



# ReVista

HARVARD REVIEW OF LATIN AMERICA • FALL 2007

## Dance!

*Global Transformations of  
Latin American Culture*

## EDITOR'S LETTER

We were little black cats with white whiskers and long tails. One musical number from my one and only dance performance—in the fifth grade—has always stuck in my head. It was called “Hernando’s Hideaway,” a rhythm I was told was a tango from a faraway place called Argentina.

The beat imprinted on my imagination, as did the lyrics: “I know a dark secluded place/a place where no one knows your face/a glass of wine a fast embrace/It’s called ...Hernando’s Hideaway...”

So while I was preparing this issue on dance, in tribute to Harvard’s Humanities Center conference “Tango! Global Transformations of Latin American Culture,” I decided to google the words to the song. Much to my surprise, I found the decidedly non-Argentine word “olé!” A reference to castanets—normally associated with Spanish flamenco—led me to investigate the pan-Hispanic imagery. It turned out that “Hernando’s Hideaway” was from the Broadway musical—later a Hollywood film—“Pajama Game.” My childhood Latin dance associations—also including Ritchie Valens’ rendering of “La Bamba” and Desi Arnaz as the Cuban orchestra leader Ricky Ricardo in “I Love Lucy”—were inspired global transformations of Latin American culture.

Many of the authors in this issue have also touched on their childhood experiences with Latin dance. Homi K. Bhabha recalls listening to his father’s scratchy tango records; Doris Sommer brings us back to her Brooklyn childhood and how master pianist Larry Harlow inspired “inter-ethnic bridges so wide that everyone is invited to dance.” Alba Barbería confesses, “My life probably started with a tango,” and Claudia Pineda relates how dance performance connects immigrant youth with their home culture and helps them adapt to their home society.

In his article “Colombia’s Broken Body,” Álvaro Restrepo Hernández perhaps provides the explanation for this unintentional theme: “Children are masters of a powerful and unique instrument that is their body, their being, with which they can play, create, enjoy, transform and be transformed.”

Dance is a truth engraved in the body: as Restrepo notes, “Everything passes through the body.” Thus, dance has the power of transformation and communication, linking the self and the other. Suddenly, I understood why it has been so hard for me as an editor to decide which articles went in which section of this *ReVista*. How we conceive of ourselves in terms of societies and religions—shaping identity—is intricately related with how we project ourselves as people—“beyond the tourist gaze.” These relations exist whether at home or abroad, as seen through dance in the diaspora, and in how we transform ourselves as individuals and cultures.

Dance has the consistent ability to change, to mutate and to express. This issue was intended to be in black and white, drawing its strength for the power of dance movement. But as *ReVista* designer Kelly McMurray of 2COMMUNIQUE and I worked with the vibrant images in this magazine, we found it mutating into color.

From time to time, *ReVista* will now be published in color, not every issue, but at least once every academic year. We celebrate the tango conference and the dance theme with color—a joy, a surprise, a dance itself. Enjoy!



# ReVista

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Cover photograph  
The tango-dancing couple illustrates the poster for the conference “Tango! Dance the World Around: Global Transformations of Latin American Culture.”

# Tango! Dance the World Around

## *Global Transformations of Latin American Culture*

BY HOMI K. BHABHA

I am passionately interested in tango and profoundly ignorant about it. When I came to the Humanities Center at Harvard two years ago, I knew that at last I had an opportunity to direct my passion towards overcoming my ignorance. This is the personal motivation behind "Tango! Dance the World Around: Global Transformations of Latin American Culture"—our October 26 and 27 tango conference, co-sponsored by the Humanities Center, the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, and the David Rockefeller Center, with the generous support of the Consulate General of Argentina.

My first experience of tango was in Bombay when I heard it on grainy, scratchy records. My father greatly loved tango, both to dance to and to listen to, and he had purchased these records in the 1930s or 40s. I heard them as a child in the 60s, and I was completely captivated. I can't say precisely why, as I can't put myself back into the mind of a child, but I believe it was the music's combination of strength and fragility. I couldn't understand the lyrics, but I could feel the music intensely.

Early in 2004, as the senior humanities advisor to Dean Drew Faust—now President Faust—I collaborated with Radcliffe in organizing a conference on cultural citizenship. At that time, I remarked that we should do something together on tango because tango is an extraordinarily popular dance and musical form with a fascinating social and political history that is translated across the world in a remarkable range of art forms and media. There is popular dance tango; there are great art works that incorporate tango; there is cinema that focuses on tango; there is tango as classical music—thanks in part to Yo-Yo Ma, who speaks at our conference; there is tango in Paris, Tokyo, Bombay, and Boston as well as Buenos Aires—thus our title "Dance the World Around" and our subtitle "Global Transformations of Latin American Culture."

Tango is about nostalgia, the nostalgia for one's country, about migration. Tango is about emerging from lack of privilege and expressing one's passion for life in that context. Tango is about gender. Tango is deeply embedded in histories of urban poverty, social marginalization, and masculine authority.

I may not have conveyed all that information to then-Dean Faust, but my enthusiasm appears to have been contagious. Radcliffe every year stages a major conference. They did one last year on food. They've done one on war and another on money. They eagerly signed on to "Tango!"

That was the origin of a conference that addresses issues of gender, class, Latin American culture and its exportation to other countries, translations and transformations of a vital cultural form. It takes up all those issues, puts them together, and gives them to us in a way that is both pleasurable and informative.

I originally spoke about tango to Drew Faust in terms of a Radcliffe conference. A tango conference became even more relevant to me when I became director of the Humanities Center. The main role of the Humanities Center is to bring together colleagues from

different departments, disciplines, and divisions of the university into conversations that combine academic expertise with intellectual passion.

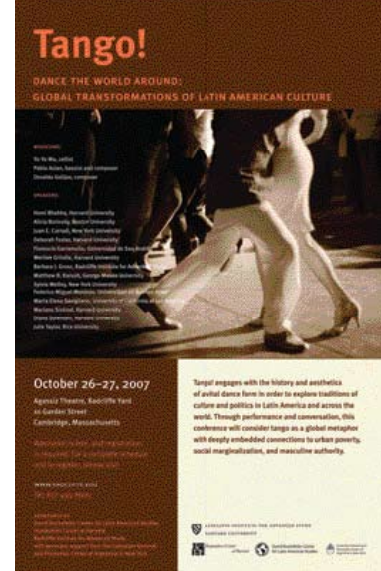
I thought tango would be a splendid way of connecting the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, and the people who are associated with DRCLAS, with Radcliffe, with the Humanities Center, with the performing arts at Harvard. We would also be able then to link up literary scholars, musicologists, urban historians, sociologists, dancers, and musicians. It is our great good fortune to have Yo-Yo Ma participate fully in this conference and be an advisor who sent us in many interesting directions, both intellectually and aesthetically. His conversation with the composer Osvaldo Golijov is no doubt a highlight of the conference.

"Tango!" explores the issues I've discussed above, looking at the local contexts of performance while, at the same time, posing larger questions of cultural transmissions. We are asking why tango has achieved such a remarkable success as a global metaphor. We are looking at what gives it the capacity to infuse diverse national and regional contexts across the globe with the spirit of Latin American performance. To help us answer these questions, lectures and panels will explore such topics as "Tango and Literature: Borges and Tango," "Tango as a Cultural Form: Music, Dance, Film," and "Tango as Politics: Gender, Class, and Urban Life."

The tango conference kicks off a program funded by the Mellon Foundation at the Humanities Center, which concentrates on "the regional and the global." Our hope is that every year we will focus on a particular region, explore the arts, the culture, the economics, the history of that region. We thought it would be wonderful to begin our engagement with Latin America with the tango conference. Through the year, it will be followed by other events focusing on Latin America. The tango conference from that perspective is a gateway for a range of collaborative, interdisciplinary events on the Latin American region, on connections within Latin America, and connections between Latin America and the rest of the world.

For me, the tango is both personal and political, both regional and global. I probably first saw tango performed in early films made about the life of Carlos Gardel, although I had heard the music already on my father's records. Carlos Gardel, the most famous of tango artists, was born on the shore of Río de la Plata; both Argentina and Uruguay claimed his birthplace. He died in a tragic plane crash in Medellín, Colombia. What better symbol could there be for an impassioned music that is indeed world music?

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# TANGO!

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*Tango, as Homi K. Bhabha points out in his introduction, is both personal and political, both regional and global. This section explores tango in its many facets.*

# Tango, Samba, Modernity and Nation

*It takes more than two*

BY FLORENCIA GARRAMUÑO

THE STORY BEGINS IN A PARIS CABARET, IN THE 1910S. SUDDENLY, the conductor of the orchestra—all Brazilian musicians—announces: “And now, ladies and gentlemen, a Brazilian Tango!” The story could have ended right there, if it weren’t for a group of Argentine tourists in the audience who rose up and started a fight: “This is impossible, the tango is Argentine.” Tango, indeed, *was Argentine*, but there was also a lively and effervescent Brazilian tango by some of the most interesting Brazilian musicians such as Ernesto de Nazareth and Chiquinha Gonzaga.

Even though in the 1910s, the tango’s nationality could still be disputed, by the 1930s the panorama had radically changed. In 1937, Carmen Miranda—“The Samba Ambassador”—recorded a song entitled *O tango e o samba (Tango and Samba)*:

Chegou a hora!  
Chegou!... Chegou!  
Meu corpo treme e ginga  
Qual pandeiro  
A hora é boa  
E o samba começou  
E fez convite a tango  
Pra parceiro  
Homem, yo no sé por qué te quiero  
Yo te tengo amor sincero  
Diz a muchacha do Prata  
Pero, no Brasil é diferente  
Yo te quiero simplemente  
Teu amor me desacata  
Habla castellano num fandango  
Argentino canta tango  
Ora lento, ora ligeiro  
Eu canto e danço, sempre que possa  
Um sambinha cheio de “bossa”  
Sou do Rio de Janeiro.

The song, which mixes samba and tango, clearly identifies each rhythm with a single national identity. The lyrics spell out the differences between Argentines and Brazilians as expressed by the music and the marked contrast between the rhythms and the corresponding instruments—bandoneón for tango, violão for samba.

On the one hand, the song views tango and samba and the national identities they supposedly represent in opposition to each other. Yet it also merges rhythms and language to create a song that

actually contradicts its exclusive quality. The ambivalence of this song—called on the disc label a *samba-tango*, a “genre,” as far as I know, of which this song is the only specimen—is paradigmatic of the ambivalence that arises on studying the construction of tango and samba as national symbols of Argentina and Brazil. From the fight in the Paris cabaret to Carmen Miranda’s song, the nationalization of samba and tango is completed and fully accomplished. How was this process achieved? And what does this process tell about the nationalization of a Latin American culture?

The two musical forms do share some formal features such as rhythmic predominance and the systematic use of a particular beat (known in the musical world as syncopation). In addition, tango and samba may even share a possible common genealogy. Some research indicates the habanera, a musical style from Cuba—as a possible origin for forms shared by samba and tango. There is also evidence of contacts between these two types of music.

Moreover, several events have both tango and samba—or maxixe, one of the Brazilian musical forms that contributed to samba’s development—as their protagonists. For instance, when tango was said to have been proscribed by Pope Pío X because of its overtly sensual nuances, a satirical quartet was published in a Brazilian magazine, *Cá e Lá*, in 1913:

Se o Papa soubesse  
O gosto que o tango tem  
Viria do Vaticano  
Dançar maxixe também.  
(If the Holy Father knew  
just how tasty is the tango,  
he’d come from the Vatican  
to dance maxixe, too)

A further example involves Carmen Miranda, the film star-singer who became known as “the lady in the tutti-frutti hat.” The story goes that the first time she was asked to sing a samba, she replied with surprise and, perhaps, some indignation, “How dare you, I am a tango singer!”

Even more important than formal features or historical encounters between the two forms, the cultural network in which both of them are enmeshed presents a series of surprising coincidences.

To name one example: the syncopation and the counterrhythms of tango and samba or maxixe at the turn of the 19th century—in combination with typical instruments or some particular lyrics—associated these musical forms with a savage primitivism that the nation was compelled to banish. Their primitiveness meant that they could never play a role in the construction of a national culture.

Argentine photographer Sergio Segura captures the elegance of tango performance as dance partners perform tango in shadow position.

## DANCE!

A caricature published in the magazine *La Ilustración Argentina* in 1882 makes that point quite clearly in a comic drawing representing the animal-like postures of the dancers. (“Negros bailando,” *La Ilustración Argentina*, No. 33, November 30, 1882, see website).

How could a national culture possibly be constructed on such typical and exotic forms that do not meet—at all—modernity’s standards?

By the 1930s, these very same counterrhythms could be associated with the avant-garde music of a Darius Milhaud—in fact inspired by samba and maxixe for his *Suite Brésilienne*—or a Stravinsky, who would later compose two tangos, one for piano and another for chamber orchestra. Both popular and erudite musical scenes were influenced by tango, samba and the other “dances brunes,” as they became known in Paris. A common trend in the musical language of the period, and not only in Latin America, rhythmic predominance—perceptible both in avant-garde and popular music—made tango and samba or maxixe into some of the most successful musical forms in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century.

The 1920s and 1930s involved a period of an intense and rapid modernization for Latin America. The idea of the primitive came to be tied to a vernacular concept of modernity. Such changes in the constructed meanings of primitivism negotiated the tension between

the complex—and at some points contradictory, for a Latin American country—demands of modernity and nation.

These transformations in the meaning of primitivism in this period are similar in many Latin American countries. This movement can be traced in Tarsila do Amaral’s paintings and Oswald de Andrade’s poems, in the *criollismo* of Jorge Luis Borges and the Argentine avant-garde group’s publication *Martín Fierro* or the *Revista de Antropofagia*, the Brazilian avant-garde magazine. Precisely during those decades, some of the most primitive and exotic features of the tango and the samba were emphasized in order to highlight their national characteristics. Music such as the samba, which accentuates the syncopation associated with African music, and the tango, which lingers in a nostalgia for a past world now lost, highlight these aspects. In addition, some contemporary discourses on tango and samba—novels, essays, poems, films, paintings and iconographic representations—are often complex elaborations of the primitive and exotic nature in these musical forms.

Primitivism was also associated with a modern sensibility through some visual representations of tango and samba. Emilio Pettoruti, one of the key figures of Argentine avant-garde, created some paintings with tango as their subject. *La canción del pueblo* (*The people’s song*) and *Bailarines* (*Dancers*) are just two of the many he painted.



*Baianas*, Cecília Meireles, in *Batuque, Samba e Macumba*, Martins Fonte Editora. All rights reserved, Solombra-Agência Literária.



*Bailarines* uses the modern language of cubism to paint a tango dance, reproducing tango's *corte y quebrada* with the angles and intersected planes of cubism. Thus, the painting dissociates itself from realist representation while at the same time referring to a national icon, evoking simultaneously the primitive and the modern, a combination that marks the emergence of a national form. Stressing the avant-garde character of this maneuver, reproductions of *Bailarines* and *La canción popular* were included in one of the issues of *Martín Fierro*, the journal of Argentina's avant-garde. In a text signed by Xul Solar, Pettorutti is acclaimed as "one of the painters of our *vanguardia criolla*."

In Brazil, Cecília Meireles chooses a different path to modernize samba. Her very "feminine" designs depict Afro-Brazilian women in their traditional dresses, but rendered with a sophisticated movement that could be compared to motifs in modern fashion designs. Meireles' designs—now included in the book *Batuque, Samba and Macumba*—were exhibited at the Pró-Arte Art Gallery in Rio de Janeiro, in 1933. (Fig. 4 and 5, *Baianas*) At the opening, anticipating the artistic happenings of later decades, the *Escola de Samba* da Portela performed one of its first shows. Together with paintings and texts by Emiliano Di Cavalcanti, Lasar Segall, Oswald de Andrade and Mário de Andrade, many samba representations of the period found in samba's primitivism a modern quality full of potential.

Perhaps the widest ramification of this association of primitivism with modernity can be seen in Jorge Luis Borges' 1933 book *Evaristo Carriego*. A reading of a popular urban poet, *Evaristo Carriego* reveals itself in fact to be a book on the city of Buenos Aires and the poetics it expresses. In it, Borges articulates a poetics based on some aesthetic principles he encountered in tango. The *compadrito*, tango's central character, and the music of courage, as Borges sees *real* tango, condense for Borges a national idiosyncrasy that, nonetheless, manifests also a universal drive.

Citing such authors as Jordanes, Homer, Quevedo, Hugo, Ariosto and Schopenhauer, Borges states that tango "transmits the bellicose joy that was attempted in previous eras by Greek and German rhapsodies." What becomes, then, of tango as a national icon? In a movement that later he will extend to his short stories, Borges employs simultaneous particularist and universalist strategies, producing a discourse on the nation that sustains an ambiguous relation both to the idea of nation and the concept of universality. In an article published some years earlier, he had claimed:

Contrary to the solemn chauvinism of fascists and imperialists, I have never incurred in that sort of intellectual blunders. I feel more *porteño* than Argentine and more from Palermo than any other neighborhood.... I am inept for patriotic exaltations and *lugonisms*: I am bored by visual comparisons and will rather listen to the tango *Loca* than to the National Anthem!

The almost infinite movement of particularization fragments the nation without ever abandoning the need to construct a discourse that can handle its vibrant heterogeneity. However, that heteroge-



Left: *La canción del pueblo*, 1927, 73,5 x 64,7 cm., oil on wood. Malba-Colección Costantini, Buenos Aires Right: *Bailarines*, 1918, 77 x 55 cm., oil on canvas. Museo Provincial de Bellas Artes Emilio A. Caraffa, Córdoba, Argentina. Both, All rights reserved, Fundación Pettorutti.

neity is kept in sometimes too strict and hierarchic boundaries. It is as if only because tango is—according to Borges—like a Greek rhapsody that it could and needs to be esteemed. But making this analogy eclipses many of tango's most contested features and the populations that played, danced and sang tango.

It is possible to read a figure of some Latin American modernities in this contingent and changing primitivism. As long as the need to construct a national culture coincided with the need to become a modern nation, that changing primitivism paved the way for the construction of a simultaneous national, primitive and modern culture. The historical condition for the modernization of a Latin American culture is inscribed in these convoluted relations: if the nationalization of a cultural form previously considered primitive presented some contradictions to modernization, these contradictions end up being negotiated by the proposition of a primitive and modern form as an alternative type of modernity. These forms embody a new, vernacular identity in those decades of relative optimism for Latin America.

The movement is, yet, clearly aporetic—a skeptical dance in and of itself. It reveals the construction of a national identity immersed in a complex exchange of gazes and transactions. Different discourses and actions, coming from very diverse sites and nations, come into play. Modernity and nation were, in those turbulent but challenging years, two contrasting vectors that, nonetheless, only defined themselves by negotiating their differences. If the association of primitivism to modernity risks the blurring of specificities and the consolidation of some sort of exoticisms, it also allows tango and samba to figure as sites of an alternative modernity.

In the interplay of cosmopolitanism and nationalism, the negotiation of differences in tango and samba not only drives joy and hope, but continues—as many *milongas* and carnivals keep showing—to build communities and enable intercultural communication.

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# Why I Do Not Like Tango

BY DIANA SORENSEN

I'M OUT: I'M SAYING IT: I DO NOT LIKE tango. I'm an Argentine who cannot dance tango, and has never liked it. When I'm in Buenos Aires, I love to see dancers (sleek or plump, young or old) in San Telmo, entirely focused on music and the entwined grammar of two bodies; I've taught tango as a cultural phenomenon in a course about Buenos Aires, and had fun watching my students' abandon as the sweepingly nostalgic edges of the *bandoneón* filled Sever Hall with their edgy sound—all the time wondering what about it exerted such magic.

My dislike for tango comes from early childhood experiences. On television, those angry lyrics articulated by glowering faces—caught up close by cameras enamored of mere propinquity—became the marks of a *ressentiment* I was not yet able to decode, but which reached me with its primal rage.

As I began to understand the lyrics that went along with such displays of violent emotion, I had to learn the meaning of words like “percanta,” “bacana,” “pelandruna,” “cambalache,” “pebeta,” “flor de fango,” “mishé” or “cotorro”—all connected with the world of prostitution or female betrayal. And even though over the years I have become quite literate in my country's *lunfardo*, the resonance of those gestures and those word clusters remains disturbing.

Why? Because of a prevalent misogyny—the mere acting out of a profound anxiety about masculinity which is expressed in many (admittedly not all) tango lyrics. In this sense, tango and *ressentiment* dance to the same tune: a sense of failure or inferiority is transferred to the “mina,” to the “percanta,” to the “milonguera.” A significant majority of the lyrics in tango produce a *vraisemblance* in which the male subject recognizes himself through a double move: first incarnating victimhood, and then transforming victimhood as an effective model for authority: the man who sings and complains is the most highly valued speaker. For him, life is unfair. But, much more importantly, that sense of unfairness is tangled up with women's betrayal. A “mishé” or a “cafishio” offers the triangulation that energizes the competitive tension between men. In an early tango from 1917, recorded by Carlos Gardel, “Mi noche triste,” the ailing male interpellates the cruel female:

Percanta que me amuraste  
En lo mejor de mi vida  
Dejándome el alma herida  
Y espinas en el corazón

This early tango is gentler than most: here what the abandoned male misses the most is the absence of domestic care: his place is “desarreglado, todo triste, abandonado.” But later tangos are less generous in their longing: a 1921 tango also recorded by Gardel, “Margot,” lashes against the “pelandruna abacanada” (the woman of low origins who has been seduced by riches):



“I want you,” says the man to the woman in Spanish, drawing out his vowels and embracing her. This colored wood cut was donated to the DRCLAS by former Robert F. Kennedy Visiting Professor Rafael Hernández.

ually, of course, she will be abandoned. With too few exceptions, tango lyrics go for the triangulation of desire: the other man (a “bacán”—wealthy man—or, much worse, a “cafishio”—pimp) and the lyrical voice are bound together in a competitive drive for the woman. The bond that links the two rivals, as Eve Sedgwick has shown, is as potent—or perhaps, more potent than—the bond with the fickle woman.

Of course, it is only fair to avow that tango lyrics fully express the disenchantment of a population whose dreams of economic and political success were never realized. Leave it to Enrique Discépolo's “Cambalache” (written in 1935, at the height of the “Década infame”) to convey the radical disenchantment of those who feel cheated by life:

Que el mundo fue y será una porquería,  
Ya lo sé...  
Vivimos revolcaos en un merengue  
Y en el mismo lodo  
Todos manoseaos...

To voice collective disgust, the man as authoritative speaker tells tales of victimization: self pity validates his voice. Women are rarely given that kind of legitimacy. Even when they seem to make it, as did, among others, Amelita Baltar and Sandra Luna, they are often saddled with words which obliterate the mark of a woman. Luna said it all: tango was born of a god who is “varón y compadrón.” But, come to think of it, perhaps that is the shrewdest ruse, after all: a woman can pose as a man, reclaim his voice “de varón y compadrón,” find authority in that voice—all the while merely posing as the *varón*, irresistibly parading his misery and his vanity.

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# MEMORIES OF TANGO

BY SYLVIA MOLLOY

I think tango and I think of women. I think tango and I think of Perón. Let me explain: as a child I used to hear tangos sung by our maid, a woman who had left the pampa to come down to the city, and whose political leanings were the exact opposite of those of my parents. Justa was a fervent *peronista*. Thanks to Perón she had discovered that she could be more than a maid. My mother let her have two afternoons off a week so that she could attend the School of Nursing founded by Evita. I remember how good she looked the day she graduated, decked in her brand new blue uniform, which she then hung carefully in her closet and put her white apron back on. But this is only indirectly related to tango. During Perón's first term in office, nationalism was the order of the day and radio stations were made to broadcast national music. National music meant the music of the provinces but it meant, above all, tango. Tango was so national that tango orchestras were called *orquestas típicas* – "typical" orchestras. Justa cleaned the house to the beat of tangos played on the radio and would sing along while I followed around. I remember *Zorro Gris*, for example, "Grey Fox," a characteristically misogynist tango where a man accuses the woman who left him of having a soul so cold she cannot warm it with her grey fox wrap. Perhaps I remember it because my mother also had a grey fox wrap, and the desiccated fox's head, lying between her breasts, both disturbed and fascinated me. But all this had little to do with Justa, who sang while she pushed a very heavy brush along the oak floors to make them shine. I learnt words: *percantá, bulín, gil*, words that I knew not to repeat before my parents, aware that neither Justa nor I would benefit from this vaunting of new knowledge. Justa also sang a tango that went "*Su nombre era Margot, / llevaba boina azul, / y en su pecho colgaba una cruz.*" I liked that tango because my mother's name was Margot. Justa liked it, I suspect, because it afforded her the perverse pleasure of shouting out my mother's given name instead of the usually diffident "*Señora.*" Tango, the language of tango, was the voice of resistance. I identified with Justa but never learned the words to any one tango, just fragments. Every now and then I recite them to myself, use them as a charm that does not necessarily ward off evil but brings pleasure, much in the same way I turn to stray verses from Racine, memorized roughly at the same time. These are literary luxuries: they comfort me.

I think tango and I think of the woman who taught me to dance it. "She knows how to lead," people said admiringly of my aunt. Leading was crucial to tango and role-playing essential. My father, who was a bad dancer, did not know how to lead and seemed not to care. My aunt, instead, moved with incredible dexterity, leading the body of her partner with the lightest of touches. She was able to make her partner's body–mine, on occasion–do, as if by its own initiative, whatever she wanted it to do.

It is curious that in a dance with such specific roles—the leader, the one who is led—there is so much gender instability. This is not just my perception: any critical study of tango mentions these gender oddities. At the beginning tango was supposedly a dance between men. As such, scholars suggest – perhaps not wanting to consider other discomfiting possibilities – it was the enactment of a

duel in which the more daring man won the lead. Sexuality is only recognized when tango goes heterosocial: then, instead of being a contest between lowlifes, it becomes a scene of seduction between a man and a woman. Yet the homosocial nature of tango never quite disappears. Salacious postcards of the twenties often show scantily-clad women dancing a tango together. Films contribute their bit: think of the immensely seductive tango danced by Dominique Sanda and Stefania Sandrelli in Bertolucci's *The Conformist* or, for that matter, in the transvestite, parodic tango performed by Jack Lemmon and Joe Brown in *Some Like It Hot*.

I think tango and I think of certain women's voices, like the voice of Olga Orozco, the poet, who, like the "*Malena*," celebrated in the tango by that name, knew how to sing tangos *como ninguna*, like no one else. Olga's version of "*Sur*," sung in her low-pitched, smoky voice, gave one the shivers. I think too of the long tradition of female tango singers I discovered as an adult, starting out with Azucena Maizani and Rosita Quiroga, continuing with Ada Falcón, Libertad Lamarque, Tita Merello, and still alive in Susana Rinaldi and Adriana Varela. Even in those cases—or perhaps especially in those cases—tango showed its ambiguous streak, its tendency to transvestism, to provocative sexual confusion. These women, some, in fact, in drag—Azucena Maizani often performed dressed like a neighborhood tough—physically took over the male "*I*" singing the lyrics. But tango's transvestite effects do not need an actual change of dress. Simple linguistic transvestism does it just as well, operating the twist, the gender crisscrossing through a repossessed first person. The primal scene of tango, its mourning and melancholy, stages a male "*I*" mourning the absence of a woman who has left him for a richer lover or a more glamorous life. But when that "*I*" is embodied by a woman, a woman who mourns the loss of another woman and sings her desperate love to her *not* imitating male diction but *in her own voice*, tango fully reveals its complexity, its infinite seduction.

I have said that I only remember fragments of tangos. But Argentines, even those of us who did not grow up dancing or singing tangos, casually quote them when we speak, not really knowing what tango we're quoting from. "*Veinte años no es nada*," "Twenty years is nothing," a line sung by Gardel, has passed into language. Argentines speak through tango, or rather we "speak tango": "*cuesta abajo en la rodada*," "*no habrá más penas ni olvida*." Tango belongs to what Borges calls our "slight mnemonic archive," a random collection to which we refer, seriously or in jest, and more often than not seriously *and* in jest. Borges wrote somewhere that the tango "*Loca*" touched him more than the national anthem. My mother used to say she wanted "*La Cumparsita*" played at her funeral.

A friend of mine—to go back to women—suffers from Alzheimer's and seldom speaks these days but she remembers bits of tango. If I say to her "*Veinte años no es nada*" she joins in, without missing a beat, as if waking from a dream, "*que febril la mirada errante en las sombras te busca y te nombra*." She doesn't remember her mother's name or what she had for lunch ten minutes ago but tango has the power to bring her back.

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# ALL TANGLED UP IN TANGO

BY ALBA BARBERIA

Entanglements are hard to explain. My life probably started with a tango, playing along in the radio close to my mother and my first screaming efforts to breathe.

