in a dance company. However, for other *bailadores* even finding these teaching opportunities may be impossible. The dance schools in Havana, whose rise I have described above, tend to work with formally trained dancers with a diploma in so-called folkloric dances or contemporary dance or ballet at one of Cuba’s state universities. In 2014 I overheard a discussion between dance school owner Juli and one of her teachers, who suggested she hire a dancer friend. Although he insisted on the dancer’s abilities, Juli did not want to hire the dancer in question because he lacked the necessary licence to engage in private-sector activities. In a study on

rumba dancers in Cuba, Ana (2017) also indicates the professionalisation of Havana's dance-school scene and the potential exclusion this leads to: "This often excluded practitioners without formal training, as well as those who came from families of self-taught *rumberos* or acknowledged performers, who did not have the same opportunities to interact with tourists" (Ana 2017: 172).

Wilfredo's story demonstrates the ways in which dancers in Havana may find themselves stuck in a position at the edge of the salsa circuit: themselves hindered from partaking in transnational mobility, they are dependent on the mobility of others. They can only dream of the mobility their international students take for granted. To fly to Cuba, holders of a European passport just have to purchase a ticket and fill out a visa application, a "very small administrative detail" as Gaudette (2013: 302) calls it, pointing to the asymmetric power at work between Western students of *jembe* in Guinea and their teachers. Facing the same asymmetric power relations, Cuban salsa teachers in Havana depend on *Cuban salsa's* dissemination abroad, which attracts foreign students to Cuba.

These dancers' situation is related to their position in a transnational field where class, age, unequal travel opportunities and gender intersect. In particular, I met male dance teachers of a certain age (such as Wilfredo) as well as younger female dance teachers with family obligations, who were "stuck" in this condition. They do not perceive their localised careers as dance professionals in Havana as satisfying, because they feel completely dependent on the flow of incoming tourists. Their stuck position is furthermore amplified through tourists' imaginaries of an "authentic" Cuba, "frozen" in time (see Chapter 4.3). In these unequal relations, dancers like Wilfredo redefine their position as legitimate dance teacher through reference to their Cubanness, embracing an essentialist position to legitimise his status as instructor.

7.3 Consolidating legal status

As became clear through the stories of dancers with Latin American passports, they were unable to mobilise their dancing skills and personal networks in Europe without the necessary legal documents. To access the salsa circuit for longer than

the duration of one tourist visa sooner or later, dancers need to consolidate their legal status in Europe.

Scholars working on various economic activities related to mobility have emphasised the existence of circulatory migration patterns as an alternative to (sedentary) migration (Tarrius 1993, 2002). These authors have shown that individuals cross borders regularly to engage in economic activities such as “suitcase trading” around the Mediterranean (Peraldi 2007; Schmoll 2005). As already discussed, many of the salsa dance professionals in this study developed similar forms of mobile activities, in the case of Latin American dancers initiated by a first migration to Europe. In a second step, these dancers may develop circulatory practices within and beyond Europe. However, in order to do this, they first need to establish themselves in a specific place. This is also Dahinden’s (2010: 330) argument in her study on cabaret dancers who circulate between different countries to work in different cabarets. As she argues in her article, entitled “Settle down in order to stay mobile?”, the women need to develop familiarity with the local context in order to keep up their circulatory movement between different places. As she states, “circular transnational mobility is only possible when the women develop some ‘sedentarizing’ elements in their transnational way of being”. Similarly, Qacha (2013), in a study on migration trajectories, illustrates how stages of sedentariness allow migrant women to acquire local knowledge, social networks and residency rights, which they later use to develop circulatory practices within Europe.

While a detailed analysis of these sedentary stages in salsa dancers’ careers is beyond the scope of this thesis, I will now address one element cited in the above studies: legal status, which can be conceptualised as “legal capital”. Moret (2015) theorises “legal capital” as a dimension of social differentiation in expanding Bourdieu’s conceptual framework of different types of capital. Building on her study on migrants of Somali origin based in Europe and their mobility practices, Moret demonstrates that legal status can be considered as a form of capital. For her research participants who engage in transnational mobility, international travel was difficult with the Somali passport. For them, it was crucial to acquire legal documents that grant the possibility of crossing borders. “Legal capital ensues from

migrants' social and structural position within a given context, that of their country of residence. In parallel, it is linked to the position of this state in geopolitical hierarchies of power, at a more global level" (Moret 2015: 206).

The acquisition of a residence permit or passport of a country that scores highly in terms of legal capital is essential for dance professionals who wish to travel to salsa festivals in the USA or Europe. Furthermore, they require legal documents in order to return to their place of residence. Riccio (2001) observes similar mechanisms in the case of Senegalese transmigrants in Italy and he concludes: "It is only when the permit is obtained and the re-entry to Italy guaranteed that Senegalese can start going backwards and forwards and manifest transnational mobility" (Riccio 2001: 590). In other words, being undocumented does not allow for cross-border mobility in the ways I discussed above.

In the next section I look more closely at the phase in which some dancers are stuck, without the right to stay or travel (7.3.1). In this way, I shed light on the legal dimensions of mobility after an initial migration, and the importance of access to visa documents and residence permits in terms of working opportunities for salsa dance professionals.

7.3.1 "I had to leave the country for a period of time": stuck in Europe

Lavinia, at the time of the interview 26 years old, found herself in such difficulties: born in Mexico, she moved to Italy at the age of 21 in order to join a dance company, and started to work in Italy but had troubles regularising her status:

The first years I was there, I didn't have the regular permit, now I have it, but the first years it was a little bit difficult to find a solution because the schools which I was working with, they were supposed to help me get my permit, but then after two years of working in the first school, we had some economic discussion, or difference, and we stopped working together. So then I lost two years of a possible, you know, because we didn't work anymore together. So it was tough, but now, it's slow the process, we have to wait and wait and pay, and pay, and wait. So yeah, bureaucracy is not easy, you have to be patient. [...] I had to do it all by myself, you know, I didn't have [...] a person that said, oh maybe you can do this. It was me that was always asking, what can I do, without, you know, the easiest thing that everyone does, is getting married. I didn't

wanna do this. I don't know, it didn't seem correct to me, or the best thing if I could try another thing. So then I asked for their work permit. And now it's processing, it's slow, but at least I hope that I'll have it soon.

From the above quote it does not become clear whether or not Lavinia has got an Italian residence permit, which includes the right to work. Some months after the interview she moved to another European country where she enrolled in a university to study dance, and resided with a student visa, another option Lavinia had besides marriage-based legalisation in Europe, which she refused due to moral reasons.

Lavinia's story reveals again the difficulties for non-EU nationals to regularise their status in Europe in order to participate in the salsa circuit. Although she was lucky and finally found a way to stay, others are not. Many dance professionals experience periods of irregular and precarious situations.

Marcos, already introduced above, also recalled a difficult period when he was stuck in terms of his legal rights to stay in a European country:

I once had a problem with my visa in Sweden. And I didn't know where to go because one of the companies I was working with messed up with my taxes and I had to leave the country for a period of time. And I was pretty shocked because I didn't know what to do. And... go back to my country... come on... I cannot do that. So I said "okay, where can I go that is not in Schengen area, where I can actually stay for a while?" I called a friend from Slovenia, he said "listen, I might know the right person. Do you remember the festival in Sarajevo? You remember Eric?" I said "yes...". "I think he can help you out." So I called him, he said, "yes man, come over here, you have an apartment". And I stayed six months [laughs].

Marcos was thus able to mobilise his network of salsa connections in order to help him out of a difficult situation. During his stay in Sarajevo he taught salsa and helped to organise an event locally. After the six months he went back to Sweden, and at the time of the interview he had obtained a residence permit.

For dancers who wish to make a living by teaching salsa, residency rights and the legal right to work are essential. Acquiring these is often difficult, as the dancers depend on employers to sponsor their quest for a work permit, and the stories of dancers who had to leave Europe due to visa issues are numerous. Only those who

acquired legal capital are able to build up a successful career in the European salsa circuit. Legal capital is also a resource that can be transformed into mobility capital, as many dancers can only travel to limited places.

Such visa restrictions for the USA hindered Yaimara from performing at a festival she was invited to.

Yaimara: For us Cubans it is unbelievably difficult. There are not many countries where I don't need a visa, for example Serbia, Russia and some others [...]. But when I want to fly to the United States, I need a visa. Or to Turkey or other countries [...] For example I wanted to go to the USA but they said no, just no.

Joanna: And it was for a festival?

Yaimara: Yes [...] until now the only problem has been with the USA, it's horrible.

Yaimara refers to often-cited difficulties for dancers of Cuban nationality to travel to salsa festivals in other countries, whereby the USA is particularly difficult to enter due to the political relations between the two countries. To address these difficulties, the dancers as well as the inviting organisers usually try to request the necessary travel visa early, although this strategy does not always work, as Yaimara's account demonstrates.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with the second status passage in salsa dance professionals' transnational careers, particularly dancers with Latin American nationality. It discussed the ways they accessed the European salsa circuit, taking in account the opportunity structures and constraints related to diverse regimes of mobility.

As I have shown, in order to access the European salsa circuit, Latin American dance professionals need more than dancing skills. Instead, they need to physically be in a salsa hub to mobilise manifold resources and build up social networks, mobility capital and legal capital to leave their country as well as consolidate their legal status to be mobile later on. To account for the related cross-border mobility of differently positioned salsa dancers I suggest applying the notion of "entangled mobilities". In

this respect, the circulation of imaginaries and the mobility of salsa tourists play a crucial role.

In addition, the strategies of the discussed dancers often included the mobilisation of resources in social networks, and thus have demonstrated the importance of social capital in accessing the European salsa circuit. As literature on migration has demonstrated, social networks are often vital in migration processes, as they provide information and facilitate migration (Massey et al. 1987). A large body of literature in migration research builds on the idea of “chain migration”, explaining international migration systems with “the presence of social relations channelling migrants and developing an ever denser network of connections between places” (Pathirage and Collyer 2011: 318). This literature usually focuses on social relations between aspiring migrants and established migrants from the same country of origin, thus focusing on social capital present in family ties or ethnic ties, in short people of a supposed “group”. In the case of the salsa dancers I spoke to, relations to other Cuban dancers already established in Europe were occasionally mentioned and proved helpful in only some cases. However, in many cases the dancers I interviewed relied on social ties they had created with European salsa students, who had come to Cuba to improve their dancing. Therefore, as I have shown, in the case of salsa dance professionals engaged in practices of circulation in or migration to Europe, social capital often derives from friendship, instead of family or ethnic networks, as is often assumed in migration studies (Dahinden 2013; Ryan 2015).

Social capital can be regarded as a “by-product of other social activities” (Putnam 1993: 4), in this case the relationship between a dance student and a dance teacher. However, as Pathirage and Collyer (2011) argue, building on Bourdieu, social relations have to be established and cultivated: “Yet, in some circumstances, particularly where social relations offer the only hope of an outcome perceived as highly desirable, social capital may result from deliberate and planned cultivation of certain contacts” (Pathirage and Collyer 2011: 319). As seen in the illustrated cases, contacts with salsa students were established and nurtured and in some cases proved highly effective in gaining access to the European salsa circuit.