Radio was so important in people's lives then, and tango meant a lot to my father. He sang it in the shower, whistled it on his way to work and made the house stand still in the night when he would sit at the piano and deliver a performance worthy of a place on the stage of the Colón Theater. The notes would minimize our childish and mischievous pranks because it was almost impossible to concentrate on anything else; the music was so powerful, so emotional, so full of meaning that we were perhaps too small to grasp.

My Mom would hum the words softly to my brothers and me. Later on, when we inquired about them, she would recite the lyrics of the songs by heart, enhancing the hidden poetic images. She never sang them.

When we complained that we did not understand this music, Dad played us "La Calesita," a song that led our imaginations to wander about the twirling Buenos Aires merry-go-rounds, the neighborhood cobblestoned streets and shady plazas and the thrilling experience of winning a free ride by chance with "la sortija." He told us stories about his days in the big city, his colorful Italian grandfather, Radio El Mundo and one of his favorite tango innovators, Julio De Caro, stories that proved to be more interesting than Cinderella or Bambi. He found among our favorite toys a *bandoneón* keyboard and explained about his orchestra's days in my hometown of Esperanza, Santa Fe, in Argentina, where he played since he was 17, and about the voice hidden in the instrument's deep bellows. We were mesmerized for days, caressing the mother-of-pearl keys and dreaming about its voice. I guess that we imagined it was some sort of Aladdin's lamp, and the voice of tango would rise from it at any given moment.

Adolescence brought different emotions and then the lyrics of tangos gained more of a meaning. The complexity of the world of adults and the subtleties of human relations were finally making sense to me. Then came love, marriage, three beautiful children, the efforts of adjusting to a new culture, a new place in the planet.

Years went by and my husband was the one that brought tango to me in a whole different level. He took me by the hand to a different world: dance, a new love that opened the Pandora's box of my musical childhood memories. He has a truly Milonguero heart and gave me the courage to try to dance tango. I never imagined that after thirty years of living together, we would discover a new language, a new way of communicating. We did not start dancing at thirty or at forty, we started to live and breathe tango at the age most people start liking elevator music or using medications against arthritis.

I was self conscious and timid, always afraid to make mistakes or to be laughed at, but his enthusiasm pulled me, and he dragged me to the very first lessons. It was an amazing discovery, the thrill of understanding the meaning of a slight pressure in the back, a tighter embrace, a swing of the hips, a hint of a step. I

learned dance movements that seemed to contain a true philosophy of life: respect your partner, wait for his guide, adorn the silences with beautiful gestures, and try not to get stepped on!

We found live tango music thousands of miles from Argentina at a Las Vegas casino. It felt like Ali Baba discovering the cave full of treasures: the gripping sound of the *bandoneón* made our hearts miss a few beats with a shock. We started a feverish search for opportunities to learn and improve our skills and places to dance, even special shoes to wear. We found workshops, places to practice, fantastic teachers and Milongas from California to New York to Miami.

Tango started lingering behind every one of our projects and every trip. The most important part of any vacation or trip was searching for a nearby Milonga—a term we thought an exclusive to Argentina's lexicon, that had become universally popular—so specific details about where and when to dance were floating around cyberspace waiting for our searches.

Sharing the music that awakens so many memories in me did not come easy. Sometimes I would watch people dancing and wondered if they were gripped by tango the way I was, if an emotional load was putting a lump in their throats or a tear in their eyes. I did not want the music distorted, stereotyped or misinterpreted as a whole bunch of mechanical, showy steps, the rose clasped between the teeth, the gash in the short skirt. I wanted to dance tango in a way that will make everyone understand the way it was born and raised on the streets of Buenos Aires; the true voice of the people: without distinctions of social status, skin color, profession, job, age or income level: authentic, genuine, tender, humane, arrogant, bittersweet and passionate. After dancing tango for about six years, mostly in the United States, after so many beautiful experiences, after meeting so many wonderful people and making the dearest of friends, I have come to the conclusion that tango does not need explanations, translations, comments or historical quotes. I have witnessed the music of my beloved country engulfing and enrapturing people of different ages, size, shapes and colors in this country too. I know now that tango will continue its magical journey through the hearts and bodies of people, just because, in this technologically savvy, individualistic, material world, every one can still be bewitched by the warmth of a simple, natural, powerful, warm, deeply felt embrace.

So, here we are, waiting for the next Milonga the way an adolescent awaits Prom Night, and thanking my dear Argentina for this perpetual, exhilarating, passionate entanglement with the dance and the music of Tango.

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**Alba Barberia** is a trained child therapist, who lives in Santa Maria, California, with her husband and dance partner, Juan Mario. Lorena Barberia, a long time DRCLAS staff member, is her oldest child. Alba's father, Alejandro N. Balboni (1914-2006), was a piano player in several small orchestras in Esperanza, Argentina. His recordings have not survived. Alba recommends <<http://www.planetatango.com>> or <<http://www.tangoaficionado.com>> for U.S. calendars of tango events.



Top: High heels are characteristic of a tango dancer. Bottom: Alba Barberia's father sits on the piano bench with orchestra.





# How Sweet as Long as It Lasted

## *Contributions to a Critique of Tango*

BY RAFAEL FILIPPELLI Y FEDERICO MONJEAU

**T**ANGO IS ONCE AGAIN OCCUPYING A FUNDAMENTAL PLACE IN the world's cultural offerings. The interest goes back a couple of decades when Astor Piazzolla's music drew interpreters of classical music and jazz. In Argentina, tango now has a privileged position in the tourist market, where from time to time it goes hand in hand with such attractions as the *bife de chorizo*, the star of Argentine barbecue.

This outburst of passion for tango, this paroxysm, influences forms of cultural production, as well as consumption. Today, tango takes diverse forms of expression. It's not just the tourists who are flocking to tango. The younger generation listens to tango and plays it, as seen by the proliferation of new orchestras. And women are also filling the ranks of traditionally masculine lines of *bandoneones* of the new Orquesta Escuela (School Orchestra), conducted by old-timer Emilio Balcarce, which has at least three female musicians.

This resurgence of tango has been strongly impeded by dance, the purely conservative force within tango; since the 40s, dance has been an obstacle to innovations. Historically, each orchestra had its own dance followers. Today, tango has reconciled with the distant past, leaving behind sad post-Piazzollian cliché-saturated path.

Post-Piazzolla, tango began to return to the older idiom of orchestral arrangements and idioms—not only those of the *orquesta típica*, but also of small groups of homey *criollo* music and duets of *bandoneón* and guitar. A certain old-time, almost archaic style, has also influenced some singers, which is completely understandable, given the expressive saturation of 50s singers like the later Roberto Goyeneche, later taken up by women tango artists such as Adriana Varela. The archaic style has left its mark, but new singers are faced with the problem of the lack of a school, a genealogy. The historicist perspective in this case finds an insurmountable obstacle in the vocal genre, since in the past song was so linked to the orchestras. Conductors Aníbal Troilo and Carlos Di Sarli told their vocalists how they had to sing, confirmed in recordings of rehearsals in which Troilo pushed Alberto Marino to his highest register: “Come on, Marinito, you can do better.”

But it is not only Troilo and his orchestra who have disappeared. So has their public. One needs to ask for whom the singers are performing; dancing floors do not preserve much of a historical truth; also lost is the decisive role of radio, where orchestras performed live. Tango composition is not on the rise either; Piazzolla was undoubtedly tango's last great composer. The tango has its “standards,” a wide-ranging list with examples of extraordinary quality, but the richness and perhaps the historical progress of the genre is centered more on interpretation than composition. This is one of the existential differences between tango and folklore, in which the technical demands of interpretation are less decisive. Perhaps at a particular point in time, a form with such uniform characteristics



as the tango simply stopped admitting innovations; all progress in composition had to assume the form of a rupture, which is what Piazzolla attempted in diverse ways and with diverse results.

### THE DE CARO LEGACY

Piazzolla developed the orchestra model inherited from Julio De Caro, the matrix of modern tango. De Caro is to orchestra what



This historical reenactment depicts tango in Paris in 1920.



Carlos Gardel is to the sung tango. But perhaps in De Caro this stamp is even stronger because of the rupture and the division in camps that he produces. The music coincides chronologically with Louis Armstrong's Hot Five in 1925, with trumpet, clarinet, trombone, piano and banjo, or the Hot Seven, in 1927, which added tuba and drums, forming a parallel between the vital cycles of jazz and of tango that ought to be taken into consideration.

The tango decade of the 40s was mounted on De Caro's legacy, with different orchestras complementing each other, rather than standing out individually. The art of tango interpretation develops on two fronts: musical arrangement and its execution, the written and the unwritten. Generally, arrangements correspond to an orchestra's style and that of its conductor, although not always. Argentino Galván's 1946 arrangement of "Recuerdos de Bohemia" for Troilo's orchestra is a clear example; its vanguardism must have stretched the orchestra's limits. Galván turns the structure of tango on its head and develops an open arrangement in the pure style of chamber music, with strings dominating. Thus, his arrangement evokes not only bohemian life, but also the Central-European landscape of Moldavian Bohemia, with the introduction of the cello and its exquisite tonal ambiguity. The final part of the piece is reserved for the entrance of singer Alberto Marino. You can't help wondering what Troilo and especially poor Marino thought, since the latter was relegated to a little more than half a minute in the second part of the tango. Already, the singer is beginning to be expelled from the tango, a trend that would later become explicit with Piazzolla.

Galván's radical formation highlights how tango composition since the 40s has become a veritable laboratory in musical arrangement. Frequently, these arrangements are stylized pieces that expressively transform elements from the original piece. There's the example of Tito Gobbi's marvelous tango, "Orlando Goñi," performed by the Pugliese orchestra in 1965, in which the trio section is developed in a totally lyrical form with the intervention of the violins and the silencing of the *bandoneones*.

Horacio Salgán, the supreme codifier of the genre, unifies the written and the unwritten. For example, his arrangement of "Recuerdo," for instance, takes Pugliese's use of *bandoneón*, just as he wrote it, and adds another layer of accompanying syncopated piano, an instrumental tango that contains one piece within the other. Salgán's orchestra has layers, which are also historical layers, as seen in the lyrical counter-melody that he imposed on the old tango rhythm of Mendizábal's "El entrerriano."

Salgán diversifies the orchestra without sacrificing the color of the tango, with percussive effects added through the unusual use of traditional instruments such as the noise of sandpaper on a violin or thumping on the piano; that is, percussion without drums. He also incorporates the bass clarinet to fuse with the sound of the *bandoneones*. For Salgán, tango has a limit to its form and also its sound.

Tango is also influenced by jazz, although perhaps more in a psychological than material fashion. Piazzolla envied the humor of jazz because to him the tango orchestra always seemed somewhat bitter and regimented; there is evidently a jazz influence in the solos and in the improvised imitations between the *bandoneón* and Osvaldo Manzi's piano in the central part of "Revolucionario," with the 1970 quintet. Yet it is difficult to establish if Piazzolla's use of the electric guitar also comes from the jazz world or only from the formidable instrumental detail that he introduced into tango in 1955 with the octet. It's most likely that Piazzolla took a certain rhythmic impulse from jazz, with hints of bebop. However, his principal rhythmic invention involves a displacement of the music's accent; while the primitive tango (or the *habanera*) divides the rhythm into two beats, modern tango divides it into four, and Piazzolla divides it into eight.



Piazzolla operated a crucial transformation of tango. He composed tangos altering its rhythms; he stripped tango of dancing, one of its fundamental material protocols.

### **GARDEL AND HIS SONG**

Singer Carlos Gardel established his model with such a perfect voice that although it sometimes seems that the decadence of sung tango didn't begin until the end of the 50s, it really ended in 1935 with his plane crash in Medellín, Colombia.

Yet Gardel is not the only possible model for sung tango, although most subsequent singers did follow in his tradition. They had abundant voices with a certain imitative quality that remained mindful of lyrics. They were singers of melody, able to sing a little above the beat. For the singer from Gardel's school, expression is a question of musical temperament, of measured dramatic art.

Troilo's singers are the best indication of the breadth of Gardel's model, encompassing a wide range of singers and styles. Raúl Berón, for example, was a high baritone who could easily reach tenor notes, although timbre is only one aspect of style. Tango has given us few pure tenors. A good part of singers up until the 50s were baritones with tenor qualities and that became the typical sound of tango.

Voice register is a point of modulation in the historical development of the tango. With the disappearance of the singer from the orchestra, this type of register (needed by the orchestra as a kind of privileged instrument) also vanishes. And this disappearance implies an important rhythmic question. A traditional expression in the tango is "singing to the beat." That doesn't mean that the singer can't abandon the orchestra's rhythm, getting ahead or behind it at times to create a feeling of suspense or going against the flow, but at a certain point, the singer needs to catch up with the musicians. Gardel was a master of anticipation, as shown in his version with guitars of "Viejo smoking."

And although the voices should not be thought of as operatic, tango would also have its veristic phase; from the 60s onward, voices such as those of Raúl Lavié and Roberto Yanés display a new sensibility, that of ballad singers. Gesticulation and a dubious idea of good taste begin to substitute for technique. Singers in the style of Gardel no longer have a place, and the very concept of a Gardel school is transformed into a not so veiled critique of post-60s tango ideology. This change in singer style was related to the change in the venue for tango. Performance moved from the dance floor or

Buenos Aires at 3 a.m. hosts tango dancers and spectators.

the cabaret to the café concert, the Latin American version of a dinner theater, and the loss of the dance venue surely was fatal for the tradition of tango artists singing to the beat.

In tango today, the equilibrium has been lost and it is impossible to recuperate. The orchestras don't exist; the environment is not there; in some cases, only a vague memory remains. Voice seems impossible to reconstruct, perhaps because it is tango's most emotional instrument, connection or vibration. Tango interpreted by the orchestras of the 40s and 50s, in which 20 to 30 extraordinary singers ranged from the very good to the outstanding, is along with jazz the best popular music of the last century. With the exception of the efforts of Troilo, Pugliese and Salgán, everything went downhill in the world of tango. A combination of factors contributed to tango's progressive decline. Awareness of no longer being center-stage in the cultural industry led to true musical caricatures.

The singer Julio Sosa, nicknamed *el varón del tango* (the tango guy), warrants a mention here, since his singing often leads to considerable misunderstanding. After having sung in several orchestras, Sosa, ensconced in *machista* and ill-bred character roles, decided at the end of the 50s to create his own orchestra, conducted by the sophisticated musician Leopoldo Federico. The orchestra, featured on television, became a huge success. An illusion was created of the rebirth of tango. Goyeneche joked: "If Sosa hadn't died [in 1964], I'd still be driving a cab." The odd thing about this popularity is that a group of intellectuals were the fiercest defenders of a singer so vulgar that, it was once said, he coughed as he sang.

From then on, and until just a few years ago, tango disappeared from the musical horizon. It first emerged again with revived and lasting enthusiasm for its choreography; later, young musicians became enamored of the tango genre in two distinct directions: on one hand, groups that incorporated saxophone and drums in a hybrid and watered down fusion; on the other, new orchestras that play all of Caló's or Pugliese's arrangements from the 50s. In the best of cases, tango today is a well-intentioned archeology of a musical genre.

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# EL TANGO EN EL AULA: MI EXPERIENCIA EN ROCHESTER, NUEVA YORK

**POR IRENE COROMINA**

Cuando era adolescente, el tango no me llamaba mucho la atención. Me parecía ser un tipo de música excesivamente melodramático, y que además gustaba sólo a los “viejos”. Como sucede con tantos argentinos criados en el exterior, el tango fue entrando en mi vida por una puerta chica, a intervalos regulares, con cada viaje a Córdoba, pasando, cómo no, por Buenos Aires. Un poco en la calle, otro poco por TV, y el resto a través de las conversaciones familiares donde los mayores solían recordar a un cierto morocho que cada día cantaba mejor.

El tango se convirtió para mí en objeto de estudio cuando, muchos años después, la jefa del Departamento de Lenguas Extranjeras de la universidad donde trabajaba—Rochester Institute of Technology—me pidió que diseñara un curso sobre la cultura hispánica (en inglés, dado el escaso número de estudiantes hispanohablantes). Como no sería ni un curso de literatura ni un curso sobre mujeres (mis dos especialidades), tuve que ser audaz, y tomar un rumbo totalmente distinto. Recordé entonces aquel compañero ocasional de mi juventud, el tango. Me dediqué a investigar fuentes, a buscar grabaciones, a estudiar la historia cultural

**Decir “tango” es evocar el baile, la música y las letras. A las clases añadimos la lectura de textos de sociología, antropología e historia, entre otros.**

de la Argentina. Durante este período preparatorio, mi asistente *in situ* fue mi madre, Marta, gran lectora y amante del tango, amiga de los libreros de Córdoba. El resultado fue la creación del nuevo curso titulado “Cultural Perspectives on the Tango” (Perspectivas culturales sobre el tango), hace dos años.

Decir “tango” es evocar el baile, la música y las letras. Consciente de que mi formación en lengua y literatura me permitiría comprenderlo desde un solo ángulo, recurrí a un músico para explicar cómo se construye aquel magnífico soporte para las letras que yo traduciría y analizaría. Mi mano derecha fue mi colega y amigo, Carl Atkins, jefe de la sección de música del Departamento de Bellas Artes de RIT, musicólogo, compositor e intérprete de jazz. El curso que dictamos en dos oportunidades (primavera de 2005 y de 2006) se proponía explorar el tango como fenómeno sociohistórico y artístico, mediante el estudio de la música y las letras. A las clases añadimos la lectura de textos que provenían de varias disciplinas (musicología, sociología, antropología, historia, literatura, lingüística), además de cuatro películas.

Los estudiantes universitarios estadounidenses son graciosos. Muchos, con una ingenuidad asombrosa, preguntaron: ¿Vamos a aprender a bailar? ¿Debemos matricularnos con nuestra pareja? ¿Cuenta este curso como uno de educación física? Por lo visto, el tango era para ellos nada más y nada menos que el

baile: precisamente lo que permanecía fuera de nuestro alcance, dado que ni Carl ni yo sabíamos bailar. Para satisfacer estas inquietudes, y para hacer justicia al tango (después de todo, hasta Discépolo reconoció que el tango se podía bailar), invitamos a una pareja de profesionales, Agustín Ramos y Cassandra George, quienes, entre ochos y voleos, demostraron que el tango era una poderosa arma de seducción, lo que despertó la curiosidad de estos jóvenes.

Entre las sorpresas gratas, cuento la cantidad de estudiantes matriculados cada año (entre 25 y 30), el igual número de hombres y mujeres, de distintos orígenes (puertorriqueño, alemán y vietnamita, entre muchos otros) y el hecho de que la mayoría ya tenía nociones de música o de lengua española. Aunque el curso no exigía una preparación previa en ninguna de estas dos disciplinas, el hecho de que casi todos los estudiantes matriculados conocieran a Carl o a mí por haber tomado nuestras clases, creó un clima ameno de entrada, y facilitó la tarea de aprendizaje enormemente, puesto que no hubo hielo que romper. El trabajo se dividió del modo siguiente: sobre un total de 40 horas, 22 fueron

clases magistrales; 8 se dedicaron a películas (entre ellas, *El día que me quieras*, primer contacto de estos estadounidenses con el mito gardeliano), 4 a presentaciones orales, 4 a un examen y a la revisión para el examen final, y 2 a la sesión de baile. Los estudiantes fueron calificados a base a dos presentaciones, dos exámenes y tres ensayos. El mayor desafío planteado por el curso fue la escasez

de fuentes en lengua inglesa. Esta limitación me permitió descubrir joyas que hubieran pasado desapercibidas de otro modo, tales como los escritos de Marta Savigliano, Julie M. Taylor y David William Foster.

Entre muchos momentos memorables, rescato aquellos en los que compartí perlas de sabiduría tanguera (“en la vida, se cuidan los zapatos andando de rodillas” del tango *¿Qué me van a hablar de amor!* con letra de Homero Expósito y música de Héctor Stamponi), y versos bellísimos (“nostalgias de las cosas que han pasado, arena que la vida se llevó” del tango *Sur*, con letra de Homero Manzi y música de Aníbal Troilo). Como comentó más de un estudiante, al finalizar el curso: “Me matriculé sin saber qué esperar. Descubrí un mundo que no conocía, y aprendí un montón. ¡Quiero hablar español y viajar a Buenos Aires!” Me uno al loco de Ferrer y le digo: “¡Vení! ¡Volá! ¡Vení!” (*Balada para un loco*; letra de Horacio Ferrer y música de Astor Piazzolla).

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*This article discusses the development of a tango class “Cultural Perspectives on the Tango” at the Rochester Institute of Technology.*

## TRANSFORMING LIVES

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*Dance has the power to transform lives, whether through formal projects like Colombia's Colegio del Cuerpo or the informal democratizing force of the dance floor. Dance is a form of social agency for individuals and communities.*

# Dancehall Democracy

*Social Space as Social Agency*

BY DORIS SOMMER

**“**DE DÓNDE ES USTED?”, I ASKED THE BEST Latin dancer I had ever followed around a dance floor. It was several summers ago in “centrally isolated,” as the locals say, Ithaca, New York, where a friendly gay club went Latin on Wednesday nights. Once a week we broke up the bucolic boredom that helps to make Cornell University so intellectually restless.

“Sorry I don’t speak Spanish,” said my partner.

“Where are you from, then?” I code-switched

“From Bosnia,” he answered. “My name is Nedim.”

That stopped me short. He had kept me in step through changes in rhythm and turns I only half anticipated, but now he lost me. Still grateful for his creative control as a dance partner who knows how to heighten the fun of following by almost losing the partner with unpredictable segues even when the moves were familiar, I let my mind wander. It went back to Brooklyn, to my cultural roots and to those of salsa. Throughout the 1960s and 70s, in this North of Caribbean island, deterritorialized music was mixing one rhythm with another in patchwork patterns where guaguacó interrupted rumba and slid into merengue anticipating rumba’s return. Though the Bronx and Manhattan

Young and old, both experienced and novice tango dancers, enjoy themselves at a recent Boston Tango Festival.

must have been spots just as hot for salsa, Brooklyn stays central for me, maybe because master pianist Larry Harlow—“el niño judío de Brooklyn”—made the musical mixes especially open to cultural chameleons like myself. Years later, in 2005, we would celebrate him and other unlikely *salseros* in “The Jewish Latin Mix: Making Salsa.”

Hosted by Cultural Agents at Harvard University, with participation from the Smithsonian Institute and the Americas Society, “The Jewish Latin Mix” honored the ways that music builds inter-ethnic bridges so wide that everyone is invited to dance. The connections now link the base in New York City to fans and followers throughout Americas, Europe and beyond. Along with Harlow, there was Leon Gast, who filmed *Our Latin Thing* (1973), *Salsa* (1976), and won an Oscar for *When We Were Kings* (1996); Martin Cohen, photographer and founder/president of Latin Percussion, the company that developed the major source of Afro-Latino percussion instruments, and Marty Sheller, composer, arranger, and Grammy winning producer who worked closely with Willie Colón and Celia Cruz. From the provisional Latin quarter of Ithaca, my thoughts continued to wander to other clubs in other cities less exotic for Latin music where I had found dancers like Nedim creating urban oases of sociability. A kind of utopian *Jetztzeit*, to use Walter Benjamin’s word, flashes through memories of



dancehalls in Monterrey, Montevideo and Montreal, in Santo Domingo and San Juan (where the guy in a baseball cap and too chubby to be Elvis Crespo turned out to be the real thing when he invited us to an outdoor concert the next day), dance floors are the spaces of urban utopia.

I mean by utopia that everyone fits in, not by looking and acting the same, but by improvising variations on a given theme because dance is a creative art that values difference over conformity. Ernesto Laclau might describe the design of differences on the dance floor as “universal” in the contem-

porary sense. For the classics, universalism meant conformity so that difference looked like a deviation. But for post-moderns, universality is the space that accommodates differences (a language made up of many styles; a government sustained by divergent views). Its very name suggests how salsa depends on differences of rhythm, origin, mix.

Latin nightclub of the late 20th century is no more. In its wake, a rhizome of lesser locales now multiplies the points of entry to a radically altered world of exquisite dance that has replaced the democratizing denizens of basic moves and broad-based grace. Throughout the 1970s and 80s, hundreds of clubs throughout New York were packed nightly with Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Cubans and other Latinos dancing to the music of Héctor Lavoe, Willie Colón and Ray Barretto. And though salsa is experiencing a revival in popular culture, with the film “El Cantante,” a recent *New York*

of inner-city dance halls. At the entrance to typical *gafieras*, a list of commandments dissuades all comers from anticipating anything but exemplary civic behavior with such instructions as “Gentlemen will be respectful and not get drunk” and “Ladies will accept invitations to dance from gentlemen who ask them appropriately.”

The democratizing design of Caribbean dance has been clear at least since the Cuban Wars of Independence, with their vanguard of leading Black militants and the whites who slowly learned to keep step. But readers of novels like *Cecilia Valdés* about the 1830s already know that the popular *bailes de cuna*—where classes mixed freely—had undoubtedly developed a collective taste for freestyle partnering. Dances in the revolutionary camps turned out to be testing grounds for a nascent democratic culture. Campaign diaries collected by historian Ada Ferrer are telling: two similar incidents, one in 1876 during the first war and the other in 1895 during the final war show that dance became the cipher of democracy.

One night in 1876 at a gathering in a rebel camp, a white woman rejected the overtures of an officer of color. The officer became furious, insisting that she refused him only because of his color. In anger, he then threatened her and anyone who dared to court her in the future. Twenty years and two wars later, at a dance at another rebel camp, another black officer tried to court a white woman. He asked her to dance, and when she refused, the black officer again became angry and confronted the woman with an accusation similar to the one made in 1876. “You won’t dance with me” he said, “because I am black.” In this instance, however, the officer made no threats. Instead he gave a long speech on valor, patriotism, and equality, and he condemned her refusal as anti-patriotic. Now, to be racist was to be anti-Cuban. (Ada Ferrer, “The Silence of Patriots: Racial Discourse and Cuban Nationalism, 1868-1898” paper at “Our America and the Gilded Age: José Martí’s Chronicles of Imperial Critique,” Irvine, January 27-28 1995. 20-21.)

By the time Arjun and I passed through the Copa’s portals and realized that the delay was due to bouncers who frisked the men and scrutinized the women up and down, our participant observer vision had become focused enough to notice the miracle inside: Beyond the floor-to-ceiling florescent palm

## Dance floors are the spaces of urban utopia. Surely urban dance halls were an inspiration for shaping a better world through their democratic culture.

Surely urban dance halls were an inspiration for shaping a better world. Seriously. I heard myself saying so about eight years ago after an international meeting at the Social Science Research Council to discuss what kind of scholarship and education could promote equitable development worldwide. A day of speeches and debates left us academics clear about obstacles to the good life but mostly clueless about the goal.

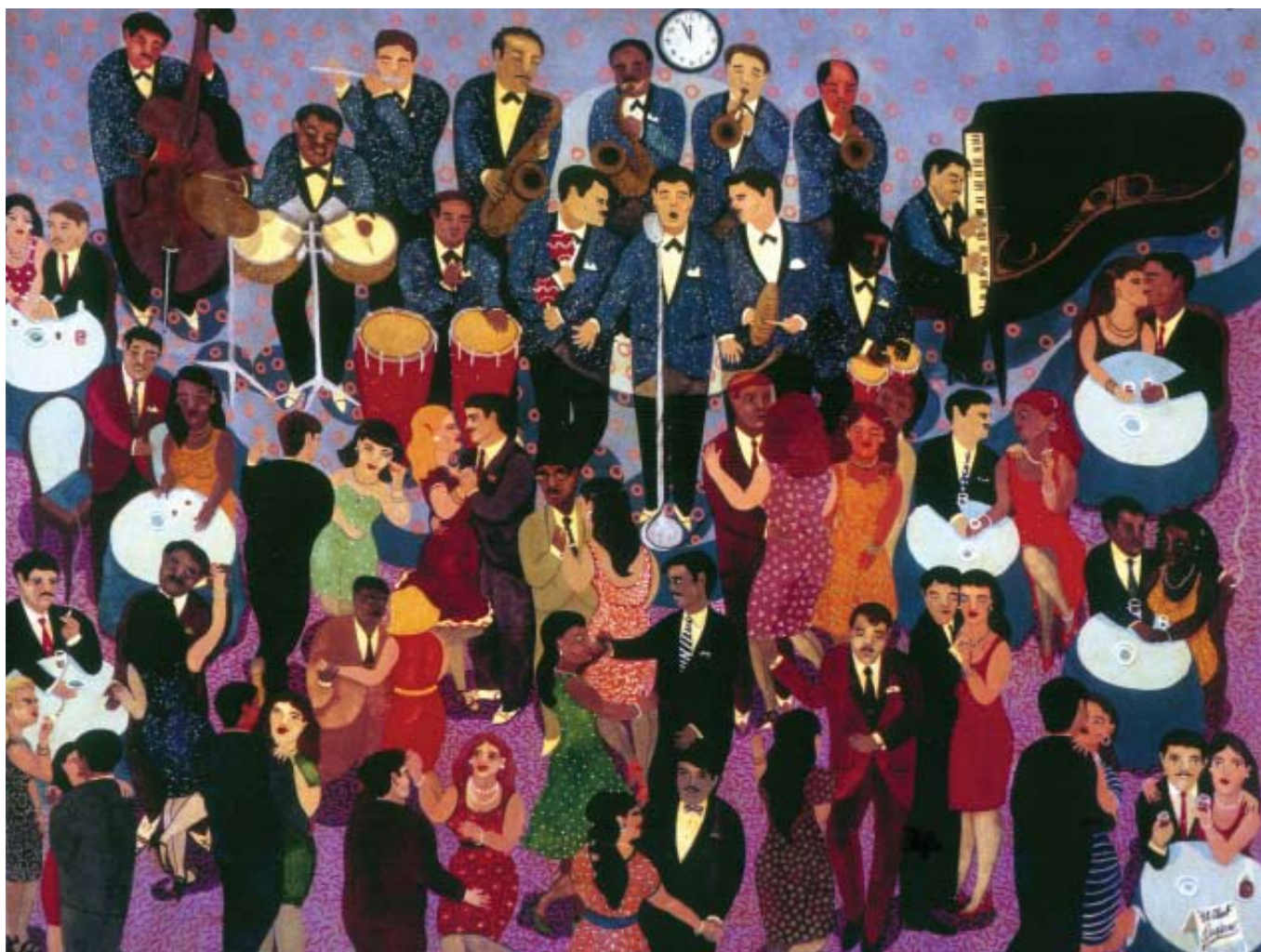
“What would a better world look like?” I asked my anthropologist friend Arjun Appadurai at the end of the meeting. I teased him some more about not being able to say what it was that we were working towards. “Do you want a glimpse of a world you can dream towards?” I went on. “Let’s look at dance as a cultural agent.” So the intrepid anthropologist let me lead him, loathe to allow his skepticism to sidetrack us from a field trip into the night of New York.

Half an hour into a taxi ride that brought us only two blocks closer to the river at 10 p.m. that Friday night was enough to make us go native and walk the rest of the way to 57 Street between 10th and 11th Avenues. There once stood the late Copacabana of glorious memory. This legendary

*Times* article observed “the dance form has largely disappeared from the New York clubs where it was born. The Cheetah Discotheque, Ochentas, Corso Ballroom have all long been closed.” Even the last holdout, a consolation Copa in Chelsea, closed in July 2007. “Today salsa is kept alive by an ardent band of semiprofessional dancers, not only in New York but around the world.”

But on that night, the midtown club close to the river was still marking its prominent place on the street with a long line of patrons patiently waiting to get inside. The line was something of an antechamber to heaven, like a programmed pause to prepare roughened souls for the refinement on the other side. Detained for the while, we stared at other celebrants who, like us, lagged behind the threshold and inched toward the neon light and the electrifying music.

Dark people, light people, and every shade of African and Asian mixed together, sometimes with white, some old ones, more young ones, maybe a mother with young girls or a madam with youngish girls, mixed couples and hybrid singles, glamorous gowns and skintight jeans, the lineup seemed as endless in variety as in length. Difference is the norm in these multicolored and intergenerational havens of strict civility that Nick Quijano portrays with his full palette from Puerto Rico to New York. Anyone who mistakes the atmosphere as informal or unstructured may be surprised to see what amounts to a written contract of comportment on entering the Brazilian equivalent



Artist Nick Quijano from Puerto Rico depicts "El Club." 1992. Gouache/ Archés 22" x 30" Colección Compañía de Turismo de Puerto Rico. He will exhibit his work in a show at the Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico, tentatively scheduled for the year 2009.

trees and before the stage that boasted a twenty-piece live orchestra alternating with another one just as fabulous to keep the club throbbing through the night, everyone was dancing to the same music.

They danced gracefully, either showy or subtle, and with variations that kept partners attentive to each other. A good move may be part of a familiar repertoire of dance steps and sequences, but the moment and the combination of moves and pauses can take a partner by surprise. A good follower, quick witted and supple, will absorb the surprise as if she anticipated or even exacted the move from the controlling lead. Liberating for a feminist like me, dancehall democracy brings relief from self-reliance and gratitude for a strong partner. My freedom in the civic counterpoint of voice and exit is to take or leave him for the next number.

In this art form, as in others, the aesthetic effect is in the small shocks that refresh per-

ception and that the formalists called defamiliarization. This enabling preference for aesthetic play is why choreographed ballroom routines of Latin dancing can seem boring to Latin dancers. But at the Copa, the rule was to improvise; Improvisation on the dance floor with a range of combinations repeated the spirit of unorthodox mixing and matching of races and regions of the devotees who kept coming to the club. The one feature we all had in common was love for the music and for the combinatory art of movement. It made us almost infinitely interchangeable partners. Not that one dancer was the same as another, but that each would invent moves from the same music in a particular style cribbed and combined from others.

Almost unbelievably, men who were too old and frail even to approach some distant potential partners still managed to show some flair and fluidity on the dance floor.

Barely bar-age youths struck classic poses to rhythms that syncopate across generations. At one spot on the floor, a stranger might ask a master to dance (I've done it more than once) in order to feel the thrill of expert creative control; at another spot, a man and wife may be doing variations on the steps they have been taking together for decades. The point is that everyone is moved by the music to make signature moves.

Nedim was a master of those moves, I thought, which brought me back to the syncopated conversation.

"Did you learn to dance salsa in Bosnia?" I asked incredulously.

"No, actually, it was in Germany."

*Doris Sommer is Ira and Jewell Williams Professor of Romance Languages at Harvard University and Director of Cultural Agents (culturalagents.org).*





# Disruption in the Immigrant Experience

*Colombian Youth Dance Their Way to Continuity*

BY CLAUDIA GIOVANNA PINEDA

**I**MAGINE YOU ARE FIFTEEN YEARS OLD. As an immigrant who has lived in the United States for a few years, you are still trying to find your place. You decide to join a group that dances the traditional dances of your country. You practice every week on Fridays, when you could be going to the movies or hanging out with your friends. Your goal is to perform in that big annual show a lot of people have told you about. That day has finally arrived and here you are, in the middle of a stage in your costume and make-up, waiting for your turn to dance. The curtain goes up and you find yourself in front of perhaps eight hundred people who are applauding for you, engaged with you, and feeling in awe of your dancing.

This is the experience of young people in the Ballet Juvenil Colombiano (Bajucol), a Boston-based organization that teaches

adolescents and young adults to dance and perform Colombian folklore. Founded more than 10 years ago by Northeastern University Business School alumnus Miguel Vargas, Bajucol's mission has been to keep young people off the streets, to provide learning opportunities to those who feel passionate about dancing and to change Colombia's bad reputation associated with the drug-trade and violence. As a Colombian and a developmental psychologist, I became interested in Bajucol as an intervention that fosters a positive connection between Colombian youth and its cultural heritage, rather than focus on negative aspects of the young people's lives. The predominantly Colombian organization also attracted me because of the incredible commitment to the group by youth, their parents and the director.

Bajucol was established in the context of Colombia's worsening economic and political conditions, which caused immigration to spiral. Colombians are now the largest South American group in the United States, and the fifth biggest Latino group in Massachusetts. Colombian migration specialist Luis Eduardo Guarnizo has pointed out that Colombians have a stronger resemblance to the U.S. mainstream than other Latino groups in terms of sex composition, race, age, and levels of education. Still, distrust within the Colombian immigrant community has been rampant, attributed mostly to the drug-related stigma, to Colombians' social organization along class and regional lines, and to their predominant urban ori-

From the series "Diptychs" (Colombian Youth in East Boston), 2003.



gin. Colombian organizations in the United States tend to be short-lived, contributing to the widespread perception that Colombians are not united and do not collaborate among themselves.

What does this all mean for youth and children? For children, the immigration process can be a very stressful experience, often including loss and grief, family separations and war-related trauma. These factors can be worsened by poverty, poor schooling or high levels of violence in the receiving context—their U.S. neighborhoods. Still, despite such challenges, many immigrant children will develop positively, though young Colombians are at risk of internalizing images about themselves consistent with negative images that both Colombians and non-Colombians may hold of them. Bajucol is a good example of how dance programs focused on youth culture can have strong potential to promote positive adaptation by easing the transition to the new country. Groups such as Bajucol provide a sense of continuity that is threatened by the migration process. They offer the means to explore and positively connect with youth's cultural heritage, as well as to create a sense of agency in response to negative stereotyping.

### MAINTENANCE AND CONTINUITY OF COLOMBIAN CULTURE

Many Bajucol participants told me they had been unhappy in Boston and wanted to return to Colombia. This idea of returning was more a wish than a realistic expectation, because their parents had made enormous sacrifices to come to the United States and did not want their children returning. In fact, parents' desires to help their children adapt to the United States while maintaining connections with their own culture were major incentives for encouraging younger and older children alike to get involved in Bajucol. Hence *maintaining* Colombian culture through Bajucol involved keeping a connection alive and providing some continuity in relation to activities and relationships severed by the process of migration. Some youth described how both Colombian peers and dances helped them find "a little of Colombia" in them that they valued and missed.

Let's us examine Sonia's case (all the names here are pseudonyms used to protect the identity of youth). Initially she wanted to return to Colombia because she was unhappy in the United States. She was 16

years old when she came against her wishes, thinking that she would stay for only a year and then go back. Active in extracurricular activities back in Colombia, she felt disoriented and lonely in the United States. Her involvement in Bajucol gradually allowed her to feel at home by reconstructing some of the things that used to define her sense of self in Colombia. In her words:

Kids in Bajucol taught me a lot, not only as dancing partners, but as people.... They were the ones who taught me to love being here, to be able to have a life again here; not feeling like 'okay, when am I going to return to Colombia?'... When I came, I arrived to a world where people told me 'you come here just to work and save money.' And the kids taught me that there was more, there were movies, there were parks to enjoy, that there was a school where you could have cultural activities. I mean, I said 'okay, I can do the same things here that I used to do there [in Colombia].'

This sense of continuity fostered by Bajucol counters the disruption caused by migration and allows youth adaptation here not to be entirely focused on the experience of being an immigrant. For Sonia, thinking that the only thing she was expected to do was work and save money was rather sad. Those feelings are especially true for youth whose families experience financial struggles, working several shifts to make ends meet, or having difficulties themselves in the adaptation process. Young people, especially girls, had to help their parents, which left little time to engage in positive activities. This feeling of continuity could serve as a protective factor against depression or disengagement, often experienced by immigrant youth.

This was clear in Lina's case. She arrived here as a teenager. Her adaptation to the United States was so difficult to the point that she described it as "traumatizing." Her limited language ability made her feel "mute," and thus kept her from making friends at an age when friends are very important. When she started learning English, her frustration deepened because she had to babysit her newborn brother after school, precisely when most activities for youth her age were taking place. When Lina found out about Bajucol she thought it would be a perfect opportunity to recover the experiences that used to define her in

Colombia—having great friends and being very active. Lina's mom and stepfather eventually decided to change their working schedules so Lina could participate in the group.

It's funny, at the time I got involved in Bajucol, I was thinking about going back to Colombia. I was fed up...I couldn't do what people my age did... I was so depressed for not having friends and school was boring, so I thought [joining Bajucol] would be a good way to go back to the way I used to be: concentrating in music, having friends with similar culture and beliefs as mine, or at least from the same country. That really caught my attention. Plus I always loved participating in activities, so I joined in and I loved it. (Lina)

Thus Bajucol was crucial in her adaptation, providing encouragement, guidance and a familiar environment to make friends. That Bajucol was mostly an all-Colombian and mainly an immigrant group helped newcomers make the transition into a new context. Older members in Bajucol served as *cultural translators* that connected newcomers with different resources to ease adaptation, giving, for example, information about college applications or scholarships. And the fact that it was an all-Colombian group led by a responsible adult helped parents such as Lina's decide to support their children's involvement. Youngsters told how parents were proud of them for demonstrating the positive side of Colombia and participating in productive activities, rather than being out on the streets engaging in risky behavior.

Many Bajucol members had lived much of their lives in Colombia, and yet Bajucol provides them with new information about Colombian folklore such as traditions, costumes, music, history and dances. Through organizations such as Bajucol, cultural values are transmitted about what it means to be Colombian—celebrating Colombians holidays together or supporting parental expectations about appropriate behavior. In immigrant families, conflicts arising from parents' fear that their children will become Americanized and thus alienated from the older generation are not uncommon. Thus for both children and parents, Bajucol became a critical place where the disruption of migration was mitigated and where more consistent messages were being communicated.

Through its activities Bajucol also allowed long-term Colombian immigrants to reconnect and maintain ties to things that they were once exposed to and were now far from. Financial constraints or immigration documentation difficulties prevent many Colombians from returning to Colombia for long periods of time, sometimes even decades. Understandably, they long for familiar places, music and cultural activities. Oscar, another Bajucol member, told me about the importance of maintaining ties to the culture through dance:

We are in a foreign country and people tend to lose a lot of things from their home country. Culture is something we have to maintain, including the [Spanish] language and the customs. Here, it is inevitable to lose a lot of things, you cannot do the things you used to do there... so we were trying to maintain that. When people saw us performing a *Sanjuanero* or a *Cumbia* it gave them the shivers, because it had been a long time since they saw them last, not even on T.V.

The Colombian community needs Bajucol as much as Bajucol members need that audience. Developmental psychologist Michael Nakkula argues that a reciprocal transformation develops between young people and adults in the context of youth interventions. In the transformation pro-

cess, each person's histories, prejudices, hopes and fears intersect, bringing about self-reflection and understanding in both parties. I found that the same phenomenon takes place in both the performances and overall participation in Bajucol: the histories and preconceptions of both dancers and audience come together. The intensity of the experience is heightened through the culturally specific content of the performance—Colombian dances and folklore. The audience “gets the shivers” and cries, and youths reflect on who they are, becoming more proud of their own culture.

Participation in Bajucol leads to self-understanding and to a construction of an identity, a task that is critical during adolescence. In her 1990 book *Self and Identity Development*, psychologist Susan Harter observes that youth are in search of self, and because “the self is a social construction,” feedback, values, and directives from parents, peers and friends become a source of a realistic self-concept. Youth co-construct their identity in the interaction with Bajucol peers and audience. Immigration scholar Carola Suárez-Orozco coined the term *social mirroring* to refer to the way in which adults, peers, and the media become the mirrors of youth; positive and negative images can lead to a sense of self-worth or the lack thereof, respectively. In my work, I've discovered that Bajucol has been an important and a positive socializing context for identity development. One group participant, César, tells of being very excited about performances because of the applause, noise and camera flashes. He adds:

There were times when, for example, we went to a festival in Lawrence, oh, I'm never going to forget this! And over there it was the first time we danced the *salsa*. And I remember that that day the people were even asking for our autographs.... Can you imagine? That motivates you to keep on going.

Audience reaction embodies recognition by the other, the mirror. Thus, youth recognize themselves positively beyond the more personal context of relationships. This

process can be both personal and impersonal: impersonal, in that the audience does not necessarily know the performers—their histories, their personalities, their unique selves; and personal, in that the applause is aimed at the performers directly, at their dances, their movements, their expressions. The impersonal aspect of performance can be especially positive for youth who have a negative self-image of themselves in other areas. For a youngster who is known at school for being problematic or a bad student, having a context of positive identification detached from the school context can be very positive. In Bajucol, both the personal and the impersonal aspects of performance make it a place for potential positive identification.

## DANCES OF RESISTANCE

Many performances also took place before non-Colombian audiences in venues such as schools, universities and the annual show. Thus, Bajucol becomes a vehicle of cultural resistance, and, more specifically, agency, in the sense that they are contesting negative Colombian stereotypes and stigma through a positive cultural representation of Colombia.

This seems a better expression of resistance than many common forms of youth resistance, such as school disengagement and risk-taking behavior. This can be summarized in the expression “Why would I act out when I can act on?” (In this sense, “act on” means to perform.) According to anthropologist Jean Comaroff, cultural resistance is usually complex, because in the social action there is a dynamic tension between transforming and reproducing the social order.

The power of Bajucol in countering negative cultural stereotypes relies then on two aspects: one, preserving and enhancing the individual's positive self-concept by providing positive cultural attributes to be proud of; and second, promoting a sense of agency through which youth feel they are representing culture as well as creating new representations of what Colombia is about to those who are familiar only with its negative aspects. Furthermore, providing a context in which youth can identify and celebrate positive cultural traditions is important, especially in contexts where their traditions are not recognized or represented, as for example in schools or neighborhoods.

Given that interventions like Bajucol are not uncommon (there are many examples of artistic, athletic, or educational groups that share a common ethnic heritage), I hope this article can help those interested in programs that reach ethnic minorities and immigrant youth in meaningful ways.

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*Claudia G. Pineda, Ed. D. recently received her doctorate from the Harvard Graduate School of Education in Human Development and Psychology. Currently, she is a Visiting Scholar at the Latin American Studies Program at Cornell University. This article is based on her dissertation work conducted between 2004 and 2005. E-mail [Claudia\\_Pineda@post.harvard.edu](mailto:Claudia_Pineda@post.harvard.edu). If you want further information on Bajucol, contact [Bajucol1@aol.com](mailto:Bajucol1@aol.com) or visit its website at [www.Bajucol.org](http://www.Bajucol.org)*

# Colombia's Broken Body

*El Colegio del Cuerpo: The College of the Body*

ÁLVARO RESTREPO HERNÁNDEZ

**W**E COLOMBIANS ARE CONSTANTLY asking ourselves what we can do for this torn and martyred country from the vantage point of our work activities.

Anguished, intimidated and powerless, we see how the language of weapons and death has become entrenched in our society. Every day, more and more Colombians become resigned to the idea that only total warfare, dragging us down to the abyss, will allow us to find a solution. But even more of us are convinced that we need to liberate another language to name and transform the reality before it is too late. Perhaps it is a matter of returning to the original truths of life, expressed in nature's basic words, in the fresh and unpolluted eyes of the children, in the simple soul of things and the simplest beings.

This is why we work with dance—as dancers and as teachers.

I work in El Colegio del Cuerpo with children and youth from Cartagena's poor neighborhoods. I try to offer them education and opportunities—which I didn't have myself growing up—to discover from their earliest years their vocation and their talent. These young people have known firsthand what it is to have a hard life, the entrenched injustices of the society, the ignorance of parents and the startling indifference of living creatures to the simple beauty of the universe. They have touched and been touched by violence. They were born into and grew up in the most devastating years of the conflict that afflicts us and don't know any other reality except that of war. But, paradoxically, they are for the most part happy human beings and loved

by their parents who give them, to the best of their possibilities, the best life that they can and know how to provide.

In El Colegio del Cuerpo, we try to create consciousness about the joy of living, the pleasure of discipline, the notion that the children are masters of a powerful and unique instrument that is their body, their being, with which they can play, create, enjoy, transform and be transformed. We teach them to marvel each and every day at what they are capable of doing and being so they can feel like gods or semi-gods—why not?—so that they can recognize the divinity within themselves and their fellow students, as well as the venerable character of their bodies, of their being and that of others.

Dance superstar Martha Graham, with whom I had the privilege to study in New York, once said, "It takes ten years to make





## DANCE!

a dancer!” With this in mind, I founded eCdC in 1997, together with the French dancer, choreographer and pedagogue Marie France Delieuvin. Following quite literally Graham’s educational precepts, we planned to graduate 13 dance-teaching professionals that very year as a result of an agreement with the Universidad de Antioquia, the Universidad Tecnológica de Bolívar and the Culture Ministry. El Colegio del Cuerpo (eCdC) is now a nonprofit organization for nontraditional and human development education.

We now work in two separate directions: education *for* dance to form dancers and education *through* dance so that youth begins to understand the body as a territory of peace. We have 46 youths who are on their way to becoming professional dancers. Many more are beginning to realize that participation in dance, in this realization of the body, leads to the prevention of violence and drug addiction and promotes citizenship, good nutrition, sexual and environmental education.

It is in the latter area—education *through* dance—that we just received a grant from the government of Japan through the World Bank to implement our methodology and philosophy in seven educational centers in the most depressed zones of Cartagena, better known in the outside world for its magical colonial center and sandy beaches. With this new program, 3,600 young Colombians will engage in learning *through* dance in PROYECTO MA\*: *Mi cuerpo, mi casa* (My body, my home).

We have done this type of work for many years in poor Cartagena neighborhoods, including the shantytown known as Nelson Mandela, which shelters more than 50,000 refugees displaced from continuing civil violence in other parts of Colombia.

François Matarasso a Britain-based writer with a particular interest in the relationship between culture and democratic society, eloquently described our work in an article entitled “Human Bridges,” published in the journal *Animated*:

[Nelson Mandela] is not a place where most of us would expect contemporary dance,

performed to a soundtrack of Jacques Brel or Buxtehude, to be meaningful: so much for our expectations...

The event at Nelson Mandela was part of the second ‘Festival de las Artes,’ created in Cartagena by two contemporary dancers, Alvaro Restrepo and Marie France Delieuvin, and their company CorpoPuentes (body-bridge)...the inclusion of the edge place that is Nelson Mandela was central to CorpoPuentes’s ethic of trying to create a role for art in healing a society riven by war, organised crime and poverty.

“For two years Restrepo and Delieuvin have struggled against huge odds to develop a college of contemporary dance which not only gives young people routes to alternative futures but through its performances creates experiences of hope, anguish, pain and renewal which are the proper, unique business of art. Some of the young people involved may go on to become professional dancers; most will not, but their abilities, confidence and self-possession will have grown beyond measure. If nothing more, it is hoped that a new respect for their bod-



Previous page: An eCdC dancer depicts the impact of violence in *El Otro Apóstol*, created by Marie France Delieuvin. Right: eCdC dancers perform *A Dios El Mar*, created by Álvaro Restrepo.

ies acquired through dance may serve them in a society where drugs, often adulterated, are widespread.

As I said, though this work is among the best art I've seen—community-based or not—it would be meaningless to say that it is better than comparable work I've seen in Europe. The reason for focusing on it here is that the vibrancy, courage and quality of the dance work of CorpoPunte stands fairly alongside the deep political and social difficulties of Colombia. It is neither a solution to those problems (at least not on its own) nor an impertinence in the face of them. It is integral of the moral, creative and spiritual fabric of its society: that is its value. How much contemporary arts practice in the UK can truly claim as much?

There is much to be drawn from a project like CorpoPunte—about practice, about standards, about extending as well as meeting expectations. But perhaps the most important thing is that engaging with society, however a dancer does it, requires imagination in every aspect of practice. Far from lowering one's vision, it demands that we raise it to match the needs, rights and aspirations of those whom we work with. Then the community dancer can be a human bridge between us all.

We artists and cultural workers in Colombia have an enormous responsibil-



*El Alma de las Cosas/The Spirit of Things is the title of this dance performance.*

scopes to examine the universe or as word-smiths or spokespeople for social questions, doubts, fears and certainties.

We artists generally are privileged beings because we love what we do and we live from this love. This interior richness at times translates into material well-being. However, our greatest asset is that this difficult identity which few human beings achieve is that vocation is equivalent to profession, to passion.

Through the exercise of my craft as inventor of impulses, movements, emotions and sensations, I have come to the profound conclusion that there is no greater richness in life than being the master of oneself. To

in contact with transcendence, with a profound sense of existence. The rest is entertainment, not to be disregarded, of course. However, for a country like Colombia, where the absolute priority is to recover the sacred value of life, I believe that Art and the artists must, with our work, try to reach to the depths of the heart of the Other and to underline the fact that we all are, in essence, sacred, inviolable and transcendent beings.

Our disorientation and our anguish are symptoms of a profound ethical crisis of values. In our country, we see the human body violated on a daily basis, tortured, massacred, mutilated, assassinated. The broken body of Colombia needs to be cured: the mangled body of young Colombians, soldiers, guerrillas, paramilitaries, common criminals, defenseless civilians, children, women, old folks. Violence and the death of any Colombian, whatever his or her condition, is an irreparable tragedy and wasted human capital. The body that performs violence is almost as much a victim as the body that is subject to violence.

We artists ought to contribute through our work, our foresight and our example, so that we can reach a peaceful agreement in this country: one of love, pardon and future. We are not afraid of these words, cynically disqualified as "social lyricism." We have to make everyone understand that quality of life does not exist for anyone in Colombia: rich and poor, governed and governors, armed and unarmed, women and men, the elderly and the young, the executioners and their victims.

We need to reach a minimum consensus, and we need to redistribute opportunities. One of these opportunities—perhaps the most important—is access to knowledge about the inalienable and inexpugnable consciousness about our body as a natural habitat, where one can express oneself and blossom with full human dignity.

And it is here that our role is indispensable, as midwives of vocation, revealers of passion, detectors of dance. These are our missions as artists and as teachers.

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*Álvaro Restrepo Hernández is a Colombian dancer, choreographer and pedagogue. He founded EL COLEGIO DEL CUERPO (eCdC) in September 1997 with his French colleague Marie France Delieuvin.*

## We work with dance—as dancers and as teachers—to liberate a language beyond violence to name and transform the reality before it is too late.

ity to build these bridges, since we embody critical conscience, creativity, oneiric, playful and spiritual aspects of the society. We are the depositories of collective memory; we operate in signals, signs, indications, traces, dreams, yearnings. These are our arms and compasses. We can be bridges, messengers, mediums, sometimes soothsayers. But we artists are not magicians nor exorcists nor priests in spite of the fact that art, magic, religion and spirituality have always been closely connected.

Society believes in itself and expresses itself through its artists. Sometimes society uses artists as mirrors or magnifying glasses to take a close look at the people or as tele-

inhabit one's body with dignity is a *sine qua non* condition for dignity on inhabiting the world of and with others.

It doesn't matter what our professions or jobs are, we all are embodied in our experience, memory, emotions, tenderness, violence, ideas, deficiencies, our caresses, fears and desires...everything passes through the body.

The daily practice of my profession strengthens on a daily basis my conviction about the transformative power of art and culture as pedagogical strategies for living together in harmony. I don't refer to art as merely entertainment or decoration. Art—with a capital "A"—is that which puts us

# DANCING MY PASSION

BY ELIZABETH BERGMANN

As a dancer, my mentor and role model was the Mexican-born New York dancer, José Limón. His passion permeated every class he taught and every dance that he choreographed, moving me deeply and encouraging me to put all of my own passion and deep feelings into dancing. Many of his themes were of Latin American origin. *Ritmo Jondo*, choreographed by his own mentor, Doris Humphrey, with music by Silvestre Revueltas, depicted four couples in Mexican costumes, flirting and dancing at a festival. Humphrey also created *Lament for Ignacio Sánchez Mejías* for Limón to explore the life of a bullfighter in dance. Limón's themes, which dealt with the downtrodden and humanity's deep yearning, have influenced my own work.

After 22 years of teaching, I left my tenured faculty position at the University of Michigan to explore exciting new territory on the West Coast. Through the California Arts Council, I became an Artist-In-Residence at an affluent Southern California high school. Finding myself in a rich community surrounded by migrant workers, I worked with the students to try to increase their awareness of the people who surrounded them and served them. My dance *La Revolución* was a dance about displacement. I challenged the students to imagine that they would have to leave their home suddenly, never to return, and only to take with them what they could carry. Using the haunting sounds of Peruvian music, I created this dance, pulling out of the students every bit of feeling they could muster, to dance this piece and to understand this situation. It was a very rewarding experience for them and for me, as well as for the audiences.

All of these experiences led me to want to live and work in an environment that was culturally diverse, with art and culture dominating the lives of the people. To that end I became a Fulbright Scholar in Trinidad and Tobago. I wanted to find out if people who lived with art and culture as a central focus experienced their lives differently. Were they happier, more fulfilled, and in greater harmony with themselves and with life in general?

Trinidad's many ethnic groups are predominantly African and East Indian with sprinklings of English, Spanish, Chinese, Javanese and Syrians. It is a country of many colors and many flavors living fairly comfortably in harmony with each other. Although there are certainly financial inequities, there is peace in the land and a deep respect for the arts. Most everyone

paints or dances or plays music. Artists are highly honored in that culture. Every cab driver I met knew of the dancers with whom I was working. I found a culture rich in artistic and cultural traditions, with a population comfortable within themselves and happy to be contributing members of their society.