“Entangled mobilities” encompass more than social capital, they also encompass mobility capital. However, this chapter’s analysis of the strategies of Latin American salsa dance professionals to access the European salsa circuit has also made clear that in many cases, imaginaries of a certain “cosmopolitan lifestyle” lie at the base of a first move into the direction of a transnational career. I would thus argue to enlarge the concept of “mobility capital” (Kaufmann, Bergman, and Joye 2004) with the dimension of imaginaries.

Access to the European salsa circuit is but one passage in the transnational career: once invited to a festival or another salsa event, dance professionals need to build up their reputation in the festival circuit, a process entailing social capital and salsa capital, as the next chapter will explore.

Chapter 8 Building up reputation

This chapter addresses the third status passage of salsa dance professionals' transnational careers: the building and maintenance of reputation in the affective economy of the salsa circuit. According to Bourdieu's (1993, 1986) framework, artistic fields are characterised by struggles over reputation inside the field in question. In these struggles, a specific set of resources is particularly valuable, once recognised by other actors of the salsa circuit: social capital, but also mobility, "authenticity" and bodily attributes. Following Bourdieu's capital theory, the distribution of these resources influences a dancer's position and structures the social order of dancers in the salsa circuit. This chapter draws on a Bourdieusian perspective on the question of power relations, and enlarges it to account for dancers' embodied doings. Reputation is here understood as linked to a dance professional's social capital together with what I coined "salsa capital".

Chapters 6 and 7 have both addressed the importance of social networks and the social capital therein. However, the notion of social capital has so far remained under-theorised. Drawing on parts of the already cited material, the first section of this chapter (8.1) therefore suggests an analysis of salsa dancers' social capital through the perspective of (qualitative) social network literature (Dahinden 2010, 2013; Ryan and Mulholland 2014; Schapendonk 2015). It asks how dancers access social capital embedded in their networks.

The second part of this chapter (8.2) discusses the resources mobilised in the construction of "salsa capital". Salsa capital varies in volume and structure, and must be contextualised. Salsa capital is valid inside the salsa circuit, but difficult to transfer to other contexts. It has to be enhanced through a dancer's presence at events in the salsa circuit and dancers face a constant struggle to maintain their capital. Individuals' "position-taking" further mediates their capital, hence actors strategise to mobilise resources and build capital (Bourdieu 1986). Salsa dance professionals endowed with a large volume of salsa capital are able to pursue successful transnational careers, including teaching and performance opportunities, thus converting salsa capital into economic capital, a process further discussed in this chapter's conclusion.

8.1 Social capital in the salsa circuit

To construct a successful career, dance professionals need to create and maintain social relationships with a variety of other actors in and outside the salsa circuit. To theorise social capital in the process of reputation building, I draw on literature of qualitative social network analysis in migration studies (Dahinden 2010, 2013; Ryan and Mulholland 2014; Schapendonk 2015) and in studies of professions (Burt 1998; Granovetter 1983; Wagner 2006, 2015). The main goal of studies of social network analysis is to describe the embeddedness of actors in a web of specific social relations (Dahinden 2010). Social relations introduce possibilities and constraints that affect actors' scope of action (Schweizer 1988).

Drawing on Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social capital, Lin (1999) develops a "network theory of social capital" and defines social capital as "resources embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions" (35). In other words, "The core idea of network social capital is that people better equipped with social resources—in the sense of their social relations and the resources of others that they can draw upon—will succeed better in attaining their goals" (Dahinden 2013: 44). However, social networks are not a "natural given"; rather they have to be created and sustained, and are the product of maintenance work (Bourdieu 1980a: 2). Following the argument for a "practice approach" to social networks by Schapendonk (2015), I consider networks not as static structures but rather as dynamic. This approach is particularly well suited to analyse the ways salsa dance professionals build up reputation because it demonstrates in detail how "networking practices" (Schapendonk 2015) lead to the evolution of transnational careers.

The first two parts of this section consider social relationships inside the salsa circuit, which provide salsa dance professionals with salsa-related resources. First, I look at the importance of co-presence and networking practices in accessing and building up relations with various actors (8.1.1). Next, I explore the ties to four categories of social actors that are crucial, as they may play the role of gatekeeper in the process of accessing performance and teaching opportunities, and thus gaining more visibility and recognition: salsa event organisers, promoters and dance

students (8.1.2), as well as fellow dance professionals (8.1.3). In the last section, the focus is broadened to include relationships with actors outside the salsa circuit, and a discussion of how such ties may actually hinder the development of transnational careers (8.1.4).

8.1.1 “It doesn’t matter how great you are, if you don’t have the network”: networking practices

To access the salsa circuit, dancers sometimes rely on the travels of others, as I discussed in Chapter 7. However, once they aspire to work at salsa festivals and construct a successful transnational career, dancers need to travel themselves, in order to access new networks and open up new working opportunities.

Salsa festivals represent the most important hub where actors of the salsa circuit meet and exchange in co-present encounters. Building on Goffman (1963), Urry (2003) writes, “These co-present encounters are located within time and space, there is a ‘gathering’ in which people must sense that they are close enough to be seen and to see others” (165). In such face-to-face interactions, dance professionals exchange information, establish trust and build up their reputation.

Yaimara, when I asked what travelling to festivals means for her, stressed several dimensions of the “meeting place” the festival represents.

For me, these festivals mean a lot of fun, it also means I get to know a new culture, new people and it is a meeting place with the other Cubans who are as well dancers and musicians. And it also means work, the development of my style and my methodology [...]. And for me it is important, to earn a living, that I am important, somebody calls me to work, to make myself a name with the time, this makes me happy.

Travelling to salsa events thus serves concrete purposes, as Yaimara made clear in the above quote. Besides the fun of it, as well as the often-cited wish to make new experiences through travelling to other places, Yaimara also mentions the congresses’ importance in enlarging her social network by meeting “new people” as well as “other Cubans”. As already shown, Yaimara mobilises these networks in the organisation of salsa holidays in Cuba, relying on other salsa teachers with their

contacts to interested students. Furthermore, she also mentions the artistic development of her dancing, like several other interviewees, who see the exchange with other salsa artists as an important source of inspiration for their work. To pursue these networking practices, Yaimara needs to travel to salsa events. Hence, social capital is accessed through the mobilisation of mobility capital.

However, this relies on active networking strategies. As demonstrated in the last chapter, to access the salsa circuit in the first instance, gatekeepers need to be persuaded to invite a dancer to an event, and the same holds for further collaborations: once dancers have been invited to an event, other gatekeepers need to be persuaded to collaborate. The salsa dance professionals I interviewed all mentioned the importance of active networking in building up reputation. In Maria's words: "If you choose to be present at the international events, then of course it's all about kind of making contacts." Dancers were "conscious of, and reflexive about, the ways they networked" (Ryan and Mulholland 2014: 154), similar to the highly skilled migrants in London in Ryan and Mulholland's study. Dancers' strategies to network include dancing at and talking to other actors at salsa events, as illustrated by Alejandro.

And once you dance at a salsa congress you get the possibility to meet people, and they will book you for another congress abroad. I started like this [...] Once you are at a congress and you manage to make contacts, you can dance everywhere. You just need to know how to move well and how to make contacts. That's how I started.

As first step, novice dancers need to access a salsa congress. Furthermore, as Alejandro notes, a specific set of (interpersonal) skills is necessary. Alejandro here mentions the need to "move well", a statement that can be interpreted in a double sense. As a dancer, it relates to the way he moves his body on the dance floor or the stage of a festival. Alejandro is well-known for his dance skills, in particular his mastering of quick rhythmical steps and isolation of the upper body. The second meaning is related to the specific skills needed in order to make contacts. "Moving well" around during the day and night of the festival allows dancers to meet other actors in the salsa circuit and establish new contacts. Networking strategies rely on specific skills such as sociability and communication skills. The way Marcos put it is

telling: “It doesn’t matter how great you are, if you don’t have the network”. Becker (1963) describes a similar process in his study on (male-only) jazz musicians:

In short, to get these job positions requires both ability and the formation of informal relationships of mutual obligation with men who can sponsor one for the jobs. Without the necessary minimum of ability one cannot perform successfully at the new level, but this ability will command the appropriate kind of work only if a man has made the proper connection (Becker 1963: 107).

Male and female salsa dance professionals thus strive to make the “proper connection” in the salsa circuit.

As scholars of network social capital have demonstrated, social capital varies with network composition (Burt 1983; Dahinden 2013). Building social ties with a diverse range of people is likely to create “entrepreneurial opportunity” (Burt 1998: 9). To construct a successful career, salsa dance professionals not only need large and expansive networks, but their networks also need to be diversified in terms of positions in the salsa circuit, as this guarantees access to different resources. The following sections focus on the different actors with whom salsa dance professionals form ties.

8.1.2 “He opened up the door for me”: organisers, promoters and dance students

Menger (1999) describes creative artists as freelancing workers who “may themselves be seen as small firms building subcontractual relations with artistic organizations” (546). In the case of salsa dance professionals, these “artistic organizations” mainly consist of event organisers and event promoters. Event organisers are often dancers themselves, who have been active in the salsa circuit for a long time and thus possess a large network of fellow organisers and dance professionals. They take charge of or delegate all tasks behind the organisation of the salsa event such as financial aspects, organisational tasks regarding the room location and publicity as well as the programme of an event, including the invitation of dance instructors and performers. Organisers work closely with so-called promoters, whose task consists of attracting paying guests to an event through advertising strategies in local dance

studios or at other dance events. Promoters are usually remunerated in the form of free entry tickets or a spot on a prestigious stage.

For dance professionals, building direct ties to organisers may prove particularly beneficial as these actors, once convinced to collaborate, are in the position to help advance dancers' careers by inviting them to their event, as seen in the case of Marcos who was invited to the US through a contact he made while in Japan.

In the cases where dancers wish to participate at an event but have no direct contact to the organisers, other actors may become important. Here, the role of promoters is crucial, as they may "broker the flow of information" (Burt 1998: 8) between event organisers and salsa dance professionals. As scholars of social networks have argued, bridges in networks are essential in facilitating information and influence (Burt 1992; Granovetter 1983). For locating and obtaining resources, such as looking for a job or a better job, actors need to access and extend bridges in the network (Lin 1999: 34).

It is precisely his relationship to an event promoter that enabled Alejandro to perform and teach at a prestigious festival. Karl, in his role of event promoter, told me in the interview that he can "bring on stage" a dancer every year. He had mobilised about 40 paying attendees and could thus recommend a chosen salsa dance professional to the organiser of the event. Himself a dance student, Karl had known Alejandro for several years, and has taken private lessons with him. As he told me, he particularly likes Alejandro's school: "it's one of the coolest schools, thanks to its family-character". Karl thus approached Alejandro, who was more than willing to participate in the festival. In this way, Alejandro and his dance partner had a chance to perform at a festival, which they would not have had without the ties built with Karl. In the salsa circuit, promoters like Karl create links between different actors, thus spanning "structural holes" (Burt 1992).