Trinidadians grow up with Carnival and their lives center around this festival year round. Designers display their new costume designs for the next Carnival soon after the year's Carnival is finished. People visit the designer's headquarters to decide who they will be and what they will wear. They order their costumes and prepare for the next year's festivities. Steel drums, made from the barrels left by the oil companies, were invented in Trinidad. Forty to 150 participants gather nightly to play in open yards as others gather around. Trinidadians tend to be loyal to one band or another as they compete yearly for prizes. Colorful, exotically costumed bands



Left: José Limón. Below: In California, Elizabeth Bergmann directs a high school performance of her choreography *La Revolución*, her daughter Sasha is on the far right.







Clockwise from far left: Kim Fields as Frida Kahlo in a piece choreographed by Bergmann; Trinidad's La Chapelle Dance Company at Harvard; Trinidad Theatre Workshop.



dad's coveted arts awards. My first year at Harvard, I brought the dancers from Trinidad to campus to perform *Love After Love* and to give workshops in Caribbean dance to Harvard students.

This vibrant and passionate country has become a great part of my life. I return as often as possible, creating more choreography for their dancers and teaching them my form of dance. Not only have I brought some of their dancers to the States to perform and teach in America, but I have also facilitated taking young dancers from the United States to perform and study in Trinidad. I continue to seek ways to make connections between the Trinidadian culture and our own. My choreography and my being have been deeply influenced by my Latin American and Caribbean connections. The body, mind and spiritual connections are very present in these cultures. Harvard is a heady place and I feel that my role at Harvard is to encourage the union of the whole being. Creativity evolves by using the whole body, calling upon the senses and felt experiences to inform one's thinking and one's choices. I bring those elements into my teaching and into my direction of the Harvard Dance Program, encouraging exploration and experimentation, along with individual expression.

It is my hope that one day I can take some of the Harvard students to Trinidad to dance and to participate in their dances and their culture. I wish for them to experience some of the wonderful ways in which this Caribbean country has opened my eyes and my heart to other peoples and other ways of being in this world, as José Limón did for me earlier.

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**Elizabeth Bergmann** joined the Office for the Arts at Harvard as Director of Dance following many years as a distinguished choreographer, teacher, performer and administrator. A graduate of the Juilliard School, Bergmann danced professionally and taught in New York City for José Limón. She has chaired the Dance Departments at the University of Michigan, Shenandoah University, California State University Long Beach and Florida International University.

march throughout the towns and as many as 10,000 people can be found parading with one band dancing through the streets of Port of Spain during Carnival.

I went to Trinidad to support the Trinidad Theatre Workshop dancers and help them develop their own choreography. The dancers had served the theatrical productions for more than 20 years and my time with them gave them a chance to focus upon the dance aspect of their art form. All of the dancers held day jobs, so we rehearsed in the evenings. I had a wonderful drummer, Redman, called that because

he was an Indian, thus a red man. His drumming and the energy of the Trinidadians rubbed off on me and I found my work being very much influenced by the beat and the passion of this culture. The Trinidad Theatre Workshop was created by Derek Walcott as the theatrical company to produce his Nobel prize-winning plays. I was so taken by Walcott's poetry that I choreographed a quartet, *Love After Love* for some of the dancers. Since the dancers were also actors, I featured the spoken text of the poetry throughout the dance. The highly successful dance won one of Trini-

# Dance Revolution

*Creating Global Citizens in the Favelas of Rio*

BY JENNIFER N. WYNN

**Y**OLANDA DEMÉTRIO STARES OUT THE window of our public bus in Rio de Janeiro, on our way to visit her dance colleagues at Rio's avant-garde cultural center, Fundação Progresso. Yolanda is a 37-year-old dance teacher, homeowner, social entrepreneur and former *favela* (Brazilian urban shantytown) resident. She is the founder and director of Espaço Aberto (Open Space), an organization through which Yolanda has nearly single-handedly taught dance to more than 500 children from Rio's favelas. Yet it was only this year, she shares with me, that her mother recognized her as a dance professional.

Born in the government-sanctioned favela of A Cruzada (The Cross), ironically nailed between Leblon and Ipanema, two of Rio's wealthiest beach-front neighborhoods, Yolanda danced her way out of Rio's slums and into a scholarship seat in the Maxime d'la Horch dance academy in Barcelona, Spain.

After three years of dancing on various stages throughout Europe, Yolanda returned to her students in the favelas of Rio, where she uses dance to transform young lives. For years, Yolanda has taught dance in Rocinha and "City of God" to help slum children learn about themselves and the world beyond their favelas, so that they may integrate into it. Today Espaço Aberto teaches ballet, ballroom, Afro-Brazilian, jazz and other dances to children from Rio's favelas to help them become global and socially responsible citizens.

Convinced that dance could create opportunities where resources were lacking, Yolanda founded Espaço Aberto in 1998 without a studio of her own. At times, there was only the beach shore to rehearse on. Yet this March, Yolanda's students helped me create a video diary about the value of dance in their lives so that we could raise the funds needed to build a two-room dance studio in Rocinha, Brazil's largest favela.

In our mini-documentary, Yolanda and her students described dance as a means of social and economic empowerment, a means of self-expression and self-sufficiency. As Roger, one of Yolanda's few male dancers,

observed in that video "[The experience of Espaço Aberto] shows that there is no such thing as 'favelado' (slum-dweller); there are people with dignity here who know how to do the things they want." Roger was referring to the agency provided by dance: the power of the dancer to counter the violent and demeaning images of drug-infested favelas by humane images of centers of culture and free expression.

**Yolanda has shown her students that dance not only combats the marginalization of the favelas, but also fights poverty through self-reliance and ambition.**

And Yolanda, as a self-employed choreographer and founder of a not-for-profit business, has shown her students that dance not only combats the silence and marginalization of the favelas, but also fights poverty through self-reliance and ambition.

Limited resources have never been enough to limit Yolanda and her students. Their strong work ethic has garnered for them trophies and medals, the honor of representing Brazil two years in a row at the MercoSul Latin American Congress, and invitations to dance at several of Rio de Janeiro's premier performance spaces—including the Baden Powell Theater in Copacabana and the Circo Voador in Lapa. One of those spectacular performances last year, at Rio's prominent Catholic university, Pontifícia Universidade Católica (PUC), so greatly impressed the university coordinator of social and cultural activities that she recommended I spend my yearlong fellowship working with Espaço Aberto.

I met Yolanda and her students for the first time last October. Yolanda asked a violin teacher in the government building across the highway from Rocinha to open his classroom twenty minutes early so that her students might have a space to show me some of their work. That night, the girls danced a romantic ballet number in their torn slippers and tights and the group at large danced a gripping Afro-Brazilian

piece depicting the story of Brazil's slave trade. Then they pushed the music stands back together and returned the space to the teacher before his class began.

I spent my fellowship year teaching and learning from these young artists. In March, I began to collaborate with Solace International, a small American NGO that supports self-sustainable social projects around the world ([www.solaceinternational.org](http://www.solaceinternational.org)), to

raise the funds needed to build a permanent "open space" for Espaço Aberto. By June, we had raised enough money to begin building the studio space.

"It wasn't until you and the Americans decided to sponsor the building for me this year that my mother finally respected my dancing as a career." Yolanda shrugged her shoulders and looked out of the window.

"That never stopped me... I've been dancing since I was 7 years old. And when I was 13, I was already teaching dance classes at the church when the teachers were gone."

At the age of seven, a parish priest from A Cruzada recommended Yolanda for a government-sponsored dance program. Her love and talent for dance were apparent to her teachers from an early age. I've seen photos of Yolanda at age 15 teaching girls, her age and older, ballet routines when the instructors were abroad with their dance companies. Yet Yolanda's mother regarded dance as a non-lucrative hobby and a poor excuse for her daughter to get out of the house. Yolanda recollected, in an amused rather than bitter way, when fellow dancers performing an Afro-Brazilian piece had to sneak Yolanda and her costume onto a school bus and drive away before her

Right, above: Yolanda, 15, leading ballet classes in La Cruzada favela, where she grew up; Bottom: Yolanda as work-student in Spain.









mother was able to pull her daughter off the performance bus.

Yolanda managed to defy her mother's rules and continue dancing into her 20s, while working and attending dentistry school. Through dance, Yolanda would also defy the social and geographical boundaries of Brazil's rigid class divide. At age 28, after dropping out of dentistry school for a career in dance, Yolanda received a scholarship to do post-graduate work at L'Institut Nacional d' Educació Física de Catalunya in Spain. She accepted and spent three years studying, working and performing throughout Europe.

In recent years, Yolanda has returned to Leblon and Ipanema as a private dance teacher to the wealthy neighbors who once ignored her. Now, as a teacher and social entrepreneur, she continues to influence the lives of youth who are growing up much as she did.

It is for this reason that Bruna Rodrigues Pereira, an 18-year-old government-certified ballet teacher, who has danced with Yolanda for seven years now, says that through dance she has "learned to face life." These days Bruna shares her passion with the world, from dancing in the opening of the Pan-American Games this July to declaring her goal of becoming her family's first college graduate (in dance, of course).

However, Bruna didn't always know that she had it in her to become such an accomplished dancer. At age 8, Bruna began taking ballet classes with her cousin Kelly at a school in A Cruzada, twenty minutes away from Bruna's home community of Rocinha. When Kelly stopped going, Bruna no longer felt motivated to travel to another favela for dance, especially since her father, João, did not approve of a hobby that offered "no future." But when Bruna was 11, she met Yolanda, who offered to teach her various types of dance for one sharply reduced monthly fee. Bruna accepted and hasn't stopped dancing since.

With Yolanda, Bruna began to perform outside of Rocinha, including her first trip by airplane to film a dance documentary in Espírito Santo, a state north of Rio. Bruna and her mom, Dulce, were elated to travel often on weekends for dance competitions, but her father still disapproved. As Bruna

Left: Espaço Aberto student Nielly, 8, poses on her way to ballet class in Rocinha Right: Yolanda and Bruna leading a Carnaval float.



puts it, “In the beginning, he really didn’t like it. He used to argue with my mom when we would get home late from performances. He would say ‘you just stay in the streets.’ Now he’s finally accepting that there is no way he can stop me from doing what I love. Now he sees that I’m not dependent on my mom anymore. I split the monthly fees [from the ballet classes I teach] half and half with Espaço Aberto. So if I need sneakers, I go out and buy them myself.”

Bruna recognizes that Yolanda’s teachings were fundamental in making her the independent young woman that she is today, observing, “I was always learning with her; learning to express myself, open up and use words to express exactly what I was feeling. Sometimes I would say ‘I can’t do it’ but Yolanda did not accept that. She taught me that I can do anything that I want to do.” Now a high school senior, Bruna teaches two ballet classes of her own at Espaço Aberto. She even has two “scholarship students” who each pay a quarter of the monthly fee for ballet classes. Bruna also co-teaches ballet with Yolanda in both Rocinha and in Leblon, while continuing her studies on a scholarship at Arte em Movimento, a ballet academy in Rio’s wealthy neighborhood of São Conrado. And for the first time this year, she heard her father point to her at a performance and say proudly “that’s my daughter.”

Through dance, Yolanda has taught her students internal, rather than external, validation. As a teacher whose students live both in Rio’s slums and in Rio’s wealthiest beach-front neighborhoods, and as a professional whose mother is just now recognizing the value of her daughter’s service, she has taught her students that only by setting and meeting one’s own high standards will they ever surpass their audience’s and society’s expectations. Through dance, Yolanda and other children from Rio’s favelas have become talented artists, trophied performers, scholarship recipients, sought-after teachers, successful businesswomen and positive global citizens.

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*Dance crosses borders and reshapes itself in the process.  
Japanese dance in Brazil, Welsh dance in Argentina and  
dances like hip-hop and salsa throughout the Americas  
strengthen cultural heritage and link communities.*

# Reinventing the Dancing Body

*The Impact of Japanese Culture on Brazilian Dances*

BY CHRISTINE GREINER

THE INTEREST IN JAPANESE CULTURE FROM FOOD TO DANCE has deep roots among us in Brazil as we have the biggest Japanese colony in the world, outside of Japan itself. Therefore, the images of Japanese culture are much more than a landscape to be contemplated. Once a friend who was born in a small city in the interior of São Paulo told me that he only discovered that the word “konnichiwa” (hello) was Japanese and not Portuguese when he was already in his teens. Throughout his childhood, he had heard his mother greeting all the merchants of the region this way, even when they weren’t of Japanese descent.

Stories like this have been part of our daily life for almost a century. From 1908 onwards, more Japanese immigrants were drawn to Brazil than to any other country. Most of them settled in the southern states of São Paulo and Paraná because São Paulo in particular had the most dynamic economy in Latin America. Highly restrictive immigration measures adopted by the United States and Canada had redirected the Japanese immigration process to Latin America, mirroring in a certain way the opportunities available to pioneers in the United States before the turn of the century.

The Japanese dance experience in Brazil started from the very beginning as a way of preserving cultural memory and bringing people closer together. Several small amateur groups tried to pre-

serve the Noh theater dances, the Kabuki choreographies and other Japanese folk dance traditions. These groups used to present performances to the members of the Japanese colony, using the everyday community meeting spaces such as Japanese language classrooms or neighborhood barns. For several years I wandered over every week to a small room in a building in São Paulo’s Japanese district, Liberdade, to take private classes from Professor Noburo Yoshida of the Kanze School of Noh. On some specific occasions, such as New Year’s, the presentations were open to the public, but normally they were limited to the community.

It is important to observe that the Japanese immigration to Brazil has gone through different phases with two powerful periods (1908-1938 and 1953-1979) that had a significant impact on the way the cultural and artistic interchanges evolved. The fifteen-year interval between 1938 and 1953 was one of the most difficult periods for the Japanese community. President Getúlio Vargas adopted a policy of nationalization aimed at forcing the descendants of foreigners to “speak the national language and understand that Brazil was their home country.” This policy conflicted directly with the Japanese immigrants’ mentality and their desire to raise their children in the Japanese tradition. The nationalization policy was codified by a decree in 1939 to prohibit all foreign languages from being spoken in public spaces. By 1952, the only source of news from Japan was Radio Japan, which began broadcasting to South America in 1937. All the newspapers written in Japanese were forbidden, as were the dancing events.

Clockwise from top: Emilie Sugai performs in the choreography Tabi;  
Salvadoran masked dance in Somerville; African-style drum in Cuba.

## DANCE!

After the war, the policy changed. Successful coffee farmers and a small number of professionals and business owners were the first to abandon the old mentality. They saw themselves as foundation builders for an entirely new community of Japanese beyond the homeland. Thus began the transition from countryside to city and from loyal subjects of the emperor to citizens of Brazil. The first researchers of Japanese culture started their work between the 40s and the 50s. At this time, most of the texts written in Portuguese were related to Japanese literature and language. The focus on discourse strategies may be interpreted as political resistance to the Brazilian policy in force at that time. In the 60s and early 70s, universities began Japanese studies with the creation of the field of study of Japanese Language and Literature at the Universidade de São Paulo (1964) and at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (1979). The main focus continued to be the Japanese language, only later embracing literature and poetry as well. The great change

that would open new channels for the dialogue with contemporary Brazilian art occurred outside these research centers.

Two very important publications triggered the new possibilities of dialogue with Japanese culture. They were “Ideogram, Logic, Poetry and Language” (1977) by the poet and translator Haroldo de Campos and “Aesthetics, Reflections on Eastern and Western Arts” (1983) by the musician and composer Hans Joaquin Koellreuter. Both authors proposed a very different approach that understood Japanese culture as a sort of “poetic operator” capable of inaugurating new creative processes, no longer limited to the studies of language or the repetition and imitation of the traditional arts. They were inspired by the experiments of artists like the cinematographer Sergei Eisenstein, the poet Ezra Pound and the musician John Cage to seek a dialogue with the Orient without imitating or exercising any type of authority on the other culture. This did not mean that the traditional manifestations should be removed.

What did change were the strategies of translation that Haroldo de Campos would start calling “transcreation” (“transcriação”).

In the case of the Noh Theatre, for example, after returning from a year studying in Japan in the early 90s, the actress Alice K. produced Hagaromo, based on Haroldo de Campos’s translation of the 14th century play by Motokyo Zeami. However, what appeared on the stage was no longer the “katas” or Noh-style modules of movement, but a certain understanding of the space-time interval present in the gestures and the organization of the scenic elements. At the end of the 90s, the choreographer Angela Nagai, who had also studied Noh in Japan, would propose an unusual bridge between this classical Japanese theatre and candomblé, investigating similarities between the incorporation of entities in the Afro-Brazilian rituals and the ever-present symbolic incorporation during the Noh plays, when the principal “shite” character reveals his true ghost identity, which characterizes the plot.

With regard to modern Japanese dance, one of the great landmarks was the year 1986, when the master of Japanese butoh, Kazuo Ohno, came to Brazil for the first time and overwhelmed various artists who, thereafter, became very interested in better understanding this practice, which arose from the postwar experiences in Tokyo. Ohno was invited by the choreographer and plastic artist Takao Kusuno, pioneer of butoh dance in Brazil. He had worked in Tokyo with an important butoh company, Dai Rakuda kan, and then decided to move to São Paulo, where he lived from 1977 until his death in 2001. Several Brazilian dancers studied with him. Some of them were not only interested in butoh training but in broader research on one of the main issues of the butoh experience: the metamorphosis of the body. Among them was the actress Dorothy Lenner and the



Emilie Sugai and other artists inspired by Japanese traditions have influenced dance in Brazil.



Emilie Sugai, shown here in the choreography *Tabi*, has connected butoh to personal questions regarding her search for her Japanese roots.

choreographers Denilto Gomes, Patricia Noronha, Emilie Sugai, and Ismael Ivo, just to name a few.

Emilie Sugai deserves special mention among these artists for continuing Kusuno's research connecting butoh to personal questions regarding her search to retrieve her Japanese roots, as well as to the possibility of reviewing butoh training and linking it to the contemporary dance being investigated in Brazil today. Other Brazilian choreographers decided to go to Japan on their own to study under masters of butoh like Kazuo Ohno himself and Min Tanaka, as did Maura Baiocchi, Denise Courtouké, Ciça Ono and

## Brazil's Japanese community is the largest in the world outside Japan. The modern Japanese dance experience dialogues with contemporary dance in Brazil.

Marta Soares. With the exception of Ciça Ono, none of the other artists had any blood ties to Japan. These choreographers were motivated by the desire to get to know a new form of training, not necessarily to create a new vocabulary for dance, but above all to re-invent the body. The Lume Group, headquartered in Campinas (in the interior of the State of São Paulo), also invited several Butoh dancers to work over the past ten years, and eventually produced spectacles with Anzu Furukawa and Tadashi Endo.

Toshiyuki Tanaka is another Japanese artist who immigrated to Brazil at the end of the 90s. Toshi, as he is known among us, started

teaching the seitai do-ho technique. It is a method of preparing the body that was developed in Japan under Master Noguchi and has captivated Brazilian artists seeking to sharpen their perception and awareness of the body.

After 2000, others continued to experiment. Choreographer Leticia Sekito, for instance, created the choreography "Disseram que eu era japonesa" (They Said I Was Japanese), based on the images of Pop Japan. Although she is of Japanese descent, she has never been to Japan and has been trained in Western contemporary dance. The images of Japan that made an impact on her life came from two different streams: training in the martial art ai ki dô, very much used by artists who work with contact improvisation, and the transmission of the images of the cultural industry (films, animes and mangas).

After all these experiences, you can see that in a very particular way, Japanese culture in Brazil has shown us, in many different moments of cultural history, how the represented body has become a complex net of time that simultaneously links past, present and future—an amazing idea that I still wonder about after all these years, and that continues to haunt me.

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# Bodies That Sing

*Forró Music in a Transnational Setting*

BY MEGWEN LOVELESS



*We arrive at a doorway hidden in the shadow of a 24-hour convenience store, and dig crumpled bills from our pockets, surrendering them to the barrel-chested man in a tight black tank top. The scene is a reminder of what an inspired idea it was to leave my purse at home; the plan is to dance all night long. Having paid, we step carefully down a winding staircase and perch on tippy-toed stools at the bar with a great view of the dance floor.*

*The ceiling is low and the only lights are strategically placed orange, red, yellow and green bulbs. The band begins to gather on stage, gesticulating to one another in the semi-darkness. Once set-up is complete, lights flood the stage and with a shout the band launches into their first set. The room is transformed as people surge onto the dance floor. Sounds of live accordion and percussion bounce off the walls. Forró music pumps energy into the bodies of the dancers, and they grind, twist, turn, hop and cling to one another, creating a mural of gyrating bodies whose sultry aerobics scream: festa!*

**F**orró captured my attention while living in the northeast of Brazil in the late 1990s and has since taken me to dancing joints in São Paulo, Rio, New York and even New Jersey. Described as a mixture of ska with polka in overdrive by musician and record-producer David Byrne, forró *pé-de-serra* (foothill music), traditional forró is typically performed by a three-piece band consisting of accordion, triangle and *zabumba* (a double-headed-drum). In New York, the few bands that regularly perform have added more modern instruments (bass, drum sets) but continue to

A couple dances forró; such scenes take place in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, New York City...and even New Jersey.

play from the authentic forró repertoire of songs. Interestingly, I find that most forró music played in New York is relatively typical of all of Brazil, but a close look at the *dancers* reveals pronounced regional affinities, alliances, and discrepancies expressed through dance style and choreography.

My research examines the different styles of dance that develop as forró stretches across provincial and national borders. The previous paragraph, taken from my field notes after a long night of dancing in Manhattan, demonstrates what an international phenomenon forró has become. It sets the stage for the story of how a relatively unknown folkloric music from the Brazilian rural northeast has come to play a key role in how Brazilians articulate their identity as migrants in foreign settings.

This folk music from Brazil's *nordeste* region has become an ideological tool for an increasingly cosmopolitan and globalized Brazil. It helps emigrants venture into the global economy while maintaining a tight knit sense of place and home. I am particularly interested in how Brazilians use forró as a marker of identity; while forró *music* symbolizes the nation as a whole, Brazilians from various regions *dance* to it differently. Thus, forró dance styles allow Brazilians to feel a sense of national pride and belonging while simultaneously expressing regionalism and differentiating their provincial identities. Regional distinctiveness can be read through bodily expression on the dance floor, creating a lexicon through which Brazilians position themselves and their local identities in a transnational setting.

While framed as traditional music tied to a rural and bucolic past, forró has been dynamically recreated over time, developing into several genres in both rural and urban settings. My research focuses on the more traditional and rural styles because of my interest in how Brazilians imagine their own identity; something about forró *pé-de-serra* smacks of the authentic Brazil in a way other genres do not.

## HISTORY OF FORRÓ

From its conception, forró has been tied to migration. It was not only created from, but continues to be consumed, because of an ever-growing cycle of Brazilian emigration. Before we look at this larger issue of immigration, however, I'll introduce the traveler who first brought the triangle, *gonguê* (cowbell) and *zabumba* (as he sings in a 1950s hit) to the entire nation.

The story of forró begins with Luiz Gonzaga, known today throughout Brazil as the undisputed pioneer of the genre and one of the country's most iconic symbols of *nordestinidade*, or northeastern identity. A gregarious son of an accordion player, Gonzaga's ambitious wanderlust led him from his birthplace in rural Pernambuco to a budding forró career in the capital of Rio de Janeiro in the

1940s. His popularity, made possible by the burgeoning importance of radio, arose from his introduction of northeastern rhythms and melodies into a southern Brazilian musical culture then dominated by waltzes, mazurkas, foxtrots, schottishes and tangos. Gonzaga's first major success was the 1941 hit *Vire e Mexe* (literally Turn Around and Boogey), an instrumental accordion piece that immediately caught the nation's interest because of its new sound, framed by radio producers and Gonzaga himself as traditional flavor from the backlands of the northeast.

Forró has always been primarily a dancing music. It's quite impossible to listen to it without twitching toes and feet in time, swaying hips back and forth between the measures, clapping out the hard clave rhythm that the drum teasingly withholds underneath its own beat.

**While framed as rural traditional music, forró has been dynamically recreated over time. From its conception, it has been tied to migration.**

Even its etymology—though hotly debated—refers to dance. The version most travelers will hear is that the word really originated from a clever Brazilian pronunciation of English. According to this story, a British railroad company laying tracks across the *nordeste* sponsored regular social dances as a “release mechanism” for underpaid *nordestino* workers; the dances had free admission and were open “for all.” Another version, preferred by ethnomusicologists, argues that the word derives from the word *forrobodó* (possibly of African Bantu origin), which refers to a place in which a community dance occurs. Throughout the high points of Gonzaga's career,

forró's delicious fusion of music and dance was promoted. Every few years, the famed *nordestino* would invent a new style of dance to go with the release of his latest hit, reinforcing the connection between music and dance, and between the northeast and south.

#### BRAZILIAN HISTORY AND IMMIGRATION

Since its independence in 1822, Brazil has struggled to create a national identity to unite its diverse and dispersed regions and ethnic communities. The nation's diversity (or fragmentation, depending on your perspective) is evident in Brazil's curious tendency to refer to itself in the plural: “*os Brasileiros*.” Successful political regimes over the past two centuries have constructed an official ideology that often hinges on cultural forms (such as samba) to substantiate claims of national cohesion. Still, Brazil has remained very much divided across a north-south axis. The north is associated with the dried-up colonial sugar-cane economy, while the south represents the industrialized cities that have become the financial powerhouses of the nation. Worsening the divide were cyclical droughts that plagued the area west of the sugar-cane plantations, triggering huge exoduses of rural subsistence farmers pushed off their land. During the 1960s and 1970s, hundreds of thousands of migrants fled to the big urban centers along the coast or in the south.

Part of Gonzaga's appeal as a performer was the fact that he was a “country bumpkin” who had “made it” in the cosmopolitan south—a success which spoke to the thousands of *nordestinos* economically exiled in the southern cities where rapid industrialization demanded low-wage workers. For these migrant *nordestinos*, forró music became a way of accessing their native land through *saudade* (“nostalgic longing”). The lyrics of Gonzaga's canonical

## THE FUN OF FORRÓ

BY KATHLEEN HUNT

I went with my friend Denise and her boyfriend to the Gafieira Estudantina for a night of *forró*. Last year, I used to see the Estudantina's hand-painted dance banner hanging from its second-floor balcony, whenever I was walking around the Praça Tiradentes in Rio de Janeiro. But I'd never been up there. The Estudantina, it turns out, is one of Rio's old ballroom dance halls (*gafieiras*)—founded in 1932. Denise told me her mother used to come there to dance in the 1940s, and she'd come there to dance in the 1980s, and now here we were in 2006. Estudantina now hosts a mixed selection of *forró*, samba and all kinds of modern stuff, but always *forró* on Thursdays.

Forró (fuh-HAW) is the earthy, folksy country dance of Brazil. It's what Brazilians dance when they want a fun, down-home dance for flirting up close with their partners, instead of the fast, showy samba. It's rather like the niche that country two-step has in the United States. Forró's very popular in Rio, and most of the big clubs have a *forró* night at least once a week.

I'd seen a little *forró* before but this was the first time I had seen the “*pé-de-serra*” style—“foothills of the interior” style, that

is, really authentic country style *forró* with zabumba, accordion, triangle and a singer. Zabumba's one of my favorite Brazilian drums; it's a big double-headed bass drum played with a thumpy bass mallet in one hand, while the other hand plays wickedly fast syncopations with a little switch stick on the other side of the drum. (Plus, it's got the all-time best drum name: Zah-BOOM-bah!) They were playing mostly *baiao* rhythm but with an occasional slower *xaxado*, and sometimes a faster thing that I was told later was *arrasta-pé* (“foot-dragger”).

Later I tried to demonstrate to my friends the proper hand-hold for *forró*, as far as I could tell from my experience: woman's right hand clasped loosely in man's left, woman's left hand on man's shoulder, and man's right hand slowly sliding down the woman's back all the way down into her jeans and clear down to her underwear. Woman's left hand periodically reaching back to man's right hand and pulling it back up a good foot or so.

Eventually a player came up on stage with an odd-looking unvarnished fiddle. My first sight of a *rabeca*, the Brazilian fiddle. He was holding it folk-style, low on the chest, and was using an

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tunes are imbued with the struggle of nordestinos and their hostile yet beloved land, thus creating a way to be emotionally present while physically absent from home.

At the same time as these impoverished nordestinos were scraping a living working as servants in affluent homes of the south, changes brought on by the growing and increasingly globalized Brazilian economy began to change the cultural orientation of the middle and upper classes that employed them. The perception that foreign conglomerates dominate the Brazilian economy has shifted the sense of national culture and national identity. Even as they participate freely in transnational politics and exchange, the haves of the industrialized south have come to covet what the have-nots of the northeast have in abundance: traditional values and lifestyles. Thus the middle- and upper-class southerners have begun to look to forró as a representation of Brazil's rural and bucolic past, an imagined place and time untouched by modernity that somehow better reflects a truly authentic Brazilian psychology.