A third category of people is indirectly important in salsa dance professionals' networking strategies: students. After gaining their first access to the salsa circuit, dancers invest in their own careers and concentrate on jobs that contribute to their reputation building even if they have to work unpaid (for a similar observation see also Freakley and Neelands 2003: 55). In this way, dancers in the early stage of their career actively contact festival organisers and promoters and offer performance and

teaching – for free. They also invest in their own travel and accommodation costs as well as entry fees, thus drawing on economic capital. Moreover, their ties to salsa students may be a crucial element, as the following explanation from an interview with a salsa promoter illustrates:

Very often you don't get anything. In general, without having a name, you have to assume that you don't get anything. Additionally you even have to bring something to be allowed to perform. [...] If you bring enough people [paying attendees], and you have to be a good dancer [...] And if you bring really a lot of people, they may pay for your hotel. And if you really really bring a lot of people, like 50 people or maybe 35, 40 people, then you get the hotel and the flight. And if you really want money, like [names some of the *salsa stars*], [...] they really get money, but there, you know, they are the headliners, they bring people [through their reputation]. (Karl)

Congress organisers always invite some of the well-known *salsa stars* to attract paying participants to their events. Salsa dance professionals of lesser reputation in the salsa circuit may nevertheless have a large group of local students at their disposal. As congress organisers wish to attract these students to travel to their event, some of them do promotional deals like the example described above. For dance professionals with teaching activities in a local school, this means that the ties they have built with their own students become a resource to mobilise in the process of the construction of a transnational career. Students become a resource only under the condition that they have the necessary resources and are willing to travel. As already discussed, dance professionals who teach in local salsa studios develop several strategies to keep their students interested and loyal: besides an evolving curriculum with ever new content, they organise monthly or weekly parties in their studio, go out together at weekends or organise dance trips to other countries. In this way, they nurture relationships with their students who then follow them to events. As Ryan and Mulholland (2014) argue, based on Bourdieu's classical argument, "social ties are not spontaneous but require effort and nurturing" (148).

8.1.3 “We performed together in a show”: dance partners

Besides ties to event organisers, promoters and dance students, building up relationships with a fourth category of actors in the salsa circuit is of high interest: other salsa dance professionals or peers. Dancers exchange information about job opportunities or they may introduce a new dancer to an event organiser they already know. Gary, who struggled to build up a salsa career after his arrival in Germany in the late 1990s, told me about his meeting with a more experienced dancer:

And then I met [name of a salsa dancer], he's a legend from New York. And he toured in Europe and I was by chance in [city in Germany] and there I got to know him and he helped me, he opened up the door for me, to be solo at a congress for the first time, in Germany in 2000. And I'm so grateful to him, we performed together in a show, then I had my solo, I taught workshops and then it started rolling.

Although the collaboration between Gary and the more experienced dancer lasted for only the duration of this one event, it takes an important place in Gary's description of his career. Through his performance on the stage of a salsa event with international outreach, being seen together with a well-known dancer, Gary was able to enhance his prestige in the salsa circuit. As sociologists of art have noticed, “being seen” is of high interest in any artistic field. “To be seen, discovered and recognized, to be attributed to the field or to be given the opportunity to take part of certain assets of the field, that is, to have symbolic capital, is of decisive importance in the field of art in particular” (Svensson 2015: 4). Furthermore, Gary made contacts with fellow dancers, and in this way his transnational career started unfolding. As this example illustrates, fellow dance professionals may “open up the door” for dancers and become gatekeepers to the salsa circuit.

A specific form of the professional relationship salsa dance professionals engage in are dance partners, who are often decisive for reputation building and the construction of a dancer's transnational career. Although there exist different forms of work constellations, from travelling and performing solo to being part of a dance company, most salsa dance professionals perform and teach with another dance professional (most commonly of the opposite sex) for short or longer periods of time (see Picture 23). To analyse these relationships, I loosely draw on Wagner's model of

“career coupling”, adding a focus on gender and romance, whose importance in the salsa couple is specific to the salsa profession. Career coupling is defined as a “social process, which concerns the parallel professional routes of two or more actors who cooperate, each in their own specialty, during the time necessary for them to change their rank in their respective professional worlds” (Wagner 2006: 78). Wagner develops the idea of career coupling in her analysis of the interaction between the careers of virtuoso musicians as well as elite scientists. The actors in her study collaborate closely and jointly build their careers, with the goal of moving up in the professional hierarchy of their respective field. In the professional fields of musicians and scientists, career coupling happens between people at different stages in their careers: newcomers and initiators, whereby both categories depend on the work of the other (Wagner 2006: 85). In the salsa circuit as well, newcomers strive to become the dance partner of an established dancer whose reputation and network may help to construct their own career. Established dancers may need to find a new dance partner after a break-up with a former partner or a change of location.



Picture 23 Two dance couples performing at a festival night, SBSF Šibenik 2017 (© Steven Isaacs).

Obviously the process of career coupling in salsa dancing is gendered, as the roles during salsa performances and teaching are often highly gendered. Romance plays an important role in dance partnerships: salsa couples often not only form a professional dance couple but also publicly share that they are involved romantically, for example on Facebook.

In the first phase of the career coupling process, the “matching”, two dancers decide to become professional dance partners. As I observed, salsa dancers often decide to perform together after becoming a couple in private life. In the process of matching, different criteria have to be considered, such as a similar dedication to construct a transnational career, including time and location constraints as well as questions of aesthetic-artistic elements. If dancers live in separate places, and wish to work together in a local school or with a local company, one of them may move to the other’s location, as seen with the case of Lavinia, who left Mexico and moved to Italy to work and train on a daily basis with her new dance partner. The same holds for Maria, who met her future dance partner at one of the festivals, whereupon she was offered a teaching job in his dance studio in Norway.

During the phase of matching, dancers need to clarify and match their career goals and the ways they wish to work together, including the decision for a place to meet for joint trainings. Additionally, aesthetic elements are often mentioned as important criteria. Ajay told me how he met his current dance partner, with whom he has been working for eight years.

[I found my partner] at a salsa festival. She attended my workshop, I saw what she was doing and she picked up very fast, and her style and movement is very similar to mine. She was almost a carbon copy of what I was doing. So that really fascinated me, and she also liked my style in dancing a show. I asked her if she would like to work together, and she agreed. And the rest is history.

Once two dancers match and decide to become dance partners, they enter the phase of “active collaboration” (Wagner 2006: 79). In this phase, the other actors in the salsa circuit learn about the collaboration and “the names of the collaborators are joined” (Wagner 2006: 79). They now construct their careers together, and reputation is attached to their joint names. In the salsa circuit, salsa couples are

announced in festival programmes and on stages with their names, for example “Iannis and Alicia”.⁹⁶ In this process, private and professional life often becomes intertwined, as famous salsa couples celebrate their love story on social media and romance becomes part of the marketing strategy of the couple. In this phase, dance partners travel together to salsa events, and they are able to build on the networks of both dancers, thus enlarging their job opportunities. The lesser-known actor becomes recognised in the salsa circuit through the well-known partner while established actors are able to maintain their reputation as *travelling artists* through the collaboration with a matching partner. Whenever a relationship ends, this also means that the dancers need to renegotiate their dance partnership, and often the search for a new dance partner begins.

8.1.4 “It’s too much all over the place”: mobility’s implications

So far I have discussed social networks inside the salsa circuit as enabling dance professionals to access new resources and construct their transnational careers. However, as research on social networks has highlighted, social ties may also hinder actors from developing mobile careers. Faist (2000) argues that social ties are factors that rather keep people in one place. Furthermore, “life courses cannot be fully understood as individual trajectories only” (Leemann 2010: 613), often they also affect other family members or partners, as studies on the mobility of academics have argued (eg Leemann 2010; Schaer, Dahinden, and Toader 2017).

In this vein, dancers mentioned challenges in terms of relationships related to their *travelling* to different salsa events. These difficulties are especially common in social relationships outside of salsa. Several of the interviewed dancers mentioned the inverse working rhythm they follow, which render meetings with non-salsa friends and family difficult as the dancers often work during the evenings (teach) and are away at weekends. Clara also told me that she really missed her dog during their weekends away, which was for her a reason to stay at home at least one weekend a month and travel less to salsa events. The constant travelling also influences the couple relationships. As mentioned above, some of the research participants

⁹⁶ For a video of a show of a professional salsa dance couple, see rebrand.ly/salsa-16.

travelled with their partner, forming a dance couple as well. Others preferred to stay single in order to be independent. Andy, who pursues a solo career as dance teacher in the festival circuit, stated:

You know, I'm gonna say it, I'm very selfish about what I do because I love it so much. And selfish because I don't wanna give up my passion for, you know, if you find a woman or wife or children, you need to compromise, you know, I don't think I'm ready for that yet. So and I'm happy with what I am.

Several of the interviewed dancers felt that their transnational careers were more important to them than a stable relationship. Others wished to be in a stable relationship but accepted that it was not compatible with their travelling.

I'm actually single. And being all the time that kind of on the way... It's hard to be with someone when you have a lifestyle this way. You know, you travel all the time, you're devoted to your job. Yeah, for now I think it's OK. Until I kind of finally settle down, maybe it will be much easier.

Like Marcos in this statement, several of the interviewed dancers affirmed that they see their mobile lifestyle as temporary due to the sacrifices it entails in terms of romantic relationships or starting a family. Studies of highly mobile professionals have indicated the difficulties related to such a mobile lifestyle. Lipphardt, in her research with EU-funded artists, argues against a too narrow celebration of artists' mobility: "What gets lost in these official narratives is an understanding of the highly ambivalent character of this lifestyle and work-mode: artists nowadays may indeed enjoy the most privileged form of mobility, but for many this also means to live permanently on the edge, financially, socially and emotionally" (Lipphardt 2012: 121). While my data does not allow me to draw such a precarious image of salsa dance professionals' careers, nor the opposite, the mobile lifestyle clearly has its limitations and they are often articulated at the intersections of family life/partnership, gender and mobility.

While male dancers mentioned the need to compromise between a partner and their transnational career, several female interviewees told me that they cannot imagine travelling to salsa events once they have children. Gendered representations of

childcare work as a female activity were particularly strong in female salsa dancers' discourse (see also McMains 2015: 307). The already cited case of Anna demonstrates this. A dancer in her late forties, Anna consciously changed her career from a transnational to a local one, due to her age and the birth of a child. As she explained to me: "And now it is calmer, now I have a child. Many have a child first and then a career, but I had first a dance career and now a child, in the last moment [laughs]". For Anna, the transnational career could not be combined with having a child, so she decided to travel less and concentrate on her own studio. In a similar vein, the young salsa dance professional Irena clearly sees her transnational career as temporary:

I love dancing, this is my passion, I can't imagine my live without this, but I know this is not really forever, you know. Especially for women. You know, you wanna have a family, you need to look after kids, all that and I definitely would love to have kids in the future. So the lifestyle we have, I don't see this working for starting a family. Because it's too much all over the place, you know.

Irena's account of her imagined future is gendered, as she sees the high mobility necessary for her work as incompatible with her wish to start a family, and relates this to her being a woman. Her partner, who was present during this interview, on the contrary, did not express the same concern for a more stable lifestyle in the future. Such gendered representations of childcare may therefore produce gendered practices of mobility, whereby female dancers choose to stop travelling and male dancers continue. It is beyond the scope of this study to examine gendered representations of childcare tasks and the ways they influence mobile careers. Nevertheless, my findings indicate the importance having children represents in terms of salsa dancers' career decisions (cf McMains 2015). Social ties to family members may therefore also lead to the abandonment of a transnational career.

Although being mobile (or *travelling* in salsa dancers' emic term) is often represented as an achievement and linked to a dancer's position in the salsa circuit, for many dancers it is also a necessity, which affects other domains of their lives. In sum, to build up reputation in the salsa circuit, dancers need to travel and make new connections, but this travelling depends not only on themselves but also on other

actors such as friends, partners or other family members, and the transnational careers are thus gendered.

8.2 Salsa capital in the salsa circuit

Drawing on Bourdieu's work on economies of symbolic goods (1980b) and inspired by Törnqvist's (2013) analysis of the "intimate dance economy" of Argentinean tango in Buenos Aires, this section explores the construction of "salsa capital" in the affective economy of the salsa circuit. Salsa capital is a form of capital dancers construct by mobilising different resources and forms of social and symbolic capital (as well as, less discussed in this chapter, economic and cultural capital). Bourdieu defines symbolic capital as follows:

Symbolic capital is an ordinary property (physical strength, wealth, warlike valor, etc.) which, perceived by social agents endowed with the categories of perception and appreciation permitting them to perceive, know and recognize it, becomes symbolically efficient, like a veritable *magical power*: a property which, because it responds to socially constituted "collective expectations" and beliefs, exercised a sort of action from a distance, without physical contact (Bourdieu 1998: 102).

This section looks at some of those "ordinary properties" that are loaded with special significance. It explores different ordinary properties that are recognised as values in the salsa circuit, and thus figure as resources that dance professionals may use in the process of reputation building.⁹⁷

Salsa capital builds on the negotiations between differently positioned actors, whereby dance professionals mobilise various resources to distinguish themselves from other dancers. To be acknowledged as a legitimate salsa dance performer and teacher, dancing skills are crucial but they are far from the only skills their salsa capital is built on; salsa dance professionals also have to develop teaching skills, a

⁹⁷ Chapters 4 and 5 respectively have explored in depth the ways in which gender and "authenticity" (based on ethnicity as well as other criteria) are construed and negotiated between differently positioned actors in the salsa circuit. By focusing on how gendered, ethnicised and embodied properties may form "salsa capital", I now draw attention to the ways the outcome of such negotiations affects the construction of careers.

certain degree of entertainment skills and the comfortableness with being a public persona (Bunten 2008) at congresses, as the discussion of affective labour in Section 6.1.2 has demonstrated. This section discusses other resources dance professionals build on to construct salsa capital in the affective economy of the salsa circuit: visible geographical mobility (8.2.1), as well as embodied (8.2.2), gendered (8.2.3), and ethnicised forms of resources (8.2.4).

8.2.1 “Off to... ?? I don’t know, lol”: mobility and salsa capital

As argued throughout this thesis, mobility is an important resource dance professionals need to acquire, first, to access the salsa circuit and, second, to access new networks related to job opportunities (social capital). This section examines in which ways mobility is a resource to build up reputation. Visible geographical mobility can enhance a dancer’s salsa capital in two ways: as a form of credential of their symbolic capital as well as a form of investment in “authenticity”.

In interviews with dance professionals, being on the move was often represented as a sign of a successful career. I term this symbolic dimension of mobility as a resource the “tale of mobility”. As Iannis put it, “you have a dream, to achieve a goal and travel. When somebody says ‘I will bring you [to an event]’, I feel really really nice.” In the salsa circuit, the practice of regular cross-border mobility is not only part of the dream of a “cosmopolitan lifestyle”, it also enhances dance professionals with salsa capital.

Joanna: And what are your actual projects right now?

Andy: There is no project, it’s just, I’m booked up till next October, every weekend.

Joanna: Every weekend?

Andy: Yeah, we all travel every weekend, so everybody you see here this weekend, we are booked up in other events for the whole year. I’ve been like this from 2001, I wouldn’t have a weekend off for about 14 years now.

In this quote from an interview during the month of October, Andy boasts of his *travelling* to salsa events for the next 12 months. The importance of the “tale of mobility” is also demonstrated by numerous descriptions in artist biographies on

websites, on Facebook and in festival programmes and clearly illustrated by the following marketing sentence: “Taught in more than 70 countries”.

To be recognised as a form of symbolic resource, mobility has to be rendered visible. Similarly, speaking of professional ballroom dancers, Marion (2010) writes: “Just as the dancing costumes of ballroom dance competitors are designed to help them be seen on the competition floor, their wide-ranging travel raises their visibility and status as competitors and performers” (8). The above quotations exemplify the performative dimension of mobility. To add to their physical presence at an event, salsa dance professionals use Facebook as the main tool for self-promotion. Dancers here state where they will travel, sometimes putting a whole list of confirmed workshops, sometimes just letting their followers know where they will go next, such as this Germany-based dancer: “only 12 hours at home then off to Singapore”. Through such status news, the dancers not only demonstrate their importance as invited artists in such faraway places but also render their mobility visible for others. In this process, with the exception of Cuba and New York, the actual destination becomes secondary, as the following Facebook status of a travelling salsa artist exemplifies: “Off to... ?? I don’t know, lol”.⁹⁸ In terms of reputation building, the fact that a dancer *travels* to perform at salsa events is more important than the actual place or country of the festival. In the case of the salsa circuit, practices of cross-border mobility are often reduced to a short period of time, such as teaching and performance opportunities at salsa events for three days or, in rare cases, up to a week (see Picture 24). This short-time travelling needs to be rendered visible through constant performance and repetition in virtual space.

The phenomenon of mobility as a career-enhancing element and thus a form of symbolic capital is known from studies of other professional fields. Bauder, Hannan, and Lujan (2016: 3) adapt the notion of “mobility fetishism” in the academic field to indicate the importance of mobility in the careers of academic researchers. As they write, “researchers strategically pursue mobility to enhance their value as researchers” (Bauder, Hannan, and Lujan 2016: 3). In a similar vein, Schaer, Dahinden, and Toader (2017) critically indicate the “imperative of mobility” in

⁹⁸ Lol is an often-used abbreviation in online communication, meaning “laughing out loud”.

academia. However, in academia, the specific place or university a researcher goes to is important as well: a “post-doctoral experience at a prestigious foreign university can generate ‘reputational capital’ that is appreciated by hiring committees” (Bauder, Hannan, and Lujan 2016: 3). The same holds true for the processes of reputation building in the salsa circuit, where the travel to specific teachers or places ranked highly in the salsa circuit, due to salsa’s supposed historical “roots” imagined in specific geographic places, is significant.



Picture 24 Flyer India Fiesta Latina 2015.

Hence, secondly, mobility is used as an investment in authenticity: as seen, salsa dancers at an early stage of their transnational career often choose to take dance lessons at specific places that are historically associated with salsa. Greece-based Iannis told me why it was important for him to go to New York.

Actually that summer I went to New York, again to take some workshops and to learn new things, I was at the congress there as well. And I was thinking of coming back and opening it [dance studio], because I wanted to do New York-style salsa. I wanted to bring something new to Greece, to [Greek city]. [...] I had some classes already, in

other studios, and I had a degree in Latin International ballroom, you know. But I wanted to teach salsa so I went to New York and I said I'm gonna bring this to [Greek city]. That happened in 2008.

Taking lessons with teachers based in New York or Cuba does not only enhance a dancer's technique but also creates value for use back home. As Iannis puts it, in order to "bring this to [Greek city]", he needed to physically be in contact with salsa instructors in a specific place – New York. Once they have been "there", dancers are able to transfer the acquired "danced knowledge" (Farnell 2010: 2) through their own mobility and validate their teaching practices. The acquired dance skills as well as the fact that they have "acquired context" (Bizas 2014) through their "being there" legitimises and authorises these dancers as knowledgeable.

As the discussion demonstrated, mobility can be transformed into social advantages in form of reputation, and thus becomes mobility capital.

8.2.2 "She looks exotic": bodies and salsa capital

In her analysis of the intimate economy of tango in Buenos Aires, Törnqvist (2013) describes tango as an "economy of the flesh". She states: "The fact that dancers enter into the tango with and through their bodies, implying that the practice is primarily an economy of the flesh, stresses the significance of appearance" (Törnqvist 2013: 69). Keeping in mind this chapter's focus on salsa capital of dance professionals (as opposed to the mixed tango salons of Törnqvist's study design), a similar claim can be made for salsa: bodily appearance matters. As in other parts of social life, popular physiognomic features may be an asset, as Hakim (2010) argues in terms of the importance of "erotic capital" and "erotic power" in late-modern societies. In the affective economy of the salsa circuit, salsa capital can be enhanced through the values attached to bodies considered as beautiful and sexually attractive, defined along a salsa-related aesthetic sometimes including authenticity markers such as dark hair or dark skin (see also Törnqvist (2013: 69) for a similar discussion in tango tourism).

Salsa dance professionals engage in various forms of what has been termed "body work" (Gimlin 2007) to shape their bodies in particular ways. They engage in

techniques such as dieting, working out, hairstyling and hair removal, the application of cosmetics and cosmetic surgery (cf McClure 2015: 39). Dark sunglasses, fancy shoes and tight clothes are popular accessories among male and female salsa dancers alike. In addition, salsa artists need special costumes for their performances as well as their social dancing, as the parties at salsa events often propose a themed party with a dress code (see Picture 25). McClure even writes of “the image era of salsa” (see also Marion 2014 for a discussion of glamour and style in dancesport). The “body work” is used to attain a certain appearance particularly valued in the affective economy of the salsa circuit, which also changes with general trends in pop cultural and the fashion industry.

Furthermore, bodies are used to construct specific looks with attached ethnicised and racialised meanings. Iannis and Alicia, a young Greek salsa couple, discussed the importance of “looks” during the interview:

Iannis: Another thing that I like [about salsa], on the dance floor: it doesn’t matter, I mean if you are a doctor or a lawyer or you are a painter or whatever. It doesn’t, no one asks you. If you are black or white, it doesn’t matter... Maybe it matters, if you are black.

Alicia: It’s better!

Iannis: It’s better [laughs] You know, you look more like a Latino, and it feels nice. [...]

Alicia: I’ve heard this, because in summer I’m even [...] darker [laughs]. Yeah, I get this sometimes. Because you know, dancing, and the hair and...

Iannis: She looks exotic, that’s why, that’s the truth.

Alicia: In summer maybe.

Joanna: So is it a plus for a salsa dancer?

Alicia: Yes, I think so, as a salsa dancer yes.

As this discussion suggests, to “look like a Latino” may enhance a dancer’s salsa capital. Here, “Latino” is stereotypically equated with black or dark skin, a state Alicia reaches through tanning during the summer. The other signifier of Latinness

for female dancers is long, wavy hair, exactly the way Alicia wears it – like many other female salsa performers. She is thus able to obtain an “exotic” look, as Iannis puts it, a resource that is regarded as valuable in performing on salsa stages.



Picture 25 Flyer Vienna Salsa Congress 2015.