### REGIONALLY INFLECTED FORRÓ

In the early 1990s, forró hit the dance clubs of São Paulo and Rio, and a whole new segment of the population began to swivel and slide on the dance floor. They called their style *universitário* (university) because of the many students, intellectuals and urban culture brokers who hopped from club to club. Interestingly, forró *universitário* and forró *pé-de-serra* do not sound very different. However, they *look* quite different. Northeasterners and southerners have different experiences while listening and dancing to this music, which can be seen in their variations in body movement.

Metro New York, along with Boston and Miami, has been a node of Brazilian immigration since the late 1980s. *Nova Iorque* is my home—as well as home to perhaps the most diverse population

of Brazilians in the U.S. north and south tend to blend more here than anywhere in Brazil. The dance floor is no exception. I return to my field notes from that night out dancing in Alphabet City.

Couples dancing forró generally followed the style of the male lead. Pernambuco: tight, tight dancing, with thighs intertwined and nothing to embellish the grinding. São Paulo: almost sporty, with casual turns and sexy pauses and clearly demarcated shoulder space. Rio: pretty twirls that remind me of latticework on a balcony in Lapa. As the female dancers switched partners I watched as their style changed: some added or subtracted spins, slid closer to or further from their partner, or threw in pauses or dips. The men stuck to their own style, performing signature moves that reflected more of a regional tendency than individual style.

Forró is a dance in which a national rhythm can find its voice in a variety of bodies. It is a performance in which regional accents play off one another. Ultimately, it is a genre in which diverse styles speak the same language, albeit with lilting cadences of difference. I've found that while forró music and lyrics can tell me about Brazilian national identity, forró dance elucidates Brazil's distinctive regional identities. Taken together, forró performance can shed light on both the unity and diversity of Brazilian identity. It may be, in fact, the perfect medium for communication across the cultural, social, and regional separations that both divide and unify Brazil.

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old 19th-century style handmade wooden bow. He started playing the most incredibly beautiful solo and my jaw almost hit the floor. SO gorgeous. Then the band entered. Wow. First of all, wow, it was so beautiful; and second of all, wow, I could have been in Louisiana, it was now so like Cajun fiddle music—the style of the melody, the way it flowed, the marriage with triangle and accordion, the voice wailing over the top of it all. The only difference was just that syncopated kick of the zabumba.

It was truly beautiful. I have a weak spot anyway for folk fiddle. (I used to play bowed bass in a Hungarian gypsy fiddle band, and also have a substantial weakness for Cajun, Cape Breton and Irish fiddle traditions.) I stood there watching the rabeca player, and thought “I have been such a damn samba snob, to have ignored forró all this time.”

The dancing crowd of men and women pressed tight even seemed to be doing pure Louisiana zydeco dance! I swear, it was eerily similar to zydeco—in basic form, in footwork, in the hip movement, and even in the pressed-tight body style. (Sooooo tight it reminded me of the Simpsons episode where they go to Brazil and see all the Brazilian dances: “the Lambada, the Macarena... and the Penetrada.”)

The similarity of the music to Cajun, and of the dance to zydeco, still puzzles me. Doing a little google for “Cajun” and

“forró” today, I found that many accordion players have picked up on the odd similarity too. I read a note by an experienced zydeco dancer who had seen the recent Brazilian documentary “Saudade do Futuro” and was amazed to see Brazilians dancing what appeared to be pure zydeco. Later I remembered that forró is thought to have been influenced by dances held “for all” (= “forró”) by US Air Force stationed in Natal (just north of Recife) during World War II. Could there have been a Louisiana fiddler at that Air Force base?

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**Kathleen Hunt** is a biologist who used to study Alaskan birds and right whales before accidentally getting hooked on Brazilian music. She now divides her time between biology half the year, and playing in Rio's samba escolas the other half. Her first South American experience was living in Peru for a year at the age of three, with her parents, economist Shane Hunt and educator Barbara Hunt.

### IF YOU GO:

For a guided tour of Rio's authentic old dance halls, with plenty of time for dancing, contact Denise at Rio Hiking <[www.riohiking.com.br](http://www.riohiking.com.br)> and ask about the Nightlife Tour.

Gafieira Estudantina is at Praça Tiradentes 79 in Rio, [www.estudantinamusical.com.br](http://www.estudantinamusical.com.br). Thursday is forró night.



# BRAZILIAN BREAKDANCING

BY SCOTT RUESCHER

When you think about breakdancing, images of kids popping, locking, and wind-milling, hand-standing, shoulder-rolling, and hand-jumping, might come to mind. And those kids might be city kids dancing in vacant lots and playgrounds. Now, New England kids of all classes and cultures are getting a chance to practice break-dancing in their school gyms and then go learn about it in a teaching unit designed by Veronica Boix-Mansilla, Jodi Falk and Alison Rhodes at Harvard's Project Zero.

The unit, which is part of Boix Mansilla and Howard Gardner's interdisciplinary studies project, places hip hop youth culture in the broader context of globalization today. It seeks to help students draw on elements of anthropology and dance to understand that youths the world over are performing breakdancing for all sorts of reasons. So while in one sense hip hop as a form of youth culture has become global, in another sense it takes deeply rooted local meanings. The dance, one of many aesthetic expressions of hip hop culture, migrated long ago from its popularly recognized 1970s origins in the Bronx. By the 1980s, it had spread all over the United States, from the roughest neighborhoods to the manicured lawns of suburbia, and then to the streets of Bangkok, Seoul, and Tokyo. And to the Brazilian *favelas* of São Paulo, Rio, and Salvador as well.

When Boix-Mansilla received funding from Atlantic Philanthropies to collaborate with 12 Massachusetts teachers in the design of a pedagogical framework for quality interdisciplinary teaching, she wanted her team to tackle the question of how to teach about globalization—a contemporary force shaping students lives on the planet and one that will define the work of their generation. One of the experimental units was developed in collaboration with Jodi Falk, director of dance at Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Center in western Massachusetts. To gather materials for her work she visited hip hop hipsters in Salvador de Bahia and São Paulo. With the help of João Kulcsar, Falk documented the Brazilian break-dancing in videotapes and interviews and applied the principles of Laban Movement Analysis for instructional purposes. Synthesizing Falk's observations and Boix-Mansilla's background research, Alison Rhodes in turn published an article in the *Journal of Dance Education* (Vol. 6, No. 2, 2006). "We investigated how hip hop as a form of dance had been interpreted in Brazil," she says, "as part of a more broadly shared youth culture."

Breakdancing, anthropologists have found, is not simply a matter of what Boix-Mansilla calls "copying a globalized product." In the United States, poor black and Latino youth learned to express personal agility within confined public spaces—not to mention the opportunity to show off some *bling*. In Japan, middle-class kids used breakdance to express freedom from a circumscribed culture. In Brazil, meanwhile, it has offered young people in the *favelas* a chance to celebrate their Afro-Caribbean roots in defiance of racial oppression. "There's a commitment to political participation—to the fight *against* poverty and *for* human rights among Brazilian youth," stresses Boix-Mansilla. And it hasn't necessarily meant importing a foreign dance in favor of a traditional one.

Dance anthropologist Pearl Primus has noted that the origins of acrobatic breakdancing are not North American, but Central and West African. From the *bushasche* dance of the Bantu people in the Congo and the *fanga* of the Liberians emerged *capoeira*, a martial art created by enslaved Africans in Brazil and practiced in the state of Bahia. That is where Brazilians assume they got the form—from the same African places, perhaps, as the "boyz in the hoodz" of the Bronx. And if they're breakdancing in the streets thanks in part to a 1970s New York dance craze, they do so with little sense of indebtedness. It's their very own.

As many New England schoolchildren will soon be able to tell you.

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## MORE ABOUT DANCE ONLINE

<http://drclas.harvard.edu/publications>

**Rebecca Cantú writes about "Ballet Folklórico Mexicano: How Nationalism, Mestizaje and Indigenismo formed Folkloric Dance in Mexico."**

**Anna Else Pasternak writes about "The Flight of a Moment Creating Cuban Identity Through Dance."**

**Vania Masías writes about her experiences as director and founder of the Peruvian youth dance group ANGELES D1 (en español).**

**Suzanne Jenkins and Paola Sofia Galarreta Espinoza-Dabbs describe their experiences with ANGELES D1 (in English and en español).**

**"Fue lindo mientras duró: Contribuciones a una crítica del tango" by Rafael Filippelli and Federico Monjeau (p. 12) is available in a longer Spanish version (en español).**

**"Lessons of Güegüense, a very old dancer" by Alba F. Aragón (p. 63) can be found in an English version.**

**A longer version of "Diablos Danzantes en Puno, Perú" can be found in Spanish (en español).**

**"Recuerdos de Tango" by Sylvia Molloy (p. 9) can be found in Spanish (en español).**



# Dancing in the Diaspora

## *El Baile de los Negritos*

TEXT BY SEBASTIAN CHASKEL | PHOTOS BY SEBASTIAN CHASKEL AND ALONSO NICHOLS

**D**ANCE UNITES YUCUAIQUÍN, A SMALL TOWN IN EASTERN El Salvador, with the city of Somerville in eastern Massachusetts. Traditionally a city of Greek, Irish, Italian, and Portuguese immigrants, the only quality Somerville had in common with Yucuaiquín before the 1980s was a population with vibrant Catholic beliefs and traditions. The hundreds of Yucuaiquinenses that found their way to Somerville in the past two decades brought with them a unique set of religious traditions—among them a dance in honor of Saint Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals and the environment, and of Yucuaiquín.

*El baile de los negritos*—literally the dance of the little black folk—has been a Yucuaiquinense tradition since time immemo-

rial. Legend has it that Yucuaiquín was once a small hamlet hidden in a valley, until a group of hunters found a wooden figurine of Saint Francis of Assisi under an *amáte* tree up in the mountains. Their attempts to bring the figure back to the hamlet were futile; it reappeared over and over again on the mountain, under the *amáte* tree. Eventually, the entire town moved and established itself around the tree, honoring its newly found patron saint. Yucuaiquinenses then and now ask Saint Francis for favors, offering to dance *el baile de los negritos* if their requests are granted. They believe Saint Francis is generous to those who fulfill their obligations to him, but stern to those who fail to comply with their promises.

### FOTOENSAYO, YUCUAIQUÍN EN ESPAÑOL

Yucuaiquín, El Salvador y Somerville, Massachusetts no tenían mucho en común antes de que miles de yucuaiquinenses migraran a Somerville en las últimas dos décadas. Ahora, un baile tradicional une a estas dos ciudades. Con el chin-chin en una mano y un ramo en la otra, yucuaiquinenses en los dos sitios bailan el baile de los negritos

para agradecerle a San Francisco de Asís, el Santo Patrón de Yucuaiquín, por cumplir con sus peticiones. Algunos bailan para agradecerle a San Francisco su exitosa llegada a los Estados Unidos, mientras otros buscan enseñarles a sus hijos la tradición. Habiendo visto el baile de los negritos en el Museo de Somerville el año pasado, el

alcalde de Somerville viajó recientemente a Yucuaiquín para firmar un acuerdo de hermanamiento entre las dos ciudades. La vida de los yucuaiquinenses es muy diferente en los dos sitios, pero el baile y su Santo viajan con la gente de Yucuaiquín. Lo invitamos a leer el artículo entero en español en <http://drclas.harvard.edu/publications>.



From the bucolic town of Yucuaiquín to the city of Somerville in Massachusetts, Salvadorans dance *el baile de los negritos* to give thanks and maintain traditions.

Since the 1980s, thousands of Yucuaiquinenses have migrated to the United States. While Yucuaiquín is a town composed of some 10,000 people, according to a Somerville-based Yucuaiquinense organization, an estimated 2,500 Somerville residents identify themselves as Yucuaiquinenses. Now they dance *el baile de los negritos* in order to fulfill promises to Saint Francis of a more contemporary nature: some thank their patron saint for safe arrival in the United States after an arduous journey; some follow the tradition in order to teach their U.S.-born children to continue to celebrate Salvadoran culture and religion in their new homeland.

The upbeat *el baile de los negritos* is danced during the months leading up to Saint Francis' Day in October to the fast-paced music of *el tambór* (drum) and *el pito* (recorder), played by individuals in Yucuaiquín and a tape recorder in Somerville. Dancers swing *el chin-chin* (maracas) in one hand and hold *un ramo* (bouquet) behind their backs as their feet move fluidly from side to side; wooden masks covering the performers' faces mockingly depict white men with big eyes and wide mouths. The explanation behind the name—*los negritos*—and the costuming, is unknown: they are traditions that have been evolving since pre-Hispanic times and now offer no clarification.

Following a performance of *el baile de los negritos* at the Somerville Museum last year, Somerville's mayor traveled to Yucuaiquín

to sign a sister-city agreement. Yucuaiquín's officials travel often to Somerville to campaign and update Yucuaiquinenses in the area. Yucuaiquinenses in both countries are constantly in touch through telephone, e-mail, money transfers, and the time-honored dance they all share. For Yucuaiquinenses in both countries, *el baile* serves as a conduit between Yucuaiquín and their new homes, between past and present, and between generations. It has become a crucial component of the modern Yucuaiquinenses' struggle to adapt themselves to a new land while remaining true to their roots. While their lives may be drastically different in U.S. urban centers than they were in provincial Yucuaiquín, *el baile* and its saint travel with the people of Yucuaiquín.

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*Sebastian Chaskel worked with the community of Yucuaiquinenses in Somerville as a component of his anthropology coursework at Tufts University. Sebastian is now Research Associate for Latin America at the Council on Foreign Relations.*

*Alonso Nichols is a freelance photojournalist based at Tufts University interested in issues affecting Latin America and Latinos living in the United States. His travels and projects have taken him from Mexico and Nicaragua to New Orleans, Los Angeles and Kentucky. His website is [www.alsonnichols.com](http://www.alsonnichols.com).*



## DANCE!



The hundreds of Yucuaquinenses that have found their way to Somerville in the last two decades have preserved their special religious traditions, sharing them with the community and passing them on to their children. The two municipalities have become sister cities, united through dance.



Dancers rehearse in the streets of Somerville.



A dancer from Yucuaiquín adjusts his mask for the *baile de los negritos*.



Comité Pro-Mejoramiento de Yucuaiquín, Yucuaiquín's Improvement Committee, hosts Somerville mayor in the Salvadoran town, a meeting of the sister cities.



DANCE!





# Tropical Interludes

## *The Role of the Rumbera in Mexican Cine de la Época Dorada*

BY LINDA RODRÍGUEZ

**I**N A POPULAR SONG FROM THE START OF THE MAMBO BOOM (LATE 1940s-early 1950s), Cuban musician Benny Moré flirtatiously described the dancing talent of Mexican and Cuban women. He sang in his golden voice, “Pero qué bonito y sabroso bailan el mambo las mexicanas, mueven la cintura y los hombros igualito a las cubanas.” (“Mexican women dance *mambo* so wonderfully and so full of rhythm, they move their waists and shoulders just like Cuban women.”) Moré first performed the song “Bonito y Sabroso” in Mexico City with the band of *mambo* king Dámaso Pérez Prado. A few years later, he would travel to Cuba and record the song there. *Mambo*, a Cuban music and dance phenomenon, had begun to sweep the world in popularity, spreading a fever for the provocative and sensual moves it inspired.

At the same time, another group of women in Mexico—Mexican, Cuban, and American in one case—danced to these Cuban rhythms, receiving almost limitless attention. These women, actresses called *rumberas*, and their performances live on in a genre of Mexican *cine de la época dorada* (Golden Age cinema) known as *cabaretera* films. The *cabareteras* were popular from the 1940s to the early 1950s. The women take their name as *rumberas* from the *rumba* music (Afro-Cuban folkloric music, not the watered down “rhumba” as waltz popularized by Cuban bandleader Xavier

his *Cuba and Its Music*, the *rumbera* Ninón Sevilla, from Havana, helped Pérez Prado settle into his new Mexican environment. Pérez Prado and Moré would also appear in a number of Mexican films, set in both Mexico and Cuba. Moré collaborated with Sevilla in *Carita de Ángel* (1946), and Pérez Prado played the part of an energetic bandleader in *Al son del mambo* (1950), in addition to other cinematic appearances within the *cabaretera* genre.

Moré sang in Mexico City cabarets that used to host the actresses and dancers known as *rumberas* before their leap to the cinema screen in the *cabaretera* films. Scholars acknowledge the film *La mujer del puerto* (1934) as a forerunner to the genre, and the films *Salón México* (1949) and *Aventurera* (1950) as the best known. Other titles in the genre indicate the films’ central concerns: *En carne viva*, *Coqueta*, *Perdida*, and *Dicen que soy mujeriego*, to name a few. As the titles relate, most of the films concentrated on sex and relations between men and women. In the films, the *rumbera* often played the role of a troubled young woman down on her luck who most likely survived by prostituting herself. The plot lines of these films varied, which in turn influenced the nature of the *rumbera* performance. On occasions, she danced in bars or cabarets, where she usually lived under the auspices of a madam. In comparison, a *rumbera* with bona fide star status danced on a theatrical stage.

*Cine de la época dorada* may have started in Mexico, but became widely popular throughout Latin America. As part of *cine de oro*, the *cabareteras* meshed with a music phenomenon that was popular worldwide. (*Mambo* made its way to the United States, as exemplified in Desi Arnaz of “I Love Lucy” fame plying his musical abilities and heritage into the show. He even starred in a film, *Holiday in Havana*, crafted around the music.) As compared to other *cine de oro* films, the *cabaretera* films played the erotic and celebratory counterpart to popular comedy or drama films, either set on the *rancho* or in urban locales, starring actors like Cantinflas, Pedro Infante, María Félix or Jorge Negrete. The plot lines of these films largely thrived on the seedy intrigue of sex, dance, excess, and the celebration of music in contrast to the lighter fare of other films of the period. The *rumberas* performed in this intersection of Cuban music, male desire, personal survival, and a danced choreography.

The *rumberas* could not have existed without the Cuban rhythms of Moré and others, usually in the form of the energetic *mambo*. In the films, the *rumbera* danced in bars, theaters, and cabarets, unleashing an erotic energy as she translated the language of *mambo* and *rumba* to her audience. The staccato rhythm of *mambo* punctuated the sudden, sensual movements of the dancers, while the addition of fierce *rumba* rhythms permitted the interplay of strong, masculine gestures by the women. Backed by a band of musicians and singer (almost always Afro-Cuban musicians) the *rumbera* became a captivating visual centerpiece of these films. The form of dance in these films elevated the *rumbera*, allowing her existence

The *rumberas* of the Mexican films could not have existed without the Cuban rhythms of Benny Moré and others, usually in the form of energetic *mambo*.

Cugat) they danced along with *mambo*. The films take their name as *cabareteras* after the cabarets that were the scene of many of their plot lines. With shoulders shaking madly, ruffled sleeves fluttering about, and hips circulating sharply, these *rumberas* of Mexican *cabaretera* films burst animatedly onto the cinematic dance floor. Erotic in their dancing, the women acted as translators of the Cuban rhythms.

Meche Barba, Yolanda “Tongolele” Montes, Leticia Palma, María Atonieta Pons, Rosa Carmina, Amalia Aguilar, and Ninón Sevilla, among many others, danced their way across the screen as *rumberas*; the latter four actually hailed from Cuba. The flourishing of these films, and the centrality of the *rumberas* and Cuban music, points to a massive influx of Cuban culture at the time. *Mambo* had arrived with a thunderous growl from the lips of Cuban musician Dámaso Pérez Prado in Mexico City in the late 1940s. Pérez Prado had moved there in 1948, while Cuban singer Benny Moré had come a few years earlier. Both signed contracts with RCA to record and eventually worked together. As Ned Sublette notes in

Actress Meché Barba takes cues from her trumpet accompanist in *Fuego en la Carne*, directed and produced by Juan Ortega in 1949.



Posters: Rosa Carmina, *En Carne Viva*; Pedro Almaraz and Toña la Negra with Maria Antonieta Pons, *Konga Roja*; Pons in *Reina del Mambo*.

as interpreter and performer, untouchable when she danced.

The place of the *rumbera* in cinema and in the Mexican national consciousness at this time revolved around the shaping of a sexualized other for the Mexican middle class. These films presented the “tensions in the new social standards of the emerging middle class,” as scholar María S. Arbeláez writes. The *rumbera* was the central, problematic, and powerful figure in the midst of these cinematic lessons. Her presence also underscored the relative freedom of Cuban sexuality in contrast to the more repressed Mexican counterpart. The sexuality of the *rumbera* is one that cannot help itself, yet it is a sexuality that is productive through the form of dance. As the boss says to Rosa Carmina’s Maria Antonia in *En carne viva*, “Tú sabes que cuando bailas, los hombres se despiertan. Te gusta provocarlos.” (“You know that when you dance, guys snap to attention. You like to turn them on.”) Meche Barba’s María Esther makes a similar statement in *Humo en los ojos*, “Cada vez que un hombre se me acerca, algo pasa.” (“Every time a guy gets near me, something happens.”) In her dance performances, she subverts the male gaze, if temporarily, and with her body makes sense of the musical chaos around her.

As a narrative device in these films, the tropical interludes featuring the *rumberas* ranged widely. They sometimes provided comic relief to the drama of an intense romance or acted as an elaborate spectacle on a theater stage. In myriad capacities, they always emphasized the particular dancing styles of their protagonists. Viewers would have become familiar with Tongolele’s stern expression paired with lively hips, Amalia Aguilar’s jaunty demeanor and flexible torso, or Ninón Sevilla’s expressive face and stiffer body movements. Whatever their style, the *rumberas* used it to appropriate the sounds of *mambo* and *rumba*, producing their own interpretations and thereby distinguishing their talents. During these dance episodes, other types of music appeared, perhaps a bolero (more often than not penned by Mexican composer Agustín Lara), a Brazilian *samba*, or a Mexican *son jarocho*. The exaggerated flair of the *rumbera*, however, contrasted starkly with the demurely dressed Mexican dancers of a *son jarocho*. If performing an elaborate number, the *rumbera* would appear accompanied by all manner

of dancers, in costumes ranging from superheroes to “types” of people (like an African “native”) to fantastical creations seemingly without origin.

The *rumbera* performances to the modern viewer border on the ostentatious, leading film historian Ana M. López to declare that with the figure of *rumbera* Ninón Sevilla, the *cabaretera* genre “reaches its zenith and the boundary between performance and melodrama disappears completely.” The *rumbera* emotes and exaggerates, translating *mambo* and *rumba* into something palatable to the audience widely consuming these films. The *rumberas* ranged in dancing ability, with some more authentically interpreting the form of Afro-Cuban folkloric movement that influenced the dances.

While *mambo* was energetic and playful, the rhythms of the *rumba* complex – three varying rhythms known as *guaguancó*, *columbia*, and *yambú* – called for distinctly different dancing. *Columbia*, usually performed by a solo male dancer as a way to display his physical agility, calls for fierce and abrasive movements that the *rumbera* danced accordingly. In her *rumba* dancing, she danced both the *columbia* and added *guaguancó* movements, a dance traditionally performed by a couple. The *guaguancó* dance revolves around the man’s trying to surprise the woman with his pelvic movements, resulting in a surprise thrust in her direction. (In the films, the *rumbera* would dance the woman’s parts of the *guaguancó*.) The *rumbera* may have changed from male to female roles in dance, but the lyrics of the *mambo* and *rumba* songs served to reinforce the *rumbera*’s desirable nature. In *Al son del mambo*, Amalia Aguilar sings, “Soy la sabrosura del solar, abrazo a toda la gente con mi fuerza tropical...sabrosura tengo yo pa’ regalar.” (“I am the sexiest one in the neighborhood, I embrace people with my tropical flavor.... I have enough to give away.”)

On other occasions during a *rumba* interval, the *rumbera* switched into another vein entirely and incorporated the gestural idioms of dances for the *orishas*, the deities of Cuban *santería*. During a dance scene from *Humo en los ojos*, Meche Barba’s Mercedes channels the deity Yemayá, goddess of the ocean, through wide, circular movements with her arms. The emotional frenzy associated with her dance performances may blur the lines between the

dramatic intent of the rest of the film. However, they reinforce her ability to be a conduit for the culture and beliefs, most likely, of those musicians who play alongside her. In this temporary position, which usually vanishes by the end of the film, when the *rumbera* confronts her romantic destiny or lack thereof, she gives a voice to someone other than herself.

If not in a theater, the *rumbera* always clearly defined her stage, circling either the bar or cabaret floor and denoting her performative space as opposed to other areas of the locale. Marking space with her feet or the spinning the ends of her dress into the air, it was always clear where the performative space of the *rumbera* began and ended. Whenever someone or something encroached on the boundaries of this space, the dance typically stopped, and the music ended. A scene from the *Dicen que soy mujeriego*, starring heart throb Pedro Vargas, illustrates the nature of these boundaries. When *rumbera* Amalia Aguilar (as the character Luciérnaga) dances atop a bar and then amongst patrons, an overzealous audience member grabs her and kisses her. Pedro Vargas steps in to wrangle Aguilar out of the clutches of her aggressive admirer. While she may be available for sexual favors for patrons of the bar, when she dances she is untouchable, and her performative space becomes an area that no one else may enter.

The *rumbera*, then, muddled the line between the socially acceptable and the exotically thrilling for an audience initially in Mexico. During the time of their popularity, Miguel Alemán Valdés served as president of Mexico, a tenure characterized by corruption and growing urban ills. The prevalence of cabarets in cinema reflected a growing preoccupation with their presence in places like Mexico City. If the number of cabarets grew wildly during the “unregulated revolutionary years” as historian Katherine Elaine Bliss notes in *Compromised Positions: Prostitution, Public Health, and Gender Politics in Revolutionary Mexico City*, officials later tried to regulate them, their activities, and their patrons. An attempt to zone the cabarets and brothels in Mexico City ended in 1938, but Mexican cinema continued to indulge itself in the tale of the cabaret and its dancing stars in settings such as Mexico City, Tijuana, and Veracruz. Dancing in real life led some of these women to become cinema darlings through their film roles in *cabareteras*. Voluptuous Tongolele reportedly first began dancing, at 16 at Mexico City’s Club Verde. Meanwhile, María Antonieta Pons married film director Juan Orol, a regular of the club La Aurora (also in Mexico City).

When the *cabaretera* genre declined in popularity, the women left an undeniable legacy. In addition to appearing in other non-*cabaretera* films, they would also find fame again in the world of literature, as poignant cultural references to the power of dance. Iris Chacón, a Puerto Rican *cabaretera* from the 1970s who followed the model of the original *rumberas* (albeit in a more explicit vein), appeared in the seminal Puerto Rican novel *La guaracha del Macho Camacho*, further testifying to the power of the original *rumberas*. Although fueled by a thrilling eroticism, the *rumberas* ultimately drew their power through the appropriation of the Cuban rhythms of the day, which they interpreted through a dance all their own.

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## DANZA GALESA EN LA PATAGONIA

Tal vez sorprenda al lector el título de este artículo, como también sorprende a todo aquel desprevenido viajero al Valle Inferior del Río Chubut en la Patagonia Argentina. Encontrar nombres de pueblos en idioma galés, niños que aprenden el idioma desde infancia, jóvenes que bailan danzas galesas, una bandera blanca y verde con un enorme dragón rojo flameando en un mástil; afinadas voces entonando una melodía tradicional, rostros blancos y ojos color mar, el mismo que los acuno durante largos meses cuando en 1865 un grupo formado por 153 galeses decidieron dejar su tierra, Gales, en Gran Bretaña. Buscaban un lugar en el mundo que les permitiera conservar su idioma, su cultura, su fé y sus tradiciones, dejando atrás la hermosa patria para hacer propia una tierra árida, que atesoraba para ellos el valor más deseado: la libertad.

Son hoy en su mayoría adolescentes y jóvenes quienes se sienten atraídos hacia una de las facetas que componen la riquísima cultura galesa. El Conjunto de Danzas Galesas Gwanwyn (que en idioma galés significa primavera) desarrolla sus actividades desde 1985 bajo el auspicio de la Asociación San David de Trelew, una institución cultural muy antigua. May Williams de Hughes fundó el conjunto con el fin de dar a conocer y revalorizar este aspecto del arte. Su actuación es requerida asiduamente en actos, conciertos, Certamen Internacional de Coros y distintos eventos de la zona del Valle del Chubut.

El Eisteddfod, que en galés significa eistedd-fod: estar sentado, proviene de la antigua costumbre de los druidas de sentarse en torno a una mesa de piedra para leer sus poemas y más tarde se incorporó también la música y todas las ramas del arte.

Es el festival literario musical más antiguo de la Provincia del Chubut, traída desde Gales por los colonos galeses. Desde 1945 se desarrolla en forma bilingüe, galés y castellano. Los diversos grupos de danzas galesas participan en los Eisteddfod que se realizan en las ciudades de Trelew, Gaiman y Trevelin.