The interview extract exemplifies the ways that female bodies in particular are exoticised in the salsa circuit. However, it is not only female bodies that are exoticised and racialised, as already seen in Ernesto’s description of “young black Cubans with open shirts” (who threaten his own career) in Chapter 4. Following Ernesto’s logic, *Cuban salsa* in the festival context is racialised and blackness may

enhance a male dancer's embodied salsa capital as a marker of "authenticity".⁹⁹ The cited examples point to the importance of the intersections of gender and race in the construction of salsa capital related to a dancer's body (a point I will further discuss in the conclusion of this thesis). Hence, bodily appearance and "body work" (Gimlin 2007) are mobilised to construct salsa capital.

8.2.3 "Girls are just 'the dancer of'": gender and salsa capital

Chapter 5 has analysed in detail how gender is (re)produced through the doings of salsa dancers. To analyse the specific ways in which differently positioned dancers negotiate and do gender, it was necessary to explore the gender conventions in depth. However, gender is also a key resource, which salsa dance professionals mobilise in the construction of reputation. I will now focus on gendered representations of dance professionals' roles in order to shed light on gendered strategies to access salsa capital.

Scholars of salsa dance have noted "gender inequalities" regarding dance professionals' careers in the salsa industry (McMains 2015; Pietrobruno 2006). McMains (2015) notes that female salsa teachers and performers often earn less money than their male counterparts. She furthermore argues that the inequalities stem "from broader sexual inequalities in society: the expectation that women will have primary caretaking responsibilities for children and a culture of courtship that makes women more vulnerable to harassment and exploitation when working in nightlife industries" (McMains 2015: 286). These findings were echoed during my interviews with female salsa dance professionals, several of whom came up with the topic of sexism. Recalling her first steps in the salsa circuit, Lavinia told me that in her perspective, the salsa industry is "a men's world":

⁹⁹ Studies of the exoticisation of black male and female bodies in performance spaces have pointed to the sexualisation of these bodies (García 2013). However, the two interview extracts demonstrate that the process of exoticisation in the salsa circuit is more complex. Davis (2015a) similarly argues that exoticisation and processes of "othering" in the Argentinean tango salons are a two-directional process. Besides fantasies of "sensual Argentines" among foreign visitors, she also describes Argentines' fantasies of "elegant" European women as particularly desirable dance partners.

I remember in the beginning, when no one knew me, no one talked to me. And no one said hi, and no one said, “oh who are you”, [they rather said:] “ah you are the dancer of...”. You know, because they were used to seeing things like that, the girls are just “the dancer of”. And for me it was not respectful because it’s not that I am not taking credit from my dance partner, I know he has more experience, but it’s also like: I have done my school, I have paid for my lessons, I have done a lot of things for my career, so I’m also a professional.

Female salsa dancers often experience being treated as just “the dancer of” their male dance partner, and feel they have to struggle to gain respect in salsa. Lavinia links the non-recognition to the fact of being a female dancer and predominant ideas of salsa femininities. In a similar vein, scholarship on popular music has demonstrated that music critics often privilege male performers (Schmutz and Faupel 2010). As Whiteley (2000) argues, in discussions of “authorship”, male performers and male-dominated musical styles are often more advantaged compared to their female counterparts. Similarly, in the salsa music industry cultural production is found to be primarily in the hands of male musicians (Aparicio 1998; Washburne 2008). The common expression “the dancer of”, which is reserved for female salsa dancers, indicates underlying gendered representations of autonomous male dancers and dependent female dancers. Feminist scholars have analysed such representations as being informed by longstanding notions of autonomy and agency as related to masculinity, whereas femininity has been portrayed as dependent (see Butler 1990). In the salsa circuit, gender thus influences how salsa capital can be accumulated – in different ways for male and female dance professionals.

Teresa, former owner of a dance studio in Prague who then moved to join her well-known dance partner (and later husband) Juan in Italy, told me that she often has to clarify her status as not just “playing the teacher”:

Sometimes people see you as “just the wife”, she’s trying to play the teacher. But it was never like that. I could just come with him without working. But why, if I can do it, it’s my job as well.

Teresa is often looked at as “just the wife” who helps her partner teach, without being acknowledged for her own efforts and experiences as a salsa dancer who even

built up her own school. In her case, the fact that her partner Juan achieved a considerable status in the salsa circuit before she met him may contribute to the misrepresentation of her own work. Similar to Lavinia, Teresa recalls how she had “to fight” her way in order to be acknowledged and visible in the salsa circuit.

The cited experiences are no singular cases but reflect experiences of other female salsa dancers (cf McMains 2015). They indicate gendered hierarchies in the salsa circuit, which attribute some activities to male dancers and others to female dancers. They suggest that activities such as teaching are often gendered as male activities. At the same time, these are the activities related to higher salsa capital and directly transferable into economic capital. In some contexts, aspects of “hegemonic masculinity” (Connell 1995) inform salsa capital, which can be termed a “hegemonic male salsa capital”.

As discussed in chapter 5, the couple classes taught at salsa congresses are most often led and verbally explained by male dancers, while female dancers demonstrate the steps without talking. This leader-centred way of presenting salsa dancing endows male dancers with more symbolic capital than female dancers.

In the short interview with salsa professional Andy, he told me that he travels every weekend of the year to a different salsa event, as a solo artist. As he only teaches and never performs, he has no fixed dance partner:

Me I just get on a plane on Friday, I go to sleep, I wake up, I party. Saturday I pick a girl from a class I’ve never met in my life, teach a routine. You know, my life is very easy compared to my other colleagues.

Interested only in the leading, this dancer can just “pick a girl” before a workshop he has to teach, even though he has never danced with her before, and ask her to assist him during the workshop. Andy, a professional male leader, is endowed with high salsa capital. At congress parties I observed several times how groups of women actually queued in order to dance with this particular dancer, something reserved for the *salsa superstars*. He never has problems finding a willing dance partner for the class. Although this is an extreme example, it sheds light on the status relations at work in the salsa couple. Although the two partners are mutually dependent, the leader/male dancer is often considered to be more important than the

follower/female dancer. Through the weight given to the leader function in salsa dance and the gendering of this role as male, female salsa professionals have fewer opportunities to gain reputation in the teaching business.

Confronted with this hegemonic male salsa capital, female dancers use strategies to accumulate salsa capital based on other gendered properties. Female salsa professionals have developed ways to compete with male overrepresentation in the teaching business through the innovation of *styling*. With the establishment of *ladies' styling* classes, female dancers have been able to create a specific "female salsa capital".

As Bourdieu argues, struggle over symbolic capital constitutes all artistic fields. As I demonstrate, these struggles lead to processes of change and innovation. In the salsa circuit, one strategy for female dancers consisted of promoting a new definition of salsa dancing and thus opening up new performance and teaching opportunities. I suggest that this is exactly what happened with the *ladies' styling* classes which developed at the end of the 1990s and still today form a branch of salsa dancing that is mainly in women's hands.

Anna, the before-cited German dance professional, used this strategy. In the interview she told me how she was able to continue her dance career after separating from her dance partner (after ten years of performing together). She first found other partners, but then found a new way of being a *travelling artist*:

And I had a great *ladies' styling* formation with flamenco, I was "famous" in quotation marks, in salsa, and went to many congresses and taught my *ladies' styling* 'cause I had a particular touch in *ladies' styling* through flamenco and my Argentinean tango, because I had an interest in these dances as well. So I had a special styling, people really liked it. And I think I was one of the first with *ladies' styling*, this didn't exist at that time.

Through the creative integration of other dance techniques into her styling, Anna was thus able to continue her international travelling even after the breakup with her former partner and succeed as a solo artist. Although Anna was supposedly not the first woman to teach *ladies' styling* at salsa events on an international level, since the time she mentions (around the early 2000s) *ladies' styling* has been developing

and still forms one of the main teaching opportunities for female professionals (see Picture 26). As the historical example of ladies' styling demonstrates, by taking "ownership of this aspect of the evolving dance style" (Borland 2009: 485), some female dance professionals thus created a new means of acquiring salsa capital. However, as the detailed analysis of Lavinia's and Nara's strategies of redoing and even undoing gender in salsa dancing (see Chapter 5) also shows, some female dancers are able to do things differently and challenge gendered assumptions. I would argue that Nara was actually in a position to engage in redefinitions of salsa thanks to a certain volume of salsa capital and her status in the hierarchy of *travelling artists*. Even though some other professionals might exclude her, she is also very successful and accepted among students at salsa festivals in North America, Europe and Asia. At the same time, her (and others') success with a rebranded form of salsa also informs her salsa capital.



Picture 26 Teaching *Ladies' styling*, Kiev Salsa Kizomba Festival 2017 (© Steven Isaacs).

8.2.4 “He was looking for a Cuban”: ethnicity and salsa capital

In Chapter 4 the importance of ethnicity in the construction of authenticity among salsa dance professionals has already been addressed. This section further clarifies the ethnicised strategies to access salsa capital. As I argue, in cases where cultural authenticity is acknowledged as a resource, the mobilisation of ethnicity may invert the power dynamics between actors of European and non-European nationality (in terms of legal capital and mobility capital), which I demonstrated in the last chapter. At the same time, it comes with an objectifying essentialism. The underlying mechanisms can be understood as a form of “strategic essentialism” (Spivak 2012), which, according to Eide (2010), “entails that members of groups, while being highly differentiated internally, may engage in an essentializing and to some extent a standardizing of their public image, thus advancing their group identity in a simplified, collectivised way to achieve certain objectives” (76). I illustrate the mobilisation of ethnicity with the example of so-called *Afro-Cuban* dance styles in the salsa circuit.

Similar to the innovation and spread of *ladies’ styling* discussed above, the so-called *Afro-Cuban* dances have gained in importance in the salsa circuit. As argued before, I have observed a growing offer of *Afro-Cuban and rumba* dance workshops at salsa events in Europe (see Picture 27). This particular style of dancing is often presented as an “ancestor” of salsa and part of its steps and movements are integrated into the repertory of standardised salsa movements. Through this ethnicisation/racialisation of a style, (racialised) dancers of Cuban origin are most sought after to teach it, as they are often perceived as experts in these dances. Male and female dance professionals of Cuban origin were thus able to draw on ethnicity to carve a niche in the salsa teaching business and build salsa capital.

The case of Yaimara helps to illustrate this point. When she arrived in Germany, she first had no job but was put in contact with the owner of the successful dance school where she started working soon after. Yaimara recalls:

And in this time, the other Cuban was not in the school anymore, and Franz [German owner of dance school] was looking for another Cuban woman to teach the rumba lesson with Willy [...] and then I had an interview. And so I started with the rumba

lesson. I remember very well, I had only one lesson in the beginning, and today I teach 14 hours [a week] [laughs].

As Yaimara told me, she and the other teacher, Willy, are the only Cuban teachers in the school. This explicit wish for two Cubans to teach the rumba classes demonstrates the way this dance style is ethnicised in a European context and constructed as directly linked to the Caribbean island.



Picture 27 Flyer Festival Cubano Poland 2015.

As illustrated, being identified as carrier of “authentic” salsa may sometimes enhance a dancer’s salsa capital (and thus shape opportunities for transnational career development inside the salsa circuit). In this process, global power hierarchies that considerably shape dancers’ ability to be mobile are inverted. The ethnicisation and racialisation that excludes certain bodies from European territory (and that exclusionary immigration and labour market politics are often based on) is valued inside the salsa circuit and may enhance a dancer’s salsa capital. However, this form of salsa capital often builds on ideas of cultural otherness, including assumptions of essential cultural differences. As literature on the exoticisation of Latin dances has demonstrated (McMains 2016), such representations may also perpetuate colonial categorisations and reinforce ethnicised and racialised hierarchies. Cuban salsa dance professionals therefore perform a balancing act when engaging in the mobilisation of ethnicity to construct salsa capital, which is valuable only inside the salsa circuit. This is also reflected in the fact that during my research I was unable to find a Cuban salsa dance professional who did not engage in “authenticity work” or who did actively challenge ethnicised and racialised representations, for instance by “undoing Cubanness”. The processes of authentication of *salsa Cubana* in the European salsa circuit can therefore best be understood as a part of the (rather successful) strategies of Cuban dance professionals to participate in the salsa circuit – though in a constrained field, as further discussed in the Conclusion of this thesis.

8.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have used a theoretical framework drawing on Bourdieu’s capital theory and social network theory to analyse the process of reputation building, the third status passage in the construction of salsa dance professionals’ transnational careers.

By applying some of the considerations of classic social network analysis to salsa dance professionals’ careers I demonstrated how dancers form networks to better understand how networking strategies inform the process of reputation building. I also highlighted the significance of differently positioned actors of the salsa circuit. Hence, all actors of the salsa circuit may play the important role of gatekeepers in

the process of accessing more prestigious performance or teaching opportunities. Nevertheless, social relations are not always helpful in producing (mobile) transnational careers. In some cases, they keep dancers in a specific place. Also, contrary to the celebratory narrative of mobile careers, this privileged form of mobility often entails costs in regard to social relations, which is also demonstrated in other studies with highly mobile artists (Lipphardt 2012). Furthermore, as I have shown, the transnational careers of salsa dance professionals are gendered.

The analysis of the available data on salsa dancers' social networks once they are active in the salsa circuit shows a similar picture as the one of those used in gaining access to the circuit: networks are characterised by a diversity of people in terms of gender, nationality and place of residence. As demonstrated, these networks often span national borders, and in order to maintain them and be able to access social capital, dance professionals need to engage in active networking.

As the discussion has demonstrated, dance professionals draw on various resources to enhance their reputation in the salsa circuit and construct what I have termed salsa capital. Salsa capital is constructed differently, depending on dancers' position in and outside the salsa circuit and their endowment with other forms of capital. I have specially demonstrated the significance of mobility, bodies, gender and ethnicity in this process. As shown, dancers' chance to change something in the social order depends on their position not only in the salsa circuit. This is why the category of ethnicity is salient for all of the interviewed Cuban dancers. Gender proves salient for most dancers as well, but some dancers are able to renegotiate it when endowed with other resources. An important point of Bourdieu's capital theory is the question of the convertibility of different forms of capital, which I now address.

Salsa capital can be transformed into economic capital in various ways, as has been indicated throughout the last chapters. In this process, the most obvious exchange happens in the form of remuneration for teaching and performing at salsa events. Alongside such activities, many salsa dance professionals also sell teaching material such as DVDs or online classes, which they promote during their travelling. Other dancers with a large volume of salsa capital sell choreographies of their routines to

other dance instructors, who teach them to their own students, using the logo of the well-recognised *salsa stars* as a marketing tool to attract more paying students.¹⁰⁰ Some of the experienced dancers also start organising larger events, drawing on their transnational networks of fellow *artists* and their reputation built up during years of travelling to events. Established salsa dancers who dispose of social capital and salsa capital can thus become salsa event organisers, once they see business opportunities arising.

As argued in other studies, Bourdieu's theory of forms of capital can be adapted to a transnational perspective on mobility by analysing how the different forms of capital transfer across national borders (cf Moret 2015; Nowicka 2013). As Nowicka (2013) writes in her study on the positioning strategies of Polish entrepreneurs in Germany, migration "disrupts accumulation and valorisation of capital but it also enables migrants to strategically employ these resources which are symbolically monopolised within a nation-state; this is in particular visible when migrants use the ethnic stereotypes to flexibly react to labour market demands abroad" (43). This particularly holds true for the case of Cuban salsa dance professionals in this study: the construction of their salsa capital differs from that of their European counterparts. Although the latter may be endowed with more mobility capital, they do not dispose of the specific form of salsa capital, which is enhanced through the organisation of dance holidays in Cuba and the mobilisation of social networks in Cuba.

Cuban dance professionals active in the European salsa circuit are able to mobilise the resources of their networks in two different places and thus link them, and convert different forms of capital thanks to their transnational mobility. These actors are not only able to convert social, cultural and symbolic capital from Cuba into salsa capital, which eventually translates into economic capital in the European salsa circuit, they are also able to convert their economic and social capital from Europe into social, economic or cultural capital in Cuba and thus improve their position (and that of their family and friends) at their birthplace.

¹⁰⁰ Over the last few years, several so-called *world teams* have been formed, which train a specific choreography, which is then performed together at an event, see for instance: adrianyanita.com/index.php/adrian-y-anita-world-team-project (accessed 15 June 2018).

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the circulation of people, imaginaries, dance movements, ethnicised/racialised and gendered conventions and affects from a transnational perspective through the prism of salsa dance. It argued that the salsa circuit might best be grasped as a rhizome-like, transnational formation produced through the circulation of people, imaginaries and affects, enabling professional careers at the crossroads of human movement in geographical space and on the dance floor. Including an (im)mobilities perspective, it tried to identify the conditions that allow those movements to happen and developed the notion of “entangled mobilities”. The aim of the present research was to explore the ways the salsa circuit is structured, how it is formed by the transnational careers of salsa dance professionals and the embodied doings of salsa dancers, following the logics of the affective economy.

In this concluding chapter, the main threads of my analysis of the salsa circuit are drawn together. The research questions and key findings are reviewed to situate them within debates in scholarship on salsa and (im)mobility and highlight the main contributions of this study.

Review of theoretical and methodological contributions

The starting point for this thesis was an epistemological stance based on a constructivist understanding of social “reality”, notably in regard to gender and ethnicity. I adopted a transnational perspective (eg Dahinden 2016, 2017) and a “regimes-of-mobility” approach (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013) to account for the importance of nation states in regulating the cross-border mobility of people. Drawing on scholarship interested in the construction of “transnational networks” (Kiwani and Meinhof 2011) or “large-scale systems” (Mueller 2016) with a “multi-scalar perspective” (Glick Schiller 2015), I proposed a conceptualisation of salsa as a circuit with several hubs. Paired with concepts developed in the analysis of art (Becker 1982) and cultural production (Bourdieu 1993) as well as Bourdieu’s capital approach, my theoretical framework allowed an exploration of salsa dancers’ transnational practices on and off the dance floor. The combined interpretive framework focusing

on a “logic of practices” (Villa 2010) as well as a perspective on structural power relations allowed me to gain different insights into dancers’ opportunities and constraints. Drawing on migration and mobility studies, gender studies, affect studies and scholarship on art and dance, this theoretical framework offered the possibility to go beyond several limitations of the respective academic fields, notably in the three following respects.

First, adopting a transnational perspective (Dahinden 2017) as developed in the field of migration and mobility studies in the analysis of the salsa circuit allowed me to go beyond statements of the “transnational” character of the dance world as a mere metaphor. I not only analysed the construction of transnational careers, networks and subjectivities but also demonstrated the importance of the “national” in the notion of “transnational”, notably nation-states’ borders and regimes of mobility. While dancers may feel part of a “global community”, access to and participation in the travelling is highly restricted by the nation-state in question.

Second, and related, while I focused on the circulation of salsa dancers, I also included the theoretical reflections of mobilities studies, urging scholars not to forget about the immobilities and moorings. Framing salsa dancers’ circulation from a “regimes of mobility” perspective (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013) allowed an understanding of the importance of salsa students’ travels in the construction of salsa dance professionals’ careers and a conceptualisation of some relations as “entangled mobilities”. The notion of entangled mobilities points to the significance not only of social capital but also of imaginaries and mobility capital. Furthermore, as demonstrated throughout this thesis, entangled mobilities are gendered and ethnicised/racialised. As illustrated with the manifold cases in this study, the perspective of “entangled mobilities” makes it possible to consider the (im)mobilities of differently positioned individuals without naturalising either mobility or stasis.

Third, this study started with an interest in a “group” defined in terms of members’ common activity, instead of focusing on a group defined in ethnic or national terms, as is still common in much of the research on migration and transnationalism (see Dahinden 2016) as well as some studies on transnational careers in dance. Salsa proved to be a particularly fruitful research context to establish a “de-ethnicized”

(Wimmer 2009) and “de-migranticized” (Dahinden 2016) research design due to its attraction to differently positioned individuals. To enter the field through specific events in Europe and Cuba, and the focus on the present actors and their common activity (salsa dancing) allowed for a diverse sample in terms of origin countries. I thus included salsa dance professionals of European as well as Latin American origin, as well as their students, in order to analyse how these individuals construct their careers and negotiate ethnicity and gender in specific situations. These situations were then analysed as one of several strategies to make claims of “authenticity” and legitimacy in the highly competitive field of the salsa circuit. In this way, strategies of claiming ownership through ethnicity were interpreted as responses to specific configurations of power relations (such as unequal distribution of economic and mobility capital between European salsa students and Cuban salsa teachers). Furthermore, focusing on salsa dancers with different nationalities has rendered visible the often-neglected importance of regimes of mobility and mobility capital – and thus the labour necessary in the construction of a transnational career. Therefore this study also differs from research on other cultural/dance practices such as Bizas’ (2014) study analysing West African dance teachers and North American students or Robitaille’s (2013) study interested in Brazilian capoeira masters and their North American students. As I argue, by choosing another approach to construct the research sample, this thesis is able to demonstrate commonalities and differences between dancers both as related to structural factors and as a result of actors’ negotiations. In this way it minimises the risk of presenting individuals as cultural actors drawing on cultural resources alone.

The discussed epistemological and theoretical approaches also had methodological consequences, particularly in relation to the research design, the ways in which I conducted research and the chosen research population. I adopted a specific mobile methodology of diverse data gathering methods designed to address the research questions relating to a research field in constant circulation. To grasp the importance of circulation in the salsa circuit, I developed an embodied, multi-sited (Hannerz 2003; Marcus 1995) research strategy, including several field “sites”, notably salsa congresses, dance studios and an organised salsa holiday. This study is

based on a triangulation of qualitative data-gathering methods, including semi-structured, problem-centred interviews (Witzel 2000) and participant observation/observant participation (Daniel 1995; Skinner 2010).

Moreover, this study draws on a burgeoning field of embodied research methodologies, which stress the importance of “embodied knowledge” (Crosby 1997). Taking up calls for the reintroduction of the researcher’s body into the research process, I also employed techniques of embodied research, common in dance ethnographies (Buckland 2010; Crosby 1997) and “carnal sociology” (Wacquant 2004). The acknowledgement of the researcher’s own body in the research process is still often neglected in social science literature and its importance is often unrecognised. As I have demonstrated, combining embodied research techniques with more classical research strategies proves a valuable approach not only in studying dance but also for studying (other) transnational phenomena in general.