Las danzas galesas en general, se bailan en parejas, las hay de feria, danzas alegres al compás de la música tradicional, muy coloridas en vestimenta y generalmente su formación es en rondas. Este estilo de danzas era bailado en el campo por la gente de trabajo para festejar la llegada del verano, la cosecha o algún otro acontecimiento que los reuniera.

Las danzas más antiguas son aquellas que se bailan con suecos de madera, muy alegres y entretenidas, pero un poco más difíciles por la importancia de llevar correctamente el ritmo.

Twmpath Dawns son reuniones donde se invita a todos aquellos que deseen conocer y aprender a bailar estas danzas.

Podemos afirmar, que a pesar del paso del tiempo y la distancia que nos separa, la empresa soñada por aquellos pioneros no fue en vano, aún vive también en nosotros el mismo sueño que los impulsó a dejar Gales: preservar el idioma, la cultura, la fé y las tradiciones.

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**Graciela Noemí Colasante**, descendiente de los primeros colonizadores galeses, integra el Conjunto de Danzas Galesas Gwanwyn desde su formación y tiene a su cargo la dirección del mismo desde el 1988.



# Cuba's Tumba Francesa

## *Diaspora Dance, Colonial Legacy*

BY GRETE VIDDAL

**I** ARRIVE AT SANTIAGO DE CUBA'S TEATRO ORIENTE TO SEE A SMALL crowd of locals and tourists waiting in front to buy tickets. We are here to see a performance by Ballet Folklórico Cutumba, one of eastern Cuba's premier folkloric dance troupes. Although the theater is run down and no longer has electricity or running water, its former elegance is apparent. As we enter, we see lush but tattered velvet drapes flank the stage and ornate architectural details adorn the walls underneath faded and peeling paint. Light filters in through high windows. As the performance starts, women in elaborate ball gowns enter this dusty stage. They must hold up their voluminous skirts to keep yards of fabric from dragging on the floor. Men sport white topcoats with tails and matching white cravats, contrasting with their dark skin. The costumes, modeled on 18th century French court attire, may lead the audience to expect a reenactment of an *ancien régime* ball,

However, the performance space fills with the driving rhythms of African-style drums. This is the Tumba Francesa, a dance unlike any other in Cuba.

I had seen many different Havana styles portrayed in documentaries about Cuban dance. I'd read extensively on Cuban music and culture. However, I was completely unprepared for the exciting folkloric manifestations of Afro-Franco-Haitian-Cuban origin found in Cuba's eastern provinces. In 1998, I traveled for the first time to Santiago de Cuba to participate in a study program hosted by Ballet Folklórico Cutumba, a group specializing in performing the dances of eastern Cuba. Cutumba's mission is to research, collect, conserve, and present these dances.

Santiago de Cuba, the "capital of *Oriente*"—the island's eastern provinces—has been home to thousands of Haitian migrants and retains a special culture that strongly differentiates it from Havana.

The eastern provinces of Cuba were host to two major waves of migration from Haiti, one during the time of the Haitian Revolution in the early 19th century, and another in the early 20th century, when almost half a million Haitians were recruited as manual labor for eastern Cuba's expanding sugar industry. Both waves of migrants brought well-defined, and quite different, traditions of music and dance that are still practiced in Cuba today.

### THE TUMBA FRANCESA

The intriguing dance I first witnessed almost ten years ago is one of Ballet Folklórico Cutumba's signature performances. Dancers in ornate costumes enter the stage promenading in stately rows. Tumba Francesa is danced to the beat of a battery of African-style drums: the *premier* the largest drum, the *seconde* or *bulá*, and the smallest, the *catá* (an ideophonic drum, in this case a hollow wood log struck with two sticks). When Cutumba's musicians play, they fill the performance space with robust sound.

According to Ernesto Armiñan Linares, Cutumba's choreographer and an authority on local history, domestic slaves living in the households of the francophone plantocracy created the Tumba Francesa. They danced it wearing the cast-off finery of the masters. Later, free blacks of means and mulatto elites adopted these dances as well. After emancipation in Cuba, Tumba Francesa clubs or societies were formed. Members held offices, such as that of *Presidente*

**The Tumba Francesa is a dance unlike any other in Cuba. Home to thousands of Haitian migrants, Santiago de Cuba retains a special culture that is very different from Havana and is reflected in this dance.**

and *Presidenta*. Public dances started with salutations to the organization's title-holders, then other visitors and local elders. Armiñan Linares explained to me that in later decades, heroes of Cuba's wars for independence were also ritually saluted by the societies.

In 1999, I visited the town of Guantánamo (which is near but completely separate from the infamous U.S. military base), two hours drive east of Santiago de Cuba, to see another performance of Tumba Francesa. Here, the Tumba Francesa Society Santa Catalina de Riccis (locally known as Pompadu) gives weekly concerts. Pompadu's costumes were less ornate than Cutumba's, but the women's dresses still referenced eighteenth century attire. Demeanor was dignified and formal during *masón*, the dance that initiates Pompadu's performance of Tumba Francesa. Couples paraded with curtsies and bows. Decorous and reserved dance steps were counterbalanced by dynamic percussive music. Next, the group performed the livelier *yubá* (also spelled *jubá*), and choreographies became more animated as the music sped up. Finally, the group presented *frenté*, a competitive dance performed only by men. To begin, the men gathered into a circle and fastened colored scarves to the arms, legs, and chest of one dancer. The player of the largest drum pulled his instrument into the circle, flipped it sideways and sat on it. He began to play fast patterns and sequences. *Frenté* is a friendly competition between dancer and musician, with displays of fancy footwork responding to challenging rhythms played by the lead drummer. Musicologist Olavo Alén explains in a Winter 1995 article in *Ethnomusicology*, "the premier player will always try to make his rhythmic improvisations so complex that the dancer will lose the rhythm or simply be unable to follow it; otherwise the dancer wins the challenge. When the duel between drummer and dancer is very close, the winner is determined by the applause of the spectators."

Cutumba's and Pompadu's performances raised many questions for me. How did Tumba Francesa arrive in Cuba? Had it really been performed in the eastern provinces for more than two and a half centuries? Was this part of what made *Oriente* different from

Pompadu dancer. Note her costume, which references the 18th century.



blacks and mulattos also joined the flood of refugees.

The largest portion resettled in eastern Cuba, particularly in Santiago de Cuba and Guantánamo. By 1799, Calle Gallo (“Rooster Street” in Spanish), one of Santiago’s main streets, had been re-named Grande Rue (“Grand Street” in French). By the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century, one out of every four people in Santiago had come from what became the Republic of Haiti, according to Cuban ethnographers José Millet and Rafael Brea in their 1989 book *Grupos folklóricos de Santiago de Cuba*.

Over the course of the next decades, the former members of Saint-Domingue’s colonial elite established coffee plantations in the hills and mountains surrounding Santiago. The planters of Saint-Domingue had experience growing coffee, a crop new to Cuba. The French taste for coffee, its spreading popularity in Europe, and the business acumen of the Saint-Domingue plantocracy—at the time scions of the world’s most profitable colony—combined to inaugurate a new political economy in eastern Cuba, historian Hugh Thomas tells us in his book *Cuba, or, The Pursuit of Freedom* (1998 [1971]). Coffee plantations, or *cafétales*, were for the planter class the sites of shady gardens, elegant parties, and cultural activities in Parisian style. These *franceses blancos*, as these immigrants were called, brought to the eastern provinces a repertoire of ballroom dances, known as *contredanse* in French (eventually *contradanza* in Cuba) including quadrilles, the minuet and cotillion. However, “The musicians who played for the Cuban contradanzas were black” explains musicologist Ned Sublette in his 2004 book *Cuba and Its Music*. In Oriente,

Havana? I began to learn about the colonial history of eastern Cuba, and how it was changed by events on a neighboring island.

#### SAINT DOMINGUE AND CUBA

Migrations resulting from the Haitian Revolution altered the cultural landscape of the Caribbean. In 1804, the colony of Saint-Domingue became Haiti, the western hemisphere’s first independent black republic. Saint-Domingue was France’s most prosperous colony until a slave insurrection in 1791 spread across the country, eventually defeating even Napoleon’s armies. As war engulfed Saint-Domingue in the years leading up to 1804, much of the French plantocracy fled, some with household members including their domestic slaves. Free

*franceses negros* took the European ballroom dances and remade them for their own pursuits, setting them to drum rhythms and creating their own Tumba Francesa (“French Drum”). While the original ballroom dances of the white plantocracy faded from custom over the years, black *franceses* preserved their own versions of these dances.

Both enslaved and free blacks gathered for mutual aid and cultural expression in *cabildos*, social organizations active in Cuba since the early colonial period. Cabildos functioned as support networks, for example, organizing funerals and taking up collections for members in need. They also held dances and sponsored processions on holidays. The black franceses from Saint-Domingue began to



Top: Ballet Folklórico Cutumba performs Tumba Francesa; bottom: Pompadu's *frenté*, a friendly competition between dancer and musician.



form their own *cabildos*, which became known as Tumba Francesa societies, after the dances held there (Alén 1991).

In the decades following the arrival of the Saint-Domingue refugees, Franco-Haitian society in Cuba underwent a number of changes. With the outbreak of war in Europe between France and Spain in 1809 came an expulsion order and French citizens living in Spanish colonies who did not want to pledge allegiance to the Spanish crown were ordered to leave. Many coffee plantation owners left for New Orleans, almost doubling that city's population (Sublette 2004). In the 1840s, hurricanes devastated eastern Cuba. Many *cafetales* were converted to sugar plantations or abandoned (Thomas 1998 [1971]). Cuba's first war of independence from Spain, the unsuccessful Ten Years War, lasted from 1868 to 1878 and further debilitated eastern Cuba's economy. As for the white franceses, Sublette describes their fate this way: "The coffee planters of Oriente, who had fallen on hard times already by 1840, saw their industry destroyed; what remained of the French coffee bourgeoisie was ground down to a rural middle class." (2004: 245) While the ballroom dances of the eighteenth century faded from the salons of affluent whites, they have remained a tradition among black franceses for more than two centuries.

After the 1959 Cuban Revolution, the Cuban state took over the funding and supervision of all public cultural organizations, including Tumba Francesa societies. The government has sought to demonstrate national unity in a multi-racial society through vigorous promotion and funding for sports, the arts, and *grupos folklóricos*—typically staged manifestations of Afro-Cuban cultural activities. In 2003 UNESCO, partnering with the Cuban government, proposed a six-figure funding package to help "ensure the viability of La Tumba Francesa" under the auspices of the "Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage." Folkloric performances signify pride in the Cuban national heritage and also help attract foreign visitors with much-needed hard currency. Tumba Francesa societies are potential tourist attractions and may help the eastern region capitalize on its distinctive cultural patrimony.

Scholarship on Cuban religious and performance culture has often focused on the capital and its surrounds, but Havana's story is not Cuba's story. Today, its lively customs set *Oriente* apart, contributing to the creation of a distinctive regional identity. Expressive culture, such as dance, can function as a kind of "embodied history" that enriches and extends narratives of migration and identity. Tumba Francesa fused French court dances with African music, elite colonial fashion appropriated by slaves who made into something new. Tumba Francesa dances embody the presence of both Africa and Europe in the Caribbean, and shed light on the creative genius of black peoples who found ways to meld these legacies into compelling art forms.

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*Grete Viddal is a PhD candidate in the Department of African and African American studies at Harvard University. Her research centers on how migration has influenced eastern Cuba's culture and history. She is also fascinated by the ways in which communities express identity through dance. A version of this essay has appeared in the Journal of Haitian Studies.*



# SALSA DANCERS FROM CALI, COLOMBIA, HOP ONTO THE WORLD'S STAGE

BY TIMOTHY PRATT

Once, people of the ocean, from the coast, moved to the valley, hoping to put the Andes between them and Colombia's decades of killing.

Now, 28 of their grandchildren stood on the cusp of history.

No, they danced on it.

Their \$2-a-week-salsa dance classes and rehearsals at Luis Carlos Caicedo's Nueva Dimension academy on the gritty outskirts of Cali had paid off. The group of grade-schoolers and teens had scored an invitation to participate in the 9th annual West Coast Salsa Congress in Los Angeles this spring.

Without knowing it, they were characters in a chapter still being written into the annals of dance. It's a story of a culture's global currents, as hard to follow as the flights of some migratory birds.

The piston-footed, below-the-waist style of dancing salsa developed during the last 40 years in Cali, Colombia's southwestern city of two million-plus, has been dropping jaws since 2005, from Wellington, New Zealand, to Salt Lake City.

The first two years of the World Salsa Championships, held in Las Vegas, aired on ESPN International and organized by a group called the Salsa Seven, produced two first-place and two top-three finishers from Cali.

Judges at those events were more than impressed.

They were beginning to grouse about how to score the *caleños*, since their style was completely different from the Cuban and Puerto Rican-influenced steps they had seen.

The same thing has been happening at qualifying rounds for the 2007 championships, slated for Dec. 12-16 at Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Fla.

How did this rhythm, sprung from 1970s ferment among Caribbean populations in urban barrios, land in an Andean country's tropical valley crisscrossed by sugar cane fields?

The answer is in the very legs of those kids, a pair of whom wound up qualifying for the 2007 championship based on their L.A. performance. Or better, it's in the legs of their grandfathers and grandmothers.

The forerunners of today's acrobatic cadences were actually U.S. sailors who landed on Colombian shores in the 1940s, showing the Charleston and other steps to black Colombian bar-hoppers in Buenaventura, the country's Pacific port city. The *porteños* adapted those hops, leaps and flips to Caribbean music, particularly Cuban sounds.

Three decades later, violence pushed the children of those dancers to Cali. The migration from Buenaventura and surrounding areas never stopped, producing one of the largest urban slums in Latin America—Aguablanca.

New York and Puerto Rican salsa also hit Cali in the 1970s, and the city moved to the sound of timbales, congas and brass. With drug cartel financial backing in the 1980s, the music

became homegrown. Up to a hundred salsa orchestras were formed, seemingly on every corner.

Cali dubbed itself "The Salsa Capital of the World." The annual December fair became the city's signature event, as well as a place to pass down steps from generation to generation. Tens of thousands still meet during the week-long bacchanal, trading salsa records and dancing to local and international bands.

If a dance historian was to look for clues about how Cali's frenetic dance style developed during these decades, he or she would also find that someone at some point discovered that boogaloo, a fusion of rock and Latin percussion, was a real blast

## How did this rhythm, sprung from 1970s ferment among Caribbean populations in urban barrios, land in an Andean country's tropical valleys?

to move your feet to if you put the record player on 45 r.p.m. instead of 33 1/3. Add that to the steps originally brought ashore via the feet of sailors, and you have today's salsa cadence.

Now it's the children of the urban slum Aguablanca who keep alive Cali's particular style of salsa dancing, athletic below the waist, seemingly twice as fast as the styles practiced in New York, Los Angeles and the Caribbean, and lacking twirls and flourishes.

Dancers worldwide are taking notes, says Albert Torres, a member of the Salsa Seven and the driving force behind the world championships. He shows videos of *caleños* from the first two years at qualifying rounds from Sydney, Australia to Goteborg, Sweden, and everywhere sees the same "What the heck is this?" look on the faces of dancers waiting to compete.

The success *caleños* have seen, combined with the growth of the championships, is leading thousands in Cali to dream of hopping and stepping out of misery.

Riding the wave of popularity that dance competitions have enjoyed worldwide, the event's third year promises to field competitors from more than 35 countries, after launching in 2005 with 12. The Salsa Seven has picked up contracts with ESPN and its parent company, Disney, along the way.

Still, dancers from Cali, says Torres, are "the future of salsa."

In a phone interview days before his group's trip to L.A., Caicedo said that community raffles, local performance benefits and family loans provided travel funds. He observed that many of the kids had never seen the ocean, even though their parents or grandparents were from the coast. Decades later, salsa dancing was returning 28 boys and girls to the Pacific Ocean, following the flow of global cultural currents, in reverse.

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**Timothy Pratt** worked in Cali for the Associated Press and freelanced for the New York Times, the Miami Herald, the Economist and other publications. His wife and older son were born there; he and his younger son are from the U.S. Pratt now lives in Las Vegas and works for the Las Vegas Sun.

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# The Meanings of Samba

*What has happened to the dance of racial democracy?*

BY ROWAN IRELAND

LIKE DANCING, AND NO BETTER DANCE than samba. My samba, though, always feels, as it no doubt looks, like a stilted attempt at the dance, rather than the real thing. I can recognize that in video-clips from Rio's Sambadrome, in the street during the Carnivals of Olinda and Salvador, or when Brazilian friends dance in celebration of a World Cup victory. Real samba is a body unselfconsciously flowing in response to a syncopated beat, melding curious indolence and sexual charge, form and spontaneity. Arms extended, the feet seem to transmit a rhythm to be riffed by hips and belly and shoulders as the whole body swings, dips to the ground. Then stops for a nanosecond, only to fill again with movement the fleeting void left by the missed beat of the samba music. No single word—graceful, frantic or sexy—will do to describe the real thing, though samba is all those things. But stilted it can never be.

So if I can recognize and savor it, why can't I samba? Well, some of the explanation may stay between my analyst and me. I need no help, though, to realize that I can't samba because I don't samba, except in my head, on any but rare *carnaval* occasions. In a given year *carnaval*—not quite “carnival” in English—comes often for

those Brazilian friends and the street dancers. The Sambadrome dancers hone their performances the year round in the *ensaios* (rehearsals) of their samba schools. The lesson: it's only in practice that a body attuned like mine to regular 2/4 or 3/4 beats could begin to flow with the regular irregularities of samba music.

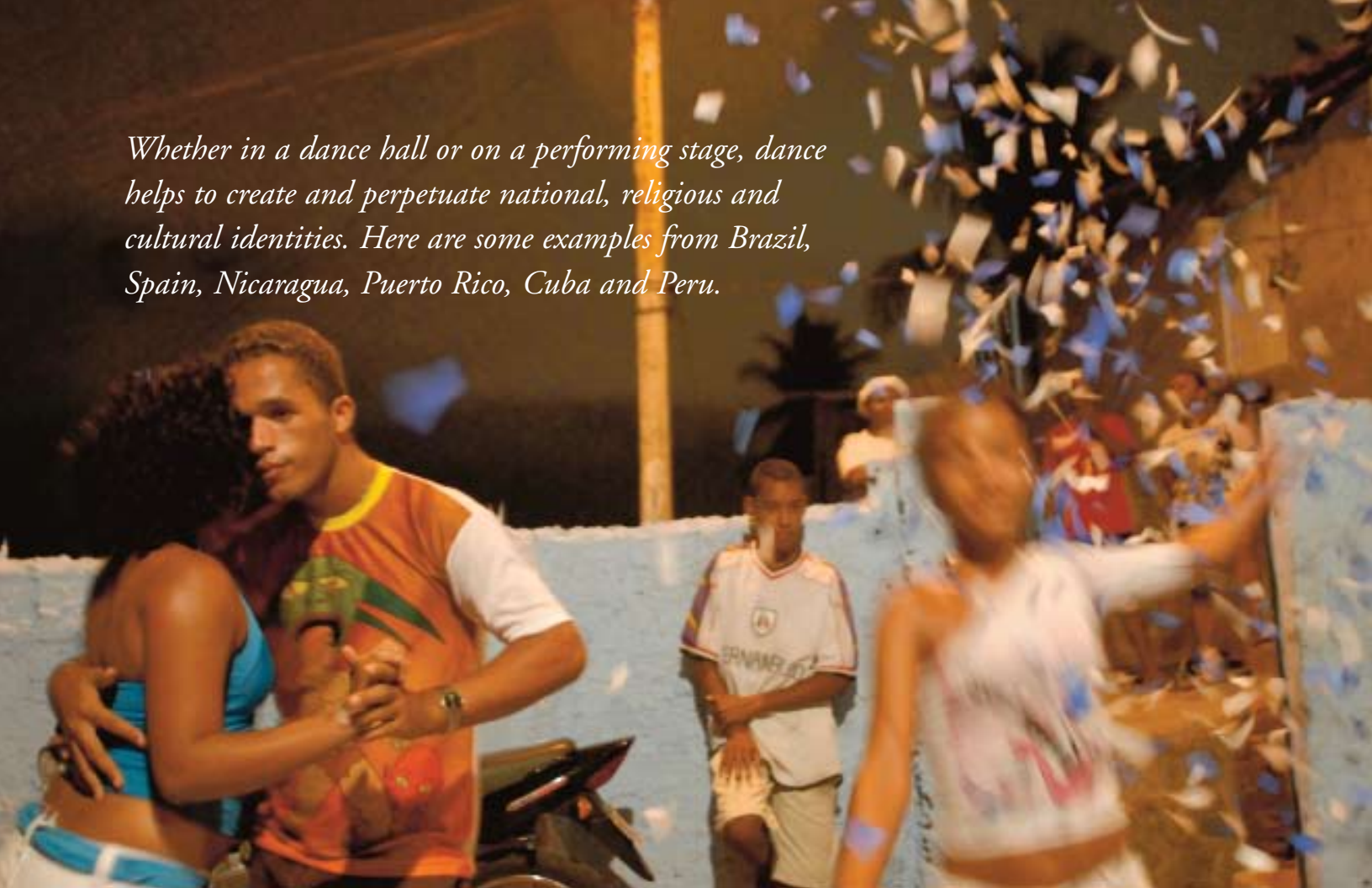
But would practice, given fitness and technical assistance, make perfect? I have my doubts, informed by some of the finest writing about the history and performance of samba from the likes of Barbara Browning and Hermano Vianna. These writers suggest to me that good samba must be samba that is meaningful to body, mind and soul. The good sambista is passionately involved, in and through the dancing, in the articulation of a contested history of race and gender relations in Brazil. The good sambista is driven with passionate intensity to express, celebrate and protest the experiences of everyday Brazilians, particularly of Afro-Brazilians in the favelas. No matter how adept, well taught and practiced, I could probably never samba well because, though a close, occasionally participant observer in Brazil, I'm not driven by roots and everyday life experience to express through feet, thighs, belly and arms, a Brazilian identity and soul.

However, there are several things to consider before that doubt puffs up into a full-fledged excuse for samba ineptitude. First, there's Barbara Browning herself. This New Yorker not only writes authoritatively about samba but is recognized in Brazil and internationally as a foremost samba performer. True, she has spent years of her life in Rio and Salvador, and has immersed herself in Afro-Brazilian communities of Candomblé (Afro-Brazilian religion) and Capoeira (Afro-Brazilian martial art). But she stands (or dances) as a case demonstrating that an outsider can become not just a competent but a creative and inspiring sambista.

Then there are questions about the thesis that the good sambista must be driven by a sense of and a quest for particular Brazilian meaning. To watch Sambadrome video-clips is to be drawn close to the conclusion that it's all about sex, stupid. Refusing that reduction, it still seems that samba means different things to different, but more than competent, dancers: ergo, a specific Brazilian meaning may not be the necessary source of the vital energy good samba requires. So

Top: Carnival 2006; bottom: Dance in any culture helps to form and perpetuate national identity.

*Whether in a dance hall or on a performing stage, dance helps to create and perpetuate national, religious and cultural identities. Here are some examples from Brazil, Spain, Nicaragua, Puerto Rico, Cuba and Peru.*





it looks as though I might have run out of lame excuses for my lame samba.

However it's time for me to shuffle off, the better to focus more sharply on samba and its place in Brazilian society and culture. To that end we must give further attention to the question of samba's meaning to dancers. And there are two meanings of a specifically Brazilian kind that must be considered.

Browning considers samba to be resistance in motion. She tells us that her teachers and the ordinary but awesome sambistas she has danced with in Rio and Salvador are, albeit with varying degrees of self-consciousness, defining in dance positive Afro-Brazilian identities. As they do so, they seek to reject in movement the oppressions of the past and the racial and gender identities that are imposed in the present. For many of her sambistas, the secular dance is founded in and continuous with the sacred rhythms and dances of the Afro-Brazilian religion, Candomblé. The energy and creativity of the dance is ultimately the energy and creativity of the orixás (the African spirits). Clearly, these meanings may energize a particular subset of the Brazilian population, comprised especially but by no means exclusively by Afro-Brazilians. Browning's sambistas are fired to dance to assert their particular identities in a Brazil of unregulated heterogeneity.

But as Browning herself acknowledges, millions of Brazilians since the 1930s have danced samba enthused, not to resist, but to be included in and to celebrate what they believed to be Brazil's glorious distinction, its racial democracy. The myth of a carefully modulated and harmonious multiracial heterogeneity, symbolized and achieved in samba, moved many dancers. To dance samba was to acknowledge and help realize the promise of centuries of physical miscegenation in the making of a modern, complex national society. In the 21st century, it is sometimes hard to recall that for the middle decades of the 20th, samba was indeed the national music and dance of Brazil. The sounds of traditional samba are growing ever fainter, long since swamped by successive waves of bossa nova, sertaneja music, Brazilian rock, MPB, samba-reggae, mangue beat and homegrown hip hop. But testimonies in Sérgio Cabral's interviews with great figures in Rio's samba schools, and stories that Vianna tells us, affirm

samba's former dominance. Moreover, they show us musicians, dancers and performers themselves proclaiming samba as Brazil's racial democracy in dance.

Initially, the connections between miscegenation, samba from Rio's favelas and the making of a modern racial democracy existed only in the minds of members of a modernist cultural elite—pre-eminent among them Recife's Gilberto Freyre. Having been excited by samba and the racial and cultural synergies he encountered in Rio in the 1920s, Freyre went on to write the classic account of miscegenation in Brazil as a source of a distinctive, vital and strong Brazilian society. His narratives and word-pictures in *The Masters and the Slaves* (1933) quickly informed the image of a shared national community, grounded in miscegenation, held by many Brazilians, even across racial, class and regional divides.

What had been Freyre's dream, with samba as its central, effective symbol, was well on its way to being a successful national project when the nation-building governments of President Getúlio Vargas helped it along. Vargas first endorsed ethnic integration (read racial mixing) as national policy, and then, throughout the 30s, sought to realize what he called racial democracy through means that included patronage and regulation of samba schools and the diffusion of the Carioca samba-dominated carnival throughout Brazil. The creativity of sambistas did the rest.

So samba became officially, and by popular acclaim and practice, Brazil's national dance. And by all accounts, the national dance became the prime means for diffusion of the nation-building story of a unique Brazilian racial democracy. But it was not to stay that way. Well before the end of the 20th century samba had been displaced as most listened and danced to music. The vision of Brazil as a racial democracy that had started with young modernist intellectuals in the 1920s started to wither in the 1980s as a new breed of social scientists de-constructed it as mere hegemonic myth, a means of occluding the realities of racial prejudice, segregation and oppression. And by then, samba itself had become invested with multiple meanings—those discerned by Browning with echoes of Gilberto Freyre's interpretations included.

Most important of all, though, as a factor in the displacement of samba, important

segments of the Afro-Brazilian population started not only to move to other dances, but in those dances expressed cosmopolitan, mid-Atlantic Afro identifications and aspirations that cannot be contained in a Brazilian racial democracy of the Freyre-Vargas mold. For example, Olodum, the best known (nationally and internationally) of the Bahian carnival's *blocos afro* has devised and popularized samba-reggae and taken a lead in fostering black pride among young Afro-Brazilians. In song and dance the group rejects and seeks to resist the injustices and exclusions of the supposed racial democracy. It drums and dances for a Brazil of jostling particular identities, some of which will not be made in Brazil—one of the bounds to heterogeneity stipulated by Freyre.

But if samba has lost its place as the national dance central to Brazilian nation-building, it has by no means disappeared. It is still the dance of Rio's carnival, and that is recognized as Brazil's national carnival, even by such champions of Bahian carnival as Caetano Veloso. And in Rio, the samba schools, from time to time at least, still display their pride in their *mestiço* nation. Samba is also to be found inflecting much of the music and the dance that displaces it. Samba-reggae, as its name suggests, melds the 6/8 beat of reggae resounding on the deep *surdo* drum with samba double triplets and riffs. And those who dance samba-reggae unmistakably dance a samba. The music and the dance express both the new Afro cosmopolitanism, and deep Brazilian roots. There also are other fusions on the global stage. The hip-hop group Black-Eyed Peas, for instance, recently collaborated with sambista Sergio Mendes on a new CD. Metamorphizing as it always has, samba may yet be the pre-eminent dance, not of a specific Brazilian national identity, but of the local quest for meaning and identity in globalizing, ever more cosmopolitan Brazil. Failing that, it will be danced for the sheer enjoyment and achievement of the thing.

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*Rowan Ireland is a former Lemann Scholar at DRCLAS (2001). For more than three decades he has studied religion and politics, and social movements in urban areas in Brazil. He is a researcher in the sociology and anthropology programs and the Institute of Latin American Studies at La Trobe University in Australia.*

# LA PLENA INMORTAL

BY ANTONIO MARTORELL

La tradición medieval y renacentista encarnada en “La Danza de la Muerte” me ha fascinado desde mi temprana adolescencia. Los esqueletos musicantes y danzantes que sacan a bailar a papas y emperadores, reinas y marquesas, labriegos y médicos, cortesanas y monjas, estas calacas que sonrientes y fiesteras los invitan a participar del último jolgorio, la postrera jarana, el parison del estribo me han tentado por más de medio siglo a emularlos, moviendo el esqueleto, engrasando las coyunturas y uniéndome a la pachanga.

No deja de sorprenderme que las condiciones que provocaron esta danza mortal—guerras, epidemias, hambre, miseria y cataclismos naturales—tan presentes en nuestro tan globalizado mundo de hoy no hayan propiciado una actualización de este último baile, una puesta al día de la muerte niveladora en clave festiva.

Recuerdo con entusiasmo una Danza de la muerte xilográfica excepcional del gran grabador alemán Hap Grieshaber publicada a principios de los años sesenta haciéndose eco de Hans Holbein. Y recuerdo haber ayudado a imprimir de los tacos originales en linóleo los grabados que componen el portafolio *La Plena* de Lorenzo Homar y Rafael Tufiño, siendo un aprendiz de ambos en el Taller de Gráfica del Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña en aquella época.

No sabía entonces que ambas memorias iban a coincidir en un proyecto cuarenta años después, cuando se juntarán “el hambre con las ganas de comer,” la plena borincana con la danza medieval, el noticiero musicalizado de suceso deportivos, policíacos, políticos y metereológicos con la arcaica ronda mortuoria pero



Antonio Martorell's workshop in Ponce, Puerto Rico, exhibits his “La Plena Inmortal” art project.

festiva de jerarquías sociales, religiosas y militares unidas bajo el ritmo contagioso de la muerte.

La guapachosa urgencia de la Pelona, su sabrosa resonancia de huesos, cuero, castañetear de dientes, maracas, güicharo y pandero combinados con la apremiante mortandad de nuestros tiempos donde se funden y confunden terrorismos de estado y subversión, fanatismos religiosos de oriente y occidente, hambre universal y miseria globalizada me han seducido y provocado a regresar con ahínco a la madera y el papel, la gubia y la punta seca, las tijeras y las tintas, la cola y el cobre para unirme a esta danza de la destrucción tornándose en construcción de un mosaico clamoroso por la vida recordándonos la muerte.

“La Plena Inmortal” es mi proyecto actual. Plena porque pretende ser plena, completa, inclusiva, igualitaria como lo fue “La Danza de la Muerte” medieval y renacentista. Plena porque es nuestra música, la

que gozamos bailando y cantando y también la que mis maestros Lorenzo Homar y Rafael Tufiño usaron de motivo para el célebre portafolios en linografía “La Plena.” Inmortal porque sólo la muerte lo es puesto que todos los demás somos mortales. Ella sobrevive, es la que mata, la que invita, la que establece el ritmo y afina el pie, es aquella irresistible ejecutante que marca el compás que aniquila, el arrebató que arrebató, el abrazo que abraza.

Se morirá gente ahora que antes no se moría porque no existían. Reconoceremos nuevas categorías, profesiones y oficios mortales. Ni en la Edad Media ni en el Renacimiento morían disk jockeys, reinas de bellezas o top models y tampoco peloteros, cosmonautas o tele reporteros, baloncelistas o galeristas. Ahora sí, y todos, hasta el artista, bailarán.

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## THE IMMORTAL PLENA: AN ENGLISH SYNOPSIS

The “Immortal Plena” is the current art project of Antonio Martorell, the 2007-2008 Wilbur Martin Visiting Fellow at DRCLAS.

The word “plena,” Martorell points out, becomes a play of words, because “plena” also means “full, complete, inclusive and egalitarian, as was the ‘Dance of Death’ in medieval times and during the Renaissance period.”

Writes Martorell of the title: “Plena [also] because it is our

music, which we enjoy dancing and singing, also because my *maestros* Lorenzo Homar and Rufino Tufiño used them as a motif in their work ‘La Plena.’ *Immortal*, because only death has determined that all of us are mortal. Death survives; it kills; it invites; it establishes the rhythm [of life] and steadies the feet; it is the irresistible performer who marks the rhythm that ends it all, the snatcher who makes the final snatch, who carries out the final embrace.”



DANCE!





# CABOCLO RITUAL DANCE “BRINGS THE JUKE-JOINT INTO THE CHURCH”

BY DANIEL PIPER

To give oneself to dance is to experience the moving body as sacred. For anyone who believes that the alienation of the body from the spirit is simply an inevitable symptom of modernity, I offer a personal challenge: are you certain you've danced already? But if you have and remain unconvinced, I leave you with this mini-narrative about a peculiar type of ritual popular in urban Brazil. May it inspire your thoughts for the next dance!

Having assumed the body of his black female host, a Brazilian caboclo [a beloved class of ancestral spirits] saunters forward, cigar butt clenched between his teeth and leather cowboy hat tilted at a forward angle obscuring his eyes, and kneels dutifully before the atabaque drums. Grunting loudly and pounding his chest a few times, the caboclo Boadeiro (cowboy spirit) captures everyone's attention and the room is suddenly silent. From a kneeling position, he chants a series of prayers (rezas) in a high-pitched nasal vocal timbre and is answered by the rapid ringing of a small two-toned iron bell. Finally, the caboclo offers his brethren a melody, to which they respond by alternating an enthusiastic chorus phrase with his solos. Boadeiro rises to his feet and suddenly – slap, slap, crack! Three drummers have entered forcefully to breathe life into the song, falling into an energizing rhythm punctuated by the syncopated tones and slaps of the lowest sounding instrument. Shuffling his feet in time as he sings solo verses, and gradually incorporating more rapid and extended leg and torso gestures during the chorus sections, Boadeiro begins to narrate his identity and personalized mythology through song and dance.

In a variety of popular religions in Brazil, rituals for the caboclos are a modern development with increasing participation from all segments of society. The boisterously social caboclo will possess the body of a spirit medium for several hours

**Caboclo dancing in Brazil: the figure of the caboclo spirit is the Brazilian equivalent of the traveling bluesman of the pre-1960s U.S. rural South—improvising vernacular poets.**

at a time, enabling people to know him through direct social interaction. In the state of Bahia, the spirits manifest as traditional songsters who smoke cigars, drink beer and the fiery liquor cachaça, dance, sing and offer proverbial wisdom from dusk until dawn. These caboclos tend to exude such charisma, creativity, distinctive personality and knowledge of regional culture that they become the “life of the party” and exemplars of Afro-Bahian social performance. Here's a succinct analogy: the figure of the caboclo spirit is the Brazilian equivalent of the traveling bluesman of the pre-1960s rural American South—improvising black vernacular poets who sing personalized narratives and fragments of wisdom gathered from adventurous journeys. Metaphorically, they are like the mythologized Robert Johnson or Son House returning from the dead to invoke the juke joint, with all its profane and sacred meaning, right inside the church.

Boadeiro's movements sometimes amplify his lyrical descriptions, through mimicry of popularly imagined Brazilian “Indians,” cowboys, and backwoodsmen or danced representations of their personalities—variously youthful and energetic, irreverent, humorous, crafty, provocative, creative and bold. Boadeiro's arms gesture about in wide-open embraces, unlike the more graceful and self-contained orixás whose closed eyes and mouth, and careful positioning of the limbs are a physical manifestation of the body's spiritual closure. The caboclo's mouth is always opening—ingesting and emitting things, whether to sing, joke, drink beer, inhale or exhale smoke. The eyes of the spirit are wide open, staring, and rarely blinking. He kicks his feet and legs outward in various directions, sometimes propelling his body high in the air, or shuffling himself rapidly across the floor. Through the caboclo's body, spiritual power is not tactfully restrained, but dramatically exhibited – or perhaps generated – through athletic movements, astonishing endurance, speedy footwork, and spontaneous delivery of one song after another.

Though Bahian caboclo ritual dances define a unique style of their own, I can trace relationships in the movements to other regional traditions including capoeira, samba-de-roda, coco and frevo. The caboclo's virtuosic solo dancing, and intensely interactive exchanges with the lead drummer also bring to mind the street rumbas of Cuba. Yet these comparisons, obvious to an experienced local practitioner, are easily overlooked by foreign scholars.

Perhaps one reason is that we assume “secular” activities – rumba, samba-de-roda and the other popular dances – do not involve religious content, or spirit possession. Looking for the sacred in the cities of Havana, Recife and Salvador, I've seen the African deity Chango at a Cuban rumba, coco house parties thrown for the spirits of Candomblé and even a mischievous caboclo seizing an unsuspecting medium in broad daylight at a Bahian samba-de-roda.

But before our readers mistake the trickster at the crossroads for an exotic demon, let me issue a reminder that the dancing, joking, and singing caboclo is a familiar, socially accessible, and virtuous character to Bahians. Hold on, blues people, I'm heading homeward for the coda: we can recognize that the Afro-American “ring shout” has been formally separated into the “ring” (popular dance) and the “shout” (religious dance), but I wouldn't say that the sacred is absent from either. In the African Diaspora, modernity, dance and spirituality seem to get along quite nicely. To revisit the blues analogy, if the caboclo can “bring the juke joint into the church,” certainly it is possible to “get some religion at the Saturday night dance.”

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# Más Allá de los Clichés

## *Dance and Identity in Cuba*

BY ANNA WALTERS

**I**N 1955, THE PROLIFIC CUBAN SCHOLAR and ethnologist, Fernando Ortiz, claimed “dance is the principal and most enthusiastic diversion of the Cuban people, it is their most genuinely indigenous production and universal exportation.” Dance may not be *the* Cuban diversion, but the identification of Cuba with dance certainly surfaces in the popular imagination—most recently in Hollywood’s *Dirty Dancing: Havana Nights*, and decades earlier as the source of the international *mambo* craze. But besides its vibrant popular dance culture, Cuba has also produced a sophisticated professional dance scene. In the early 1960s, Cuba’s revolutionary government formed three major national dance companies as well as a rigorous dance training program aimed at developing the art, educating the audience and making professional dance a vehicle for the expression of national identity.

The vitality of professional dance in Cuba today is apparent from the Ballet Nacional to the Tropicana nightclub, the hundreds of folkloric ensembles to the experimental modern dance groups. Every week in Havana promises a polished performance by one of the major national companies formed under the auspices of Castro’s revolutionary government (Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba, Danza Contemporánea and Ballet Nacional). The city also boasts international biennials in ballet, dance-theater, folkloric dance and, in the near future, modern dance.

Although professional dance in Cuba has, for the past half century, enjoyed significant support, it has not been spared the challenges of the country’s most recent economic and social crisis. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the end of its trade subsidy program with Cuba, the country plunged into a crisis called the “special period.” For ordinary Cubans, the special period has meant severe shortages of basic necessities, the flourishing of a black market and the need to have some access—often illicit—to foreign hard currency. In the vacuum left by the Soviet Union’s trade subsidies, Cuba has propped its economy

on tourism, bringing an influx of foreign visitors to the island.

The special period and its multiple effects suffuse dance as well. The material shortages of the special period are certainly visible in the physical deterioration of rehearsal and performance spaces and emigration of skilled dancers, but its social, political and psychic consequences also emerge in the performances themselves. Professional Cuban dance across genres has responded to the new pressures of the special period in both deliberate and unintended ways. Some choreographers and institutions create work to respond to the desires and demands of international tourism, others address the national experience of becoming an object of international desire, and sometimes it is not the choreography that changes but a shift in the performance’s audience and context that radically alter its significance. Performances by these national professional ensembles embody distinct versions of Cuban identity that may portray an official agenda and simultaneously betray unofficial elements of Cuban experience.

It was the mythic association of Cuba with dance that initially compelled me to travel there. I arrived in spring 2003, imagining a place where dance practically erupted in the streets. Within my first few weeks in Cuba, I became deeply absorbed in *el folklor*—the Cuban term that usually refers to the dance and music associated with Afro-Cuban tradition. Cuba supports hundreds of dance companies dedicated to a *folklor* repertory ranging from internationally acclaimed professional companies to amateur groups. The Havana-based Conjunto Folklórico Nacional (CFN) has defined the genre since 1962 when it was formed by the revolutionary government with a mission to collect, document and preserve Cuba’s original dance and music heritage. The CFN’s process of collection and codification recast the dances of Cuba’s historically marginalized black population as an embodiment of national identity.

Every Saturday, starting in 1979, the CFN performs at El Palenque—the sun-

lit, open-air patio adjacent to the company’s studios. On recent trips to Havana, I had joined the mix of foreigners and Cubans drinking beer and hunting for a patch of shade in anticipation of the afternoon show. There is no raised proscenium stage, no lights or curtain and the audience surrounds the performers on three sides. The intimacy and informality of the space and its name, which refers to a runaway slave settlement, suggest the mythical origins of the CFN’s repertory among the black slave population of Cuba’s colonial past.

In contrast to the contrived informality of the performance space, the show is meticulously choreographed and rehearsed. An authoritative emcee presides, whose gravely serious introduction to each dance is a reminder of the CFN’s mission to educate Cubans about their heritage. The musicians gathered in one corner of the performance space still include an older generation of CFN members whose knowledge of *folklor* was learned from family and friends. In contrast, the company’s young dancers brandish skills acquired at the competitive arts school, El Instituto Superior de Arte.

The dance repertory of the first half of the performance is typically a dramatized version of Afro-Cuban religious ritual. The second half promises rumba, the secular Afro-Cuban partner dance selected by the Castro government from a range of popular dances as the official national dance. In her book *Rumba: Dance and Social Change in Contemporary Cuba*, Yvonne Daniel explains that historically, rumba was the dance of “the slave, free black, mulatto and white workers of the nineteenth century” and its selection was meant to express the revolution’s ideology—if not actual practice—of “equality with the working masses and an identity with [Cuba’s] Afro-Latin heritage.”

During the rumba portion, the stage/audience boundary dissolves as people leave their chairs to dance and sing along to rumba, often pulling an unsuspecting tourist

Lorna Feijóo and Nelson Madrigal, formerly of the Ballet Nacional de Cuba, pose in front of Havana’s Capitolio.





## DANCE!

out of the crowd to participate. While in the 1980s, only Cubans and a few foreign diplomats attended these performances, the audience is now made up of tourists and Cuban hustlers or *jinetes*[or *jinetas*?] aggressively offering sex or cigars to foreigners. The CFN's display of Afro-Cuban culture that began as an iteration of certain revolutionary values takes on another meaning in the tourism economy where visitors from North America and Europe are enticed by the promise of exotic entertainment.

The exploitation of *el folklor* and the attendant sexualization of dark-skinned Cubans hinted at in the El Palenque performance are explicit in the cabaret shows performed at major hotels and resort complexes. These floor shows, virtually unchanged since Cuba's tourism heyday in the 1940s and 50s, feature scantily clad and outrageously plumed and sparkling *mulatas* alongside exaggerated and stereotyped versions of *folklor*. While the CFN performance continues to serve both local and tourist audiences, the cabaret shows are prohibitively expensive for Cubans and aimed squarely at outsiders. The appropriation of Afro-Cuban identity that once fulfilled a need for a distinct national cultural identity becomes, in the tourism market, a fulfillment of desire.

Even as the ideology and history of the CFN distance it from the cabaret, early CFN collaborator Argeliers León laments to CFN historian Katherine Hagedorn in her book *Divine Utterances: The Performance of Afro-Cuban Santería* that some of the spectacle and sizzle of the cabaret has infiltrated the CFN's supposedly "authentic" presentations. Not only folklore, but all of Cuba's dance genres, are increasingly haunted by the cabaret and the expectations it places on Cuban dance performance from the outside.

During my most recent trip to Havana, I met with Noel Bonilla, director of modern dance for Cuba's National Council of Performing Arts. Bonilla expressed enthusiasm for my interest in exploring Cuban dance "beyond the clichés." When I asked him what he meant by "the clichés" he reeled off the now-familiar cabaret stereotype: "the mulata, the palm trees, the sun," but also expressed frustration with the "worship of the diva—Alicia Alonso." Indeed, outside of Cuba, Cuban dance is synonymous with Alonso, the founder and current director of



Yemaya, the sea goddess, depicted by a dancer from the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional.

the Ballet Nacional de Cuba. A decade of *Dance Magazine* articles on Cuban dance focuses exclusively on the performances in Cuba and abroad of the Ballet Nacional.

During the early years of the revolution, when the CFN was formed from scratch, Alicia Alonso's international reputation was well established. But it was direct support from the government that allowed her small private company to become the Ballet Nacional de Cuba. While the Conjunto appealed to the revolution's ideological association with working-class Cubans, the comparatively elite, bourgeois and Eurocentric associations of classical ballet were discordant with early revolutionary ideology. Yet Castro's government gave significant support to both.

When it is not touring, the Ballet Nacional performs in the spectacular but dilapidated colonial Gran Teatro in Old Havana—a renovated part of the colonial city that has become a major tourist

attraction. Inside the theatre, a semicircle of balconies rises to a painted fresco and chandelier above the proscenium stage. The well-worn red velvet seats and curtains create a setting quite different from that of El Palenque. In a sense, the two performance spaces reenact the old colonial relationship of European and African culture. The persistence of these historic associations is apparent in the dancers as well. In the Ballet Nacional, dark-skinned dancers are the exception and vice versa in the CFN.

Ballet not only has elite connotations, but it is also less distinctively Cuban than folklore. Alonso and the Ballet Nacional are a point of national pride, but less for any particular style than for their tremendous technical abilities and fiery performance presence. Ballet itself is a multinational art, one that cannot be claimed by any single nation. In that sense, ballet has an international dance identity and through the



Alicia Alonso, founder of Cuba's National Ballet, is an international and Cuban icon.

excellence of the Ballet Nacional de Cuba, the tropical third-world island symbolically demonstrates its ability to rival European and North American superpowers, especially during the special period.

The third major professional dance institution to emerge in the early years of the revolution, along with the CFN and Ballet Nacional, is Danza Contemporánea de Cuba, the modern dance company. Unlike ballet, its development was entwined with *folklor*. Ramiro Guerra, widely considered the grandfather of modern dance in Cuba, was early director for both the CFN and Danza Contemporánea de Cuba. In a recent interview, former Danza Contemporánea soloist, Marianela Boán, described the ideological attraction of modern dance in the early days of the revolution: "modern dance, having no pre-established vocabulary, allows searching of the source of expression in the cultural roots of each country. Mod-

ern dance allowed us to develop our own way of movement . . . far from the Eurocentric ballet and open to the inclusion of our folkloric roots." Yet today, Noel Bonilla feels that while Cuba has developed formidable dancers, it is still struggling to find an original and authentically Cuban voice independent of both North American and European material and haphazard appropriation of *folklor*.

Danza Contemporánea, in a manner similar to the Ballet Nacional, is less remarkable for its Cuban-created repertory than for the international caliber of its dancers. Fresh and experimental choreography is found among the cluster of smaller companies including Retazos, Compañía Narciso Medina and DanzAbierta, which split off from the company in the 1980s during an especially "open" moment in the Castro government's attitude toward artistic expression. During the early years of the special period, these

dance outfits explicitly addressed the conditions of contemporary Cuban existence in the content of their work.

A piece by Marianela Boán for DanzAbierta entitled *El Pez de la Torre Nada en el Asfalto*, premiered in 1996, was not only experimental in its use of the genre but bold in its confrontation of Cuban experience. I did not see the piece, but in an interview, Boán described some of it for me. As the audience enters the lobby of the performance, the dancers approach them attempting to trade absurd things as though part of the underground black market that has flourished during the special period. On stage, the company dances with suitcases in a nod to the unspoken national obsession with emigration. The rags that the dancers wear are gradually discarded and they discover below them a second skin of sparkling cabaret costumes. While they dance a show in the cabaret style, they hold empty plates and forks in reference to the dull hunger behind all the glamour.

Boán's piece addresses not only the strains of the special period through dance, but addresses the very issue of Cuban dance identity. She uses Cuban dance stereotypes like pieces of a collage, altering their connotations as she places them in a new context. The meaning of the piece depends on knowledge of the history and context of those fragments even as Boán rejects them as incomplete and inauthentic.

Boán's piece points to the possibility that there is something distinctively Cuban in even the most commercial and exploitative genre. The identification of Cuba with dance articulated in Ortiz's generalization feeds on clichéd forms. But it also acknowledges the potential for dance to address and reflect contemporary Cuban identity and experience. This association of Cuba and dance constrains as well as inspires Cuban choreographers and dancers developing a voice in the medium. Their work promises to be an ongoing process of discovering and describing contemporary *Cubanidad*.

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# Knowledgeable Bodies

## *Basque Traditional Dance and Nationalism*

BY SUZANNE JENKINS



The large figure of a typical Basque farmer is paraded down the street during a festival

**I**MAGINE YOU ARE VACATIONING ON THE beach in Spain. What if you step out of your hotel on the first morning and see masses of people swarming toward you, brandishing flags and shouting in a language you don't understand, as masked policemen clad in black and red jump suits and big black boots encourage order? Down at the plaza, silent attention to speeches alternates with loud chanting. Fists jut into the air, unmoving. Would you feel frightened? Annoyed at having your path to the bakery across the street obstructed? Feel a sense of thrill that something interesting is happening? Would you feel Basque?

Chances are it is easy for you to imagine feeling fear, annoyance or thrill because you have experienced these sensations before. I don't need to explain them to you in scientific terms. You likely are not sure what it means to feel Basque, however, if you are not Basque.

I heard the statement "I feel Basque" over and over again while I researched the connection between Basque traditional dance and nationalism in San Sebastián, Spain, for my thesis in social anthropology, and it often left me frustrated. Through interviews with dancers, I came to accept that it refers to a feeling in the body as tangible as fear or thrill that can be triggered by Basque dance, music, language, style of dress or any number of cultural markers. Words cannot adequately convey this feeling to outsiders.

Accordingly, the feeling reinforces solidarity within the group and a conviction of being truly different from other people.

Recognizing these physical sensations as a type of insider knowledge both supports and adds to Harvard professor of anthropology Michael Herzfeld's understanding of nationalism as *cultural intimacy*. It helps explain how nationalism can be experienced as a natural, concrete and extraordinarily motivating force.

### DANCE AND NATIONALISM

Like the Basque language, which is strikingly unrelated to any other Indo-European language, Basque folk dance is a distinguishing element of Basque culture. As the Basque provincial government pursues diplomatic strategies towards independence from Spain, it encourages studies about dance and language to bolster its arguments. Many anthropological studies have read choreography as narrative, arguing that Basque folk dance's historical-cultural images evidence a continuously autonomous culture and social system since ancient times (*Fronteras y puentes culturales: danza tradicional e identidad social* by Kepa Fernández de Larrinoa, 1998 and *La danza tradicional* by Emilio Javier Dueñas, 2002).

To keep the dance form alive, however, the government depends upon the individual dancers who dedicate hours and hours to their practice, usually without pay. Some

of them dramatically link nationalist emotions to the question of survival. "It's that we live it much more—much more because we have to fight daily. ... In the Basque Country we are very nationalist because we feel our country, since historically they have wanted to, well they have wanted to crush us in one way or another so that we couldn't subsist," said one dancer (Personal Interview, August 22, 2002). I set out to discover what dancing the traditional form means to them.

### NERVES AND GOOSE BUMPS

The dancers' stories tell of a parallel surrender into physicality and the collective Basque identity. Basque traditional dance has a demanding physical technique, similar in some ways to classical ballet. Over time, the dancers feel their muscles gain flexibility and strength; they breathe more easily through difficult exercises, and they move with increasing technical agility. At performance time, they trust their bodies to perform the steps correctly. Gotzon is a dancer in a semi-professional company that fuses traditional and contemporary dance. When he dances well, he experiences sensations of fluidity. "I don't think," he says, "I let myself go. I let the music carry me. If you think, you mess up." Eneko, a traditional dancer, remembers learning a particularly difficult jump. He had to think a lot in the beginning, but after repeated physical practice, he says, "I don't have to think as much. I jump, and I do it."

As they release into physicality, they release their individual identity into a collective ideal. Aida, the leader of the girls in the traditional dance company Goizaldi, says that when she performs, "I'm no longer Aida, the person. I am like all of history." Fellow company member Sua says that when you step on stage, you are "your nation's ideal person."

Performing this ideal can evoke both thrill and nervousness. Aida's favorite dance is called the *agurra*. Intended to welcome an honored person (*agur* is the traditional



# LECCIONES DEL GÜEGÜENSE, UN VIEJO BAILADOR

POR ALBA F. ARAGÓN

Recuerdo bien el local porque me cautivó su nombre: Ruinas del Gran Hotel. Desde los años cuarenta hasta el terremoto que destruyó Managua la víspera de Nochebuena de 1972, había acogido a distinguidos políticos y estrellas de la farándula internacional. Quedaba en la Avenida Roosevelt, en lo que en mi niñez se empezó a recordar como “la vieja Managua”, antiguo centro urbano poblado de escombros y asediado por el espectro de la guerra continua, que no permitía el lujo de la reconstrucción. Era la Nicaragua de los ochenta, la de sandinistas y contras que desapareció de los noticieros internacionales poco después de que cayera el muro de Berlín.

Ver el baile del *Güegüense* por primera vez fue parte de una deliciosa complicidad con mi madre, que premiaba mi diligencia en los estudios llevándome a espectáculos. El interior del Centro Cultural Ruinas del Gran Hotel parecía ignorar la sordidez que lo rodeaba: era todo luminosidad y movimiento; sombreros de copas doradas con plumas altas y colores chillones, verde, rojo, púrpura; lentejuelas refractando los colores de las faldas extendidas; pañuelos ondulantes, señoritas de rulos y abanicos coquetos; violines, guitarras, tambores, risas y máscaras. Máscaras, sobre todo: unas con enormes irises azules y bigotes rubios; otras morenas con bigotes negros; y las más intrigantes, las máscaras negras y alargadas de los machos o mulos que, con sus cuerpos de hombre, agitaban un cascabel con la mano y danzaban en hilera, a veces galopando y a veces dando traspiés de borracho.

*La comedia del Güegüense o Macho Ratón* es una obra de autor desconocido que posiblemente data de 1675. Se editó por primera vez en 1883. Es una combinación de bailes, música y parlamentos escritos en una mezcla de castellano y náhuatl, *lingua franca* de los pueblos mesoamericanos dominados por los aztecas. Trata del paso de un mercader ambulante, un indio o mestizo llamado Güegüense, por una provincia de Nicaragua. El gobernador de origen español

pretende sobornarlo para permitir su paso, pero el Güegüense, usando equívocos bilingües y postergando el trámite con bailes, consigue que el gobernador le pague a él, cediéndole a su hija en matrimonio.

Los bailes del *Güegüense* son una tradición viva en Nicaragua. Cada mes de enero, durante el festival patronal de San Sebastián en el pueblo de Diriamba, el Güegüense sale a la calle. Sus interpretaciones por el Ballet Folclórico Nacional y otros grupos de danza, en ocasiones acompañados por la Orquesta Nacional en funciones cívicas y eventos de gala en Managua y en el extranjero demuestran, además, su adaptación como estandarte de identidad nacional.

Su valor literario ha sido debatido. En el siglo XIX, el poeta nicaragüense Rubén Darío opinó que era “de una simplicidad primitiva”, de diálogos monótonos y escaso argumento. José Martí, otra gran figura del modernismo latinoamericano, calificó su lenguaje de “dialeto burdo” y sin embargo vio en la obra una “comedia maestra”. Por su parte, el filólogo y crítico literario Pedro Henríquez Ureña advirtió en 1938 que “es poco lo que se obtiene” de la obra.

Otros críticos la han llamado “obra maestra de la picaresca indoamericana” (Carlos Mántica), “la pieza magistral del teatro callejero” (Milagros Palma), o la “obra clave de la identidad nacional” (Jorge Eduardo Arellano). En el 2005, la Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura (UNESCO) proclamó el *Güegüense* Obra Maestra del Patrimonio Oral e Inmaterial de la Humanidad. Esta designación reconoce su singularidad y conlleva medidas concretas para salvaguardarla.

El *Güegüense* se ha entendido como una alegoría de la resistencia indígena a la explotación colonial o de la confluencia de razas en el mestizaje. Estas lecturas parecen coincidir con agendas políticas: fue durante la era sandinista (1979-90) que se popularizó su interpretación como protesta ante la explotación extranjera,

mientras que su lectura perenne y fácil como el momento fundacional del mestizaje soslaya las dificultades de la convivencia en un país multiétnico con graves diferencias socioeconómicas.

La palabra “güegüense” proviene del náhuatl y se ha traducido variamente como “respetable anciano” y como “sinvergüenza” (Mántica). Estos significados reflejan el carácter ambivalente del protagonista, ingenioso y hábil pero también mentiroso y usurero – tal como le recuerdan los demás personajes, para deleite del público.