Key findings and contributions to the academic literature

The aim of this thesis was to explore transnational processes at the intersections of the dance–music complex salsa, professional careers and circulating representations of gender and ethnicity, as well as imaginaries and affects. It serves as a case study to illuminate globalisation processes, demonstrating the complex interplay of different levels of analysis. Focusing on the connections between differently situated individuals in a world of “entangled modernities” (Randeria 1999), this study suggests current globalisation processes should be considered beyond the global-local or North-South dichotomies.

As argued at the beginning of this thesis, most literature on salsa dance focuses on localised scenes and the ways salsa is “reterritorialised” in specific cities or national contexts. Due to this focus, the transnational careers of salsa dance professionals and the mobile practices of salsa dancers are rarely acknowledged. Furthermore, the studies which mention the participation of European and non-European dancers in salsa implicitly take the presence of Latin American dancers for granted. In this way, they neglect the importance of social capital and mobility capital, shaped by unequal power relations between countries and the historically grown migration regimes, to

actually access and participate in the (European) salsa circuit. This study adds new insights on topics neglected in the literature, thus contributing to larger debates in the social sciences, notably on the four following points: the significance of affect and emotions, the negotiations of ethnicity and gender, as well as mobility capital and social capital in a transnational field.

The Esperanto of the body and the affective economy

To address the internal structure and logics of the salsa circuit, I used the notion of “affective economy”, drawing on Bourdieu’s approach to economies of symbolic goods (1980b, 1993) combined with reflections from the field of “affect studies” (Ahmed 2004; Bakko and Merz 2015; Clough 2007; Davis 2015b). Salsa students as well as salsa dance professionals participate in the (re)production of a set of shared beliefs in specific values as part of the rules of the game (Bourdieu 1980b) or conventions (Becker 1982).

As I have shown, dancers’ beliefs in the values of the affective economy draw on conventions and emotions. They draw on the two interrelated arguments that salsa is accessible for anyone and that the shared bodily practice is a common “language”: the *Esperanto of the body*. Salsa events are collectively imagined and generated as spaces of diversity and equality in terms of nationality, class, age, race and religion. As I have suggested, salsa dancers’ arguments can be compared to public debates about political multiculturalism (Taylor 1992). Furthermore, actors of the salsa circuit share an understanding of the significance of affective values such as their passion for salsa, intersecting with gendered and ethnicised representations of salsa. It is against this backdrop that dance students’ unease about the commercialised relationship to their dance teachers and *Cuban dance partners* (taxi-dancers) can be analysed. As I have shown, framing the dance partnership in economic terms instead of a voluntary “authentic” and gendered experience generates discussions at European salsa festivals as well as in the salsa tourism space in Havana. The issues at stake resemble those described by Törnqvist (2013), who argues in her analysis of the interactions between tourists and tango dancers in Buenos Aires that “subjecting the tango to up-front economic deals through which a *price tag* is put on the experiences [...] conflicts with the *taboo of making things explicit*, the *mystification* and the *myth-*

making central to the tango culture” (219). As demonstrated, part of such “myth-making” is also the gendered convention in regards to the partnering in salsa.

I further provided a closer look at the processes through which salsa dance professionals develop a “commodified persona” (Bunten 2008) as they construct a marketable product beyond their dancing through engaging in “affective labour”. Drawing on scholarship on “emotional labour” in service industries (Hochschild 1983) and, more specifically, “affective labour” in the sex industry (Ditmore 2007), I demonstrated the significance of interpersonal skills such as creating a relationship with potential clients/students. In these gendered relations, salsa dance professionals negotiate the convention of “tangible salsa stars”.

Following calls to take emotions and affects more seriously (Clough 2007), this thesis draws attention to the affective economy on which the salsa circuit builds. It thus contributes to a better empirical understanding of the role of emotions and affects in transnational processes.

Ethnicity and gender as negotiable resources in unequal fields of power

Salsa dance has been described as a global dance form that has been “de-ethnicised” (see for instance Urquía 2005) in the process of its transnationalisation. While this is certainly true for some of the danced salsa styles, this thesis nuances the picture. As this study has demonstrated, salsa dancers of various countries of origin engage in symbolic struggles of boundary-work to legitimate their position. In this process, they negotiate salsa’s “Latinness” in terms of a group-based authenticity versus an individualised skill, which can be acquired and learned through dance training. They further draw on arguments of cultural authenticity and a specific set of pedagogical techniques.

While the boundaries of ethnicity are challenged or even seemingly irrelevant for many of the female and male European and North American salsa dance professionals, this is not the case for Cuban dancers. I have demonstrated the ways in which dancers with a Cuban passport engage in “authenticity work” (Peterson 2005), a form of “strategic essentialism” (Spivak 2012). A similar process has been described with regard to musicians and the “commodification of difference” in the so-called world music market (Connell and Gibson 2004; Kiwan and Meinhof 2011).

Connell and Gibson (2004) cite musicians who felt constrained to play the “ethnic card” in a Western context demanding “authenticity”. By demonstrating the processes of what could be termed a “re-ethnicisation” of salsa, this study has positioned salsa Cubanness as a result of the negotiations in the salsa circuit (see also Boulila 2018).

This thesis has underlined the importance of embodied doings in the construction of the social order (see Villa 2010). However, the micro-sociological analysis of how dancers are “doing being Cuban” alone does not allow for an interpretation of this phenomenon. Therefore, I added a perspective from Bourdieu’s field approach to account for dancers’ different positions in the salsa circuit. Furthermore, as argued in the debates on intersectionality, ethnicity, gender and other categories of difference always intersect (Villa 2010). This interpretative framework takes into account the Cuban interviewees’ position at the intersections of ethnicised/racialised, class-based and gendered inequalities that leave little scope left to renegotiate ethnicity. It is against this backdrop that Cuban dancers’ mobilisation of the “cultural authenticity” argument may best be understood.

Unlike ethnicity, gender is negotiated in manifold ways in the salsa circuit. Here, a micro-sociological interpretive framework was helpful in going beyond established literature on gender in salsa: Instead of presenting gender relations in salsa as stable and a simple result of dancers’ wish to engage in “traditional” or “exotic” gender roles, I presented the ongoing negotiations of gender conventions (Schulze 2015). These negotiations happen primarily in embodied ways. Through a focus on gender conventions in the dancing I demonstrated the ways in which (un/re)doing gender works “with and through” bodies (Messerschmidt 2008: 86). Hence, this study takes up calls for an inclusion of the body in analyses with the theoretical framework of doing gender.

Gender and ethnicity as identity categories are thus discussed very differently in the salsa circuit. These findings may partly be explained by the processes around an “unsettling of identities” that Brubaker (2016) analyses in a book entitled *trans*. Starting from the public debates around the pairing of transgender and transracial identities in the USA in 2015, he states: “In this landscape of unsettled identities,

sex/gender and ethnoracial categories have ceased to be taken for granted and have become the focus of self-conscious choices and political claims” (Brubaker 2016: 5). However, as Brubaker (2016) argues, in public understanding these two forms of embodied identities are perceived as being different: “even as gender identities have come to be reimagined in far-reaching and unprecedented ways, racial identities continue to be widely understood as unchanging and un-chosen” (Brubaker 2016: 132). While the context of the salsa circuit and the negotiations discussed herein turn around different questions from the ones discussed by Brubaker, his analysis parallels my findings. Brubaker (2016) claims:

“Paradoxically, while sex is a biological category in a way that race is not, sex and gender are understood to be more open to choice and change than are race and ethnicity. The distinction between sex and gender – and the irrelevance of ancestry to definitions of sex and gender – has made it possible to construe gender identity as a subjective individual property that is uncoupled from the body. Racial identity, however, is understood to be tightly coupled to the body and to be grounded in social relations, specifically in family and ancestry” (Brubaker 2016: 6).

The different understandings of these categories are also at work in the salsa circuit, where gender and ethnicity are construed in different ways. Although gender conventions are highly heteronormative and often reproduced, some male and female dancers are able to neglect gender (Hirschauer 2001) and thus challenge the current order. By contrast, when it comes to ethnicity, I have not observed a similar possibility of neglect for all dancers, and in particular for Cuban dancers. As argued above, in the European salsa circuit, they are constrained to “play the ethnic card” as they lack the resources other salsa dance professionals are able to mobilise in the construction of “salsa capital”.

Mobility capital and imaginaries

The current study highlighted the importance of mobility capital in the construction of transnational careers, and the ways in which it has to be acquired. Scholars argued for a conceptualisation of mobility capital as including the capacities and competences to be mobile (Kaufmann, Bergman, and Joye 2004; Moret 2015). As I

have shown, additionally the imaginaries of dancers play an important role in the construction of mobility capital. Often imaginaries lie at the beginning of any spatial travels (Salazar 2011), of salsa students, teachers and performers alike. Imaginaries of salsa as the *Esperanto of the body*, allowing for new encounters on the dance floor, as well as the imaginaries of Cuba as salsa's "birthplace" bring salsa students to engage in travelling to salsa events in Europe and Cuba. At the same time, Latin American salsa dancers told me about the imaginaries of salsa as a way to engage in a "cosmopolitan lifestyle", to travel themselves, but also as possibility of self-transformation. Bizas (2014) similarly analyses the importance of imagination in the travels of students and artists of the Senegalese dance form sabar. As Bizas (2014) concludes, "imagination plays an important role in mobilizing U.S. students to West Africa, and West African artists to the United States" (127). Likewise Davis (2015a) describes the importance of tango dancers' fantasies about "the other" and frames their transnational connections as "a passionate encounter across many different borders between dancers with a shared desire for difference and a taste of 'elsewhere'" (181).

However, the actors in the salsa circuit are endowed with different volumes of mobility capital. In order to build mobility capital, many dance professionals first need to access the right contacts. In the case of the interviewed Cuban dancers, they relied on the mobility of others. Moreover, in the process of career construction, salsa dance professionals need to travel to salsa events, and it becomes a condition of the transnational career. Mobility capital is thus not only necessitated in the first stage of access to the salsa circuit but also in the construction of social networks in the subsequent stage of reputation-building.

Social capital and "entangled mobilities"

This thesis analysed the importance of several types of capital in salsa dance professionals' transnational careers. It proposed to analyse salsa dance professionals' transnational careers from a sociological and anthropological perspective, thus shedding light on a specific form of a professional career at the intersections of industries as diverse as art, entertainment/performance and teaching. It particularly addressed the importance of social capital in the construction of these careers,

defined as “resources embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions” (Lin 1999: 35). Going beyond the mere observation of the importance of social capital, I also analysed which types of actors are important, how social capital may relate to the social networks actors build up and the ways it is gendered. While resources present in social networks are mobilised at all three of the stages I identified in salsa dance professionals’ careers, I particularly shed light on the roles and working of social capital in the process of accessing the salsa circuit as well as in the process of reputation building.

The literature on migrants’ social capital often focuses on ties between family members or other people from the same origin country (eg Pathirage and Collyer 2011). Contrary to this literature, I have shown that the Latin American salsa dancers I interviewed mainly drew on resources from networks built with their European students. The networks in the salsa circuit can therefore be described as transnational and highly diversified in terms of gender, nationality and place of residence.

This is also the case for the social networks the dancers build on in order to construct their careers in the salsa circuit, including the organisation of teaching and performance opportunities to gain visibility and reputation. As demonstrated, dancers need to be present at salsa events in “co-present encounters” (Urry 2003) in order to network and to meet event organisers, promoters, dance partners as well as their students – all of whom may play the role of gatekeepers to access new opportunities. Social capital is therefore mobilised to access mobility capital, which in turn allows actors in the salsa circuit to access new networks and deploy resources in different places, which leads to the accumulation of salsa capital.

To account for the specific relations between differently positioned actors in the salsa circuit I suggested the notion of “entangled mobilities”. Analysing salsa dancers’ careers through a perspective of entangled mobilities allows taking into account not only dancers’ social capital and different volumes of mobility capital, but also gendered, ethnicised and racialised representations. Literature on intimate relationships in tourist destinations in Latin America often frames these encounters as “sex tourism” or “romance tourism” (eg Törnqvist 2012 on tango tourism in

Argentina). While these studies deliver important insights, their focus necessarily means that they tend to present intimate relationships under the light of sex tourism. Based on my research, I would argue that the perspective of “entangled mobilities” allows for an analysis of the “tourist-local” relationship adding to existing approaches. As I have shown, the relationships built between salsa dance students and teachers cover a large spectrum of possible intimacy; starting from a student-teacher relationship, they may occasionally involve sexual encounters, romances or lead to a marriage. They are shaped by complex power relations between the European students and their Cuban teachers, based on unequal access to mobility capital, economic and legal capital, but also on a shared understanding of “passion” for salsa.

Approaching dancers’ mobility through the perspective of “entangled mobilities” also sheds light on the mobility practices of a group of people who are usually glossed over in studies on highly educated mobile actors.

As I have shown, the findings of this thesis complement those of earlier studies and add new insights in regard to several aspects, contributing not only to the literature on salsa but also to debates in other academic fields.

Scope for future research

This study demonstrated the importance of social relations related to salsa, and a transnational field developing between European countries, the Americas and in particular Cuba. However, the scope of this study was limited, notably in terms of the multi-sited research design and time available for research in Havana and the specific time and space frame of festivals likewise. While opening up new perspectives, the highly diverse sample in this qualitative study also represents a limitation. The combination of a multi-sited study with such a highly diverse sample represented a challenge in the process of analysis, as it did not allow for an inclusion of much historical context information for each individual trajectory. Further research might explore in depth more the role of post-colonial ties and new migration routes in salsa dancers’ careers.

While this study explicitly seeks to go beyond the accounts of localised salsa scenes, sometimes described as having a “sedentary bias” (Sheller and Urry 2006), and therefore chose to explore the transnational circulation of people and imaginaries, this focus also bears the risk of a “mobility bias”. I tried to counter this risk by addressing the immobilities and actors’ difficulties in gaining access to mobility as well. Nevertheless, this thesis draws an image of highly mobile actors, who are actually the minority of salsa dancers.

This study also showed the importance of gendered representations in salsa dancing, mainly addressing the reproduction of heteronormative spaces due to its focus on what could be termed “mainstream” salsa events. Including queer salsa spaces and the ways the gendered partnership is negotiated in these spaces could certainly offer more insights on the ways gender is (re)produced in late modernity (Davis 2015a; Giddens 1991).

This thesis demonstrated in detail some of the ways in which the space of salsa tourism in Havana influenced Cuban dancers’ opportunities to engage in the salsa circuit. While this study examines some of salsa’s transnational routes, several questions still remain to be answered, notably in relation to the transnational networks between other places and people, and the ways the salsa circuit works in other parts of the world. For example, further studies might explore salsa tourism in other places (as for example in Asian or African countries) as well as the ways that salsa tourism creates new economic and gender inequalities (particularly in Cuba). Furthermore, the recent changes in the political and economic landscape between Cuba and the USA, and the subsequent changes in tourism and salsa entrepreneurship, offer a fruitful area for further work. Recent changes in the access to and use of the internet in Cuba opens up interesting research avenues for netnographies: during the final stage of my research, I noticed an increase in commentaries on YouTube videos of dance. These commentaries and online discussions offer an extremely rich research context for studies interested in the negotiations around “authenticity”, related to power relations between Cubans on the island, those living in Miami and Cubans based in Europe, who all criticise each

other for teaching the dance moves in the wrong ways, particularly since “new” actors have access to online spaces.

This thesis serves as a case study to illuminate processes of social organisation, transnational encounters and global inequalities through the entry point of salsa dance. It suggests that the prism of dance allows for alternative perspectives in research on spatial mobility and transnational networks. It combined theoretical and methodological perspectives from different fields of study in an approach that may fruitfully be used in further research on transnational phenomena to foster our understanding of the interconnectedness of the world.

Appendix I Guideline semi-directed interviews

Guideline 1: Salsa dance professionals

Introduction

- Explanation PhD research project on salsa dancers
- Interested in subjective experiences and perspectives, no right or wrong answers
- Anonymity, confidentiality
- Recording

Narrative entry:

- **Can you tell me your salsa story?**

Possible ad-hoc questions:

- How did you get involved in salsa?
- When, where, with whom?
- What does salsa mean to you today?
- How often do you dance and where?
- Has something changed/what has changed in your life since you've started dancing salsa?
- How did you start teaching/performing? (who was important)

Teaching/performing

- **What are your actual salsa-related projects?**
- Where do you teach/perform today?
- What kind of salsa do you dance or teach (style)?
- Do you have a dance partner? How did you get to know him/her? (role of dance partner)
- Who invites you to teach/perform? (network)
- Do you organize your stays yourself or do you have some help? (marketing, organization)

Travelling

- **Do you often travel for salsa? For example when you think about this year: where did you go to?**
- What for? (teach, perform, both, other)
- How does a typical festival weekend look like for you?

- What does it mean to you to be here at this festival? To travel to these places in general?
- **What motivates you to travel?** What makes you continue? (motivation and difficulties)
- Did you ever have difficulties with travelling/visas etc? What types of visa do you need?
- Where are you based? What are your activities (people) in this place? Where (what places) did you live before that?
- Have you ever thought about moving to another place?

Career in salsa

- **What do you say when people ask you: what do you do in your life?**
- Can you make a living from dancing?
- Where would you situate yourself in the “salsa-world”? (Salsa-market)

Gender

- **What is a good dancer like?** A good male dancer /a good female dancer?
- How was it for you to start leading/following? How do you feel about your role as leader/follower?
- Is it easier to become a renowned salsa dancer for women or for men?

(For organisers)

- **How did you get into organizing salsa events?**
- With whom do you mainly work together?
- How do you choose salsa dancers to work for you?
- **Is there something else, you consider being important? Anything else you would like to discuss?**

Socio-demographic data:

- Year and place of birth, place(s) of living, nationality, highest degree of education, education of parents

Guideline 2: Salsa holiday and festival participants

Introduction

- Explanation PhD research project on salsa dancers
- Interested in subjective experiences and perspectives, no right or wrong answers
- Anonymity, confidentiality
- Recording

Narrative entry

- Can you tell me your salsa story?

Possible ad-hoc questions:

- How did you get involved in salsa?
- When, where, with whom?
- What does salsa mean to you today?
- How often do you dance and where?
- Has something changed/what has changed in your life since you've started dancing salsa? (relationships, body, feelings, reaction of family)
- How did you start teaching/performing? (who was important)

Salsa travel

- Have you ever travelled for salsa? (where, festivals, holiday)
- How and why did you choose to go there?
- How was it? What did you particularly like about it?
- What did you dislike?

(For salsa holiday participants)

- What did you expect before going to cuba? How has it been so far?
- What do you think about your teachers and dance partners? (experiences with going out, paying for services)

Representations of salsa

- What is salsa for you?
- How would you describe salsa dancers? The salsa scene? (different groups)
- Is it important where a person comes from?

Gender

- **What is a good dancer like?** A good male dancer /a good female dancer?
- How was it for you to start leading/following? How do you feel about your role as leader/follower?

Appendix II Interview participants

Name	Age	Position in salsa	Born in	Based in	Interview
Abod	ca 50	Participant (F)	Nigeria	United Kingdom	Eng.
Ajay	36	Organiser/Dancer	India	Singapore	Eng.
Alejandro	34	Salsa professional	Costa Rica	Switzerland	Ger.
Alicia	24	Salsa professional	Cyprus	Greece	Eng.
Andy	ca 40	Salsa professional	India	United Kingdom	Eng.
Anna	ca 45	Salsa professional	Germany	Germany	Ger.
Candice	30	Participant (F)	France	United Kingdom	Eng.
Clara	33	Salsa professional	Germany	Germany	Ger.
Daniela	33	Participant (H)	Switzerland	Switzerland	Ger.
Ernesto	49	Salsa professional	Uruguay	Switzerland	Fr.
Gary	32	Salsa professional	Caribbean is.	Germany	Ger.
Iannis	30	Salsa professional	Greece	Greece	Eng.
Irena	28	Salsa professional	Poland	United Kingdom	Eng.
Isabelle	41	Participant (F)	Switzerland	Switzerland	Ger.
Jamy	41	Participant (H)	Switzerland	Switzerland	Ger.
Juan	48	Salsa professional	Cuba	Cyprus	Eng./Span.
Juli	42	Salsa professional	Cuba	Cuba/Switzerland	Span./Ger.
Karl	30	Participant (F)	Switzerland	Switzerland	Ger.
Laura	33	Salsa professional	Switzerland	Switzerland	Ger.
Lavinia	26	Salsa professional	Mexico	Italy/Switzerland	Eng.
Manuela	29	Participant (H)	Austria	Switzerland	Ger.
Marcos	31	Salsa professional	Guatemala	Sweden	Eng.
Maria	33	Salsa professional	Poland	Norway	Eng.
Matilda	57	Participant (H)	Sweden	Sweden	Eng.
Nara	ca 35	Salsa professional	USA	USA	Eng.
Olorun	24	Salsa professional	Cuba	Cuba	Span.
Patric	36	Participant (F)	Switzerland	Switzerland	Ger.
Reinaldo	35	Salsa professional	Cuba	United Kingdom	Eng.
Roberto	41	Participant (H)	Switzerland	Switzerland	Ger.
Suzana	ca 30	Organizer	Romania	Germany	Eng.
Teresa	34	Salsa professional	Cyprus	Cyprus	Eng.
Valentina	34	Organizer	Switzerland	Switzerland	Ger.
Vilson	38	Salsa professional	Cuba	Cuba	Span.
Wilfredo	45	Salsa professional	Cuba	Cuba	Span.
Yaimara	27	Salsa professional	Cuba	Germany	Ger.
Zoé	ca 45	Salsa professional	Spain	Cuba	Span.

Participant (H) = Salsa Holiday participant, Participant (F) = Salsa Festival participant

Appendix III Pledge of honour



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First name: Joanna

Course of study: Docteur ès sciences humaines
et sociales

Faculty: Lettres
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