El *Güegüense* es la trama de un mestizo que socava la autoridad colonial con su dominio de dos lenguas y la postergación. En este sentido es análoga a los célebres *Comentarios reales* del Inca Garcilaso de la Vega (1609). Pero a diferencia del Inca Garcilaso, quien (según la profesora de Harvard Doris Sommer) se desplaza metafóricamente por distintos lugares de enunciación para desconcertar y seducir al lector, nuestro prosaico Güegüense se vale del baile para persuadir.

Es a través del baile, ese desplazamiento literal, físico y gozoso por el espacio escénico, que el Güegüense gana cuando las palabras fallan. Más allá de alegorizar un conflicto, el *Güegüense* representa una negociación fructuosa lograda con gracia y sin violencia. Por eso, más allá de su posible valor histórico o literario, el *Güegüense* guarda para mí un valor vital que relaciono con el asombro infantil de esa noche en las Ruinas del Gran Hotel: el saber hacer de situaciones aparentemente insuperables motivos de goce, por encima de todos los pronósticos.

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*This essay profiles the dance of El Güegüense, a continuous tradition in Nicaragua since colonial times. A version in English with references and further reading can be found at <<http://drclas.fas.harvard.edu/publications.>>*

Basque greeting), it is always the first dance that the girls perform in Goizaldi's performances. Dancing the *agurra* gives Aida goose bumps, she says. So does dancing with the *ikurriña*—the Basque flag. She tries to describe a regional celebration in which a large gathering of groups performed simultaneously. "We all, *all* the guys and girls, crouched down, and then there were a *ton* of *ikurriñas*..." Words fail her. Her breath catches in her chest, and her eyes close. Chills run down her spine. She breathes deeply before opening her eyes to stare straight into me, shaking her head. She doesn't go on, but I already have goose bumps. In the United States, I have performed classical and contemporary dance, and I know a similar thrill of performance. If you are a baseball fan, perhaps it is similar to the excitement of having the Red Sox take the lead away from the Yankees (or vice versa).

Aida believes that a Spaniard or other non-Basque "would never have this feeling. For him, dancing the *agurra* wouldn't mean anything. But for us, it means a lot, a lot. It's very emotional." Watching Basque dance, she has difficulty just sitting back to enjoy. She gets nervous for the performers and feels the urge to be dancing herself.

Nervousness evokes similarly tangible sensations. A dancer feels his agitated nerves when he feels his heart pulsing inside his chest, his stomach disconcertingly floating up between his shoulders, and his breath falling shallow. Some dancers get more nervous than others, but each dancer feels more nervous performing within the Basque Country than during international tours. Sua describes it, "I get much more nervous when I'm with my people. When you're on tour, you can dance much more calmly. They don't know the dances, you see? Even if you screw up it doesn't matter because they don't notice. On the other hand, last week in the Plaza de la Constitución, it was totally full of people, and of course... it's not just any audience. It's an audience that knows about these things" (Personal interview, August 22, 2002).

These dancers actually *feel* their commonality with other Basques and their difference from others. Thus, Basque identity can be "carried inside" in a real way at the same time that it can be constructed through experience. One of the dancers in Goizaldi was born to non-Basque parents but grew up in the Basque Country with a Basque nanny, speaking Basque, eating Basque food

and dancing the traditional Basque form. He feels Basque and is considered Basque by the other company members.

### CULTURAL INTIMACY

This view of "feeling Basque" complements Herzfeld's theory of nationalism as *cultural intimacy* in three important ways (*Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-state*, 1997). The notion of cultural intimacy is based on the sharing of insider information. It is "the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality."

First, Herzfeld's definition addresses information that a group can share with outsiders but would like to hide on purpose. "Feeling Basque" *cannot* be conveyed to outsiders through verbal communication. Therefore, it appears as a natural barrier between Basques and non-Basques—authentic and not subject to manipulation.

Second, it exemplifies how cultural intimacy accounts for nationalists' perception of the nation as concrete fact, whereas Benedict Anderson's model of nationalism as "imagined community" limits the nation to an abstract "imagined" realm. Understanding the Basque feeling as a physical sensation recognizes that insider information can reside in the body in tangible form, not just in the imagination. An outsider cannot dispute the existence of these feelings.

Third, it suggests another reason why nationalism may have such strong motivational power. Sensations of feeling Basque are a form of knowledge upon which individuals make choices—akin to Anthony Giddens' practical consciousness (*Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis*, 1979) or Pierre Bourdieu's habitus (*Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 1977). Knowledge, however, is situated. Giddens observes, "we have to recognize that what an actor knows as a competent—but historically and spatially located—member of society, 'shades off' in contexts that stretch beyond those of his or her day-to-day activity." A conspicuous threat to identity threatens to uproot an actor from the perceptual context of his everyday life. This, in turn, jeopardizes an actor's competence. An actor should have strong incentive to protect his identity to protect his competence.

### BY DEGREES

I came to realize that I can never understand *on an intellectual level* what it means to feel Basque. I can only accept that the dancers actually feel Basque, and that they make choices based upon this feeling.

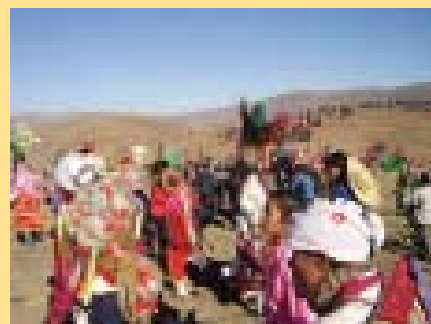
However, as my friend Zigor Salvador from San Sebastián says, "It's not like either you're Basque or you're not. Depending on your life, your family origin, your relationships with other areas of Spain or even the world, your Basque 'gauge' can and does change during a lifetime. You can begin your adult life feeling very Basque and then have the feeling lessen as you travel, see the big wide world and interact with other cultures, or you can come from a Spanish family and end up being a fundamentalist or radical Basque. Either way, meaningful communication can only succeed when you acknowledge the quantitative nature of the feeling, and you realize that all the people living here are somewhat Basque. They may only like a particular Basque sport, or the Basque gastronomical heritage, or they simply like the landscape, the mountains, the sea. Endless combinations of the very bits that make up the Basque feeling exist, and each person is unique regarding such feelings. Realizing this, you can somehow get attached to every other member of the society. Empathy opens the doors for communication, and the middle point exists."

Goizaldi asks audiences to acknowledge this each time it performs. It always seeks to perform under the Basque flag rather than the Spanish flag, in part because the Spanish flag is akin to false advertising—the audience will expect to see flamenco, when in reality it is going to hear "not even one 'olé!'" Dancers want to combat stereotypes. They complain that outsiders tend to "put them all in the same sack"—if you display an *ikurriña*, "you are already an assassin."

When Basque dancers perform, they invite both local and international audiences to acknowledge a positive side of the Basque identity and each dancer's membership in it. The audience is left to choose whether or not to accept.

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*Suzanne Jenkins (Harvard College '03) is Program Officer at ArtCorps (www.art-corp.org), a nonprofit that empowers developing communities and the NGOs serving them to work interdependently using participatory art, and a contemporary dancer.*



## SACRED DANCE IN THE PERUVIAN HIGHLANDS

BY NICOLA ULIBARRÍ

Long ago, a young shepherd named Marianito Mayta lived in the mountains above Mahuayani, caring for his aging father and tolerating the abuse of his lazy older brother. One day, a boy appeared who began to help Marianito with his chores. The Ocongate priest soon learned of this strange boy, whose white garments never ripped or stained, and, accusing him of stealing clothing from the church's saints, decided to catch the rogue. After two failed attempts, the priest finally cornered the boy on the snowy mountainside, but he grasped a crying man with blood dripping from his hands. This was the first miracle of the Señor de Qoyllur Rit'i, which means "snow star" in Quechua.

The festival in honor of the Señor de Qoyllur Rit'i began as a small pilgrimage, when farmers and herdsman from the Ocongate area journeyed to the *santuario*

limited number of dances, each telling a specific story about Peru's history, and each town or village around Cuzco has one or two *comparsas* that perform the same dances year after year. I joined the Aucca Chilenos from the town of Urcos, who perform the story of lower-class soldiers and wealthy, white Peruvians during the War of the Pacific. The *hermanos* are ordinary people—teachers, farmers, policemen—who share a deep love for Christ, which imbues their dancing with a very genuine feeling. Though the dancers occasionally miss a step or do not dance with perfect carriage, every movement expresses an earthy sincerity.

I slept for a total of one hour during the three days of the festival. There was constant music, often with several different bands playing competing tunes. Explosions and fireworks sounded every several min-

Scenes from the festival in honor of the Señor de Qoyllur Rit'i in the Peruvian highlands.

dancing themselves to exhaustion, wearing insufficient layers for the freezing weather, and not sleeping for three days, the dancers perform penance for the *Señor*. As a fellow "Chileno" dancer told me—after we spent a numbing overnight vigil on the glacier—cold, hunger, fatigue and thirst are all imaginary, and that by suffering through them one becomes stronger in God's name. Many dances include a section where the performers whip one another, another way of showing their willingness to suffer like Christ.

On the last night of the festival, as we hiked by candlelight throughout the night in a line that snaked for kilometers to reach Ocongate, I—an agnostic, female *norteamericana*—was baptized and whipped as a full member of the Aucca Chilenos. At sunrise, thousands of dancers, still clad in their masks and costumes, danced zigzagging across the hillside to mark the arrival of the statue of the Señor. Then the image was carried downhill to the church in Ocongate, and the men and women of the *comparsas* returned to their everyday life, at least until next year.

And, in order to fulfill my duties as a Chilena, I now have to return at least two times to dance in the Andes at the Santuario del Señor de Qoyllur Rit'i.

**The festival was the most exhausting, thrilling, nerve-wracking and fascinating three days of my summer.**

at the base of a three-mile-high glacier to pay homage to their local apparition of Christ. Today, tens of thousands of men and women from throughout Peru gather the weekend before Corpus Christi for three days of non-stop dancing, music and penitence. My Ocongateño host "father" invited me to accompany his son's *comparsa*, or dance group, on the pilgrimage. It was the most exhausting, thrilling, nerve-wracking and fascinating three days of my summer.

*Comparsas*—Catholic brotherhoods of dancers and musicians—are the central participants in Qoyllur Rit'i. There are a

utes, even at two or three in the morning. *Comparsas* would start dancing anywhere and everywhere: on the climb up the glacier, in a boggy field, in the courtyard below the church. Quechua masses were broadcast over loudspeakers from the sanctuary throughout the day. And Pablos, men dressed in bear costumes, whistled and danced through the crowds to whip anyone caught drinking, fighting or otherwise degrading the holy festival.

Although the twenty-four-hour commotion was overwhelming for me as a newcomer, the chaos has purpose. By

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**Nicola Ulibarri** ('08) spent three months in Ocongate, Peru, researching how development, agrarian reform, and "modernization" have influenced the residents' sense of place, with funding from DRCLAS and the Goelet Fund. She is a senior in Currier House studying Social Anthropology.



# DIABLOS DANZANTES EN PUNO, PERÚ

POR MIGUEL RUBIO ZAPATA

La Fiesta de la Virgen de la Candelaria, que se celebra en Puno en febrero de cada año, es definitivamente una de las festividades tradicionales más importantes que se realiza en el Perú y América. Este año, dentro de este ritual atávico que afirma la pertenencia y la identidad de los puneños, se calcula que participaron 35,000 personas, entre músicos y danzantes. En esta maravillosa fiesta, la "mamita" Candelaria, con excepcional capacidad de convocatoria, logra que bailen, en una misma fecha y lugar, 67 conjuntos de trajes de luces (entre diablos, morenos, diablesas y otros más). Ellos danzan en multitudinarias comparsas compuestas por los diversos estratos de la población y recorren la ciudad bailando sin parar durante más de dieciocho horas seguidas.

Este multitudinario ritual danzario es una cosmovisión que danza en las calles. Este año, 2007, fui testigo de algo que aún no termino de procesar y de darle un lugar en mi imaginario mapa de relaciones entre el pasado, presente y futuro de las manifestaciones tradicionales, en constante proceso de transformación, de mi país. Un ejército de diablos en perfecta formación (léase de manera literal) irrumpen, al bordear la medianoche, en la Plaza de Armas

Images of the dancing devils, *diablos danzantes*, in Puno, Peru.

de Puno en medio de fuegos artificiales y bombardas. Vienen de saludar a la virgen. El conjunto de diablos compuesto por los miembros del Ejército Peruano asciende a 750 bailarines aproximadamente, acompañados por cinco bandas de música que interpretan diabladas "militarizadas". El desfile de veneración se convierte en una parada militar diablesca. Todos los que estamos allí nos quedamos paralizados frente a la contundente marcialidad del batallón que viene tomando la ciudad. Han recorrido 10 kilómetros bailando y bailando, la gente no los ha dejado descansar. Imposible bajar la guardia. Es el Ejército Peruano el que pasa y en cada calle ha sido calurosamente recibidos.

**Este multitudinario ritual danzario es una cosmovisión que danza en las calles. Participaron 35,000 personas.**

El Mayor de Infantería de la 4ª Brigada de Montaña en el Departamento de Instrucción del Ejército Peruano en Puno, Roberto Martín Tovar Ortiz, me explicó los motivos, las circunstancias y el proceso de participación que actualmente tiene el Ejército Peruano dentro de la fiesta de la Virgen de la Candelaria. Ya que Puno es una provincia fronteriza y zona de conflicto armado contra los grupos subversivos, la principal función de las fuerzas armadas hasta la

década del 90 se redujo a la seguridad. En palabras de Tovar: "En ese tiempo no podía mucho identificarse la Policía Nacional ni el Ejército con lo que son los bailes costumbristas de la fiesta de la Virgen de la Candelaria, porque más que todo, nuestra misión era seguridad, una seguridad ciudadana, proteger al turista, que participe en las fiestas, que no haya atentados, para evitar que pudiera haber un sabotaje, una acción subversiva dentro de las actividades de la fiesta". Sin embargo, a partir del año 1994 la Policía Nacional inició su participación dentro de las festividades, sumándose luego la presencia del Ejército Peruano en el año 2006.

Todos bailan dentro de esta comparsa.

Entre soldados, oficiales superiores, coroneles, comandantes, mayores, capitanes, tenientes y subtenientes, junto con tres bandas del Ejército, recorren durante más o menos cuatro horas la distancia que los lleva al estadio para participar en el concurso. La población los apoya, "era la primera vez que nos presentábamos y nos dio mucho gusto porque la gente aplaudía ... se han identificado bastante de ver a su Ejército que por primera vez



ha participado en un concurso ... en cada cuadra era un compromiso para nosotros porque en vez de descansar teníamos que bailar para ellos manteniendo la disciplina y el orden.” “Este año el Ejército ha bailado en forma íntegra: en 100% han sido oficiales, sub-oficiales, tropa, las esposas de los oficiales, las hijas, la familia de los técnicos, amigos del departamento de Puno ... al personal que estaba en condiciones y quería integrar la Diablada se le ofreció sus trajes, poder bailar y ensayar”.

En la Fiesta de la Virgen de la Candelaria, estamos frente a una Fiesta Madre del patrimonio inmaterial peruano, por toda esa memoria ancestral que guarda y que sale a las calles convertida en danza. Indudablemente, el ícono principal de la fiesta lo constituyen los Diablos, con sus inmensos cuernos, sus orejas de sapo, sus afilados dientes con culebras y otros reptiles de la fauna regional que recorren su rostro.

Una de las versiones sobre los inicios de esta majestuosa danza parece referirse a un ritual de agradecimiento de origen prehispánico, vinculado a la actividad minera. Se dice que, al encontrarse una veta de mineral, lo primero que se hacía era pedir permiso al Anchanchu (espíritu que habita en los suelos y que tiene propiedad sobre ellos), para que autorice la extracción de

#### AN ENGLISH SUMMARY: DANCING DEVILS

Miguel Rubio Zapata tells us about the Festival of the Virgin of the Candelaria in Puno, Peru. He describes how 35,000 people took to the streets this February, dancing for more than 18 hours straight. Among them were a dance group from the Peruvian Army and National Police, cheered on by the crowd, a stark contrast from the country's dark period of repression and civil strife. Women too have increased their participation in this popular fiesta that strengthens the identity of the Peruvian people, and especially the identity of being from Puno. A longer version of this essay can be found in Spanish at <http://drclas.harvard.edu/publications>.

las riquezas de sus dominios. Se le ofrecía un pago (ofrenda), donde se sacrificaba una llama virgen y se colocaba un molde de grasa con láminas de los metales que podría contener la mina. Al mismo tiempo, se realizaba una danza con música de zampoñas y máscaras de cerámica con cuernos de taruca (venados). La ofrenda era incinerada con estiércol. Luego de realizada la ceremonia, el sacerdote hechicero llamado “layqa” examinaba las cenizas para leer en ellas la voluntad del Anchanchu, representado en la danza con los cuernos de las tarucas.

Al reparar en estas imágenes, los españoles las asociaron con el diablo. Y es así como a principios del siglo XVIII, el poder colonial incorpora un nuevo personaje, el Arcángel, que es el que actualmente encabeza la danza, ordenando espada en mano la coreografía. Este dominio del

Arcángel sobre los diablos es la transposición en la danza de una jerarquía proveniente de una cosmovisión distinta. Sin embargo, estos caminos no niegan los alcances míticos y rituales de la Fiesta y la danza original, que aparecen hoy sometidos, camuflados y, sobre todo, mezclados en una estructura festiva cristiana en honor de la Virgen de la Candelaria. Por lo tanto, es elocuente la permanencia de íconos de origen prehispánicos, como la recurrente serpiente-símbolo andino de la sabiduría—que aparece sobre la nariz de la máscara del diablo en la atmósfera pagana que reina en Puno durante la primera quincena de febrero.

**Miguel Rubio Zapata** es el director del Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani en Perú. Se puede encontrar una versión más extensa de este ensayo en <http://drclas.harvard.edu/publications>.





## BEYOND THE TOURIST GAZE

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*Dance is often a lead component in projecting a country's image, whether through programs for tourists or sending cultural representatives abroad. This section explores ways dance promotion has evolved "beyond the tourist gaze."*

# Dance and the Cold War

## *Exports to Latin America*

BY NAIMA PREVOTS

IT WAS NOVEMBER 1954 IN THE MIDDLE of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. The Soviets had been investing heavily in exporting their artists, and U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower was convinced we needed to compete in that arena.

In November 1954, the José Limón Dance Company was sent by the State Department to perform in Latin America, thus launching the first government-sponsored initiative in using performing arts as part of the Cold War effort. The choice of José Limón to launch the new arts export initiative had ramifications related to the quest for national identity and cultural projection. The Spanish-speaking, Mexican-born Limón had grown up in the United States. Implied in the message of sending Limón was the idea of diversity in America and possibly even the message that the United States is a country where immigrants have found a home. He was in his prime as choreographer, performer, teacher, and his work was wide-ranging in its subject matter. His choreography was fully crafted, deeply expressive and original. The works taken to Latin America showed a wide range: *The Moor's Pavane*, based on *Othello*; *La Malinche*, set in Mexico and the story of an Aztec princess torn between her love of country and love for a Spanish conquistador; and *Vivaldi Concerto*, an abstract piece. Also performed were dances choreographed by his mentor, Doris Humphrey: *Night Journey*, *New Dance*, *Ritmo Jondo*, *Day on Earth*, *Ruins and Visions*, and *Story of Mankind*.



José Limón embodied U.S. diversity abroad.

Limón told audiences in Rio and Montevideo: "With all our crudities, we are Americans. We are not afraid to declare ourselves, and have done so in our dance. The academic dance from Europe is not adequate to express what we have to say. Hemingway and Faulkner write in English, but they write like Americans. In the same way, we are trying to find a new language for American dance." Modern dance was not highly developed in Latin America, and his performances brought audiences a new language and form of expression. Here was also a message that the U.S. was a country not steeped in the past, but looking towards new ideas.

Earlier that year, in August, Congress had approved Eisenhower's request for emergency funds to use cultural diplomacy in combating Soviet influence around the world and diminishing the spread of communism. The funding marked the first time in the history of U.S. public policy that choreographers, composers and playwrights were to be systematically exported, as a peaceful weapon in the service of foreign policy.

The basic concept was that art and politics could work hand in hand to reduce the allure of communism, thus influencing political decisions. The goal was to influence hearts and minds in other countries, and to show that military might and commercial interests were not the only things Americans valued.

Limón's performances were timed to coincide with the conference of the Inter-American Economic and Social Council in Rio de Janeiro, and the UNESCO Conference in Montevideo. Limón was considered one of the most important American modern dance choreographers, and both he and his group were highly acclaimed performers. Government concerns regarding Latin America were

Top and Bottom: Two visions of dancing rumba in Callejón Hamel, a space that encourages a participatory concept of tourism in Cuba.

made clear in a 1955 statement issued by the United States Information Agency (USIA):

The strategic importance of Latin America and the size of our stake in that area are well known. What is not so well known is that, first, a tremendous social and economic change, an upsurge, is taking place through Latin America; and, second, international communism is systematically exploiting the problems arising from that upsurge, seeking to foment hatred of the United States and establish footholds in the hemisphere. (Hearings before the Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations).

The U.S. Embassy in Brazil sent a message to the State Department: "Limón Company top artistic and personal success. Even writer unfriendly United States praised highly." One of the dancers, Alvin Shulman, published a report of the tour in the March 1955 *Dance Observer*: "The orchestra applauded us, after which the first violinist stood up and, in the best English at his command, stated that he and the rest of the members wanted us to know that it was their honor to be playing for a company of artists. We had won our first step towards accomplishing our mission." The mission

## Dance became a tool for peaceful cultural diplomacy in Latin America for the first time in the history of U.S. public policy during the 1950s Cold War.

was to show Latin Americans there was freedom of expression for individual artists, and Americans did not live in a cultural void.

When the program began in 1954, the State Department signed a contract with a non-profit theatre group in New York, the American National Theatre and Academy (ANTA). Its mandate was to handle all the logistics of touring artists; it established peer panels in the various art disciplines to make artistic recommendations. In 1956, Congress transformed the Emergency Fund into permanent legislation, and through 1962, the arrangement with ANTA was maintained until the entire operation was transferred to the State Department in Washington.

Yet while art could go a long way, cultural diplomacy also has a fragile side, which the Limón export vividly illustrates. Officers in various American embassies are the key factors to linking the message and the mission. They must be knowledgeable about the arts in order to provide a linkage. Certainly in the 1950s there were U.S. officials in Montevideo who either had no knowledge of dance, or whose idea of cultural diplomacy was selective and racially biased. One of the great African-American dancer/choreographers, Katherine Dunham, was also performing in Montevideo in 1954, appearing as an independent artist with her company. Her manager had booked the government-sponsored Limón to open the same evening, and the U.S. Embassy hosted a cocktail party for Limón, but did not invite Dunham.

This story is rather complicated. Dunham was in fact considered for support in the Eisenhower program when her name came up in 1955 during the ANTA panel meetings. In 1954, the report of the Inter-Agency Committee notes the quick choice of Limón because of the imminent Latin American conferences following the

approval of the Eisenhower funds. In fact, Limón was persuaded to cancel his other activities for this assignment, and various Embassy officers in Rio, Montevideo and São Paulo were enlisted to help find theaters at the last minute.

It is likely that the ANTA panel had no idea Dunham was planning to perform in Montevideo. She toured extensively on her own in the 1950s, and in 1954 had closed her school in New York because of financial difficulties. Thus, she was not very visible in the United States at that time. The dance historian Constance Valis Hill has suggested that a 1951 piece by Dunham was the cause of her being ignored by U.S. officials in Montevideo when Limón appeared. The piece, called *Southland*, was commissioned by the Symphony of Chile, and premiered in Santiago. It was an angry and confrontational ballet about lynching, and ended with a feeling of unresolved hatred and racism. Due to negative feedback from the U.S. Embassy in Santiago, the piece was only performed there once. In 1953, the last and only other performances of *Southland* took place in Paris as part of Dunham's season. It is important to note that foreign service personnel only serve in given posts for two to three years, and are kept busy with government projects. They usually lack knowledge about dance, and it is highly likely they didn't know who Dunham was, and possibly didn't even care. She was an independent artist touring on her own, and they were given a rush assignment by the State Department. This in no way excuses their actions, or eliminates the possibility that racial prejudice could operate in their decisions, but in this case it seems highly unlikely that one performance in 1951 of someone probably unknown to them had any impact in their mandate to host Limón in the grand manner.

The bigger question relates to choices made in developing programs for cultural diplomacy regarding who represents the United States, who makes the decisions, and what kind of national identity is being represented. In December 1954, under the auspices of Eisenhower's Emergency Fund, George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* began a three month tour to Zagreb, Belgrade, Alexandria, Cairo, Naples, Milan, Athens, Tel Aviv, Casablanca and Barcelona. It was not until 1961 that the ANTA Dance Panel recommended sending Alvin Ailey overseas, and in 1962 the Carmen de Lavallade-Alvin Ailey American Dance Company toured the Far East.

Dance as a tool of cultural diplomacy in Latin America was used sporadically during the 1950s. Only two major companies toured during that time: American Ballet Theatre (1955) and San Francisco Ballet (1958). In 1960 and 1962, the Limón Company was sent again. In the final year of the ANTA contract and the existence of the Dance Panel in New York, there was an unusual and controversial decision to send the Berea Folk Dancers on a summer tour of Mexico, Central America, Panama, Colombia and Ecuador. The issue of creating a representative U.S. folk dance group had surfaced since 1954 at Dance Panel meetings. Several times a suggestion was made to send young people instead of professionals. When an application was received from the Berea college group, some objected that the young dancers' repertory focused mainly on one aspect of American folk heritage: dances of English descent and tradition. Others were concerned about a lack of high-level performance experience. Members of the panel insisted on going to Kentucky to judge the group, and returned with positive feedback.

There are no comments in the Dance Panel minutes that related to political conditions in Latin America when the Berea group was recommended and sent abroad. It is clear however, that there must have been some discussions with the State Department about the felt need for an American presence providing an image of wholesome good will and energy. The Berea dancers performed with very positive reaction in theaters and non-theatrical settings such as gymnasiums, patios and cafeterias, and they usually invited audience participation at the end of performances. Eighty-five percent of the audience was middle-class or made up of high school or university students. Admission was charged to only five of 38 performances. In Colombia, a group of folk dancers from the Bolshoi Ballet, present at the same time as the U.S. group, charged high admission prices. The report was that the Berea dancers had an audience of 20,000, compared with 1,000 for the Russian troupe.

A report from Robert F. Jordan, Cultural Affairs Officer of the U.S. Embassy, in Honduras noted: "The presentation of the Berea College Folk Dancers in Tegucigalpa is considered one of the highlights of the Cultural Exchange Program. Not only did the dancers perform splendidly but they were also equally effective offstage with their pleasant personalities, interest in meeting Honduran students, and their desire to learn about Honduran folklore dances and songs."

Katherine Dunham, African-American dancer and choreographer.



FROM NAIMA PREVOTS, *DANCE FOR EXPORT, CULTURAL DIPLOMACY AND THE COLD WAR*, WESLEYAN, 1998

In January 1963, the State Department decided to terminate the contract with ANTA and take over administration of the performing arts program initiated by Eisenhower. Research needs to be done as to changes in the program after 1963, and how cultural diplomacy in dance changed, as this author's research focused on the years 1954-1962. Conceptually and practically, the panel system that ANTA developed was brilliant; it ensured professional standards of assessment and minimized government control and censorship. The amount of money allocated for the international exchange program in 1954 was \$2,250,000, and this amount remained constant for all performing arts export.

Touring is very expensive; only a few dance companies could tour. In a country as large and diverse as the United States, this becomes a serious issue in the selection process.

The ANTA Dance Panel often discussed who their target audiences were, whether exports were designed for the elite, or for the masses, or for those somewhere in between.

In terms of Latin America, the first Limón tour served an elite audience, and it is not clear from the records whether his performances in theaters were widely advertised and attracted a broader range of people. It is likely that the tours of American Ballet Theatre, San Francisco Ballet, and those of Limón later on were designed to attract the normal theatergoing audience. The Berea College dancers had quite a different target group, and one that was controversial within the Dance Panel.

Probably the most serious questions raised in general about cultural diplomacy have to do with the nature of propaganda and the goals of national identity. These issues often become translated by critics into imperialist and post-colonial goals, with the United States imposing values and a way of life. The ANTA Dance Panel focused primarily on their notion of excellence in dance, not on political considerations in terms of sending a specific message about America. Naturally, their aesthetic decisions were influenced by their view in those years of what constituted excellence, and this related to the society in which they grew up and which had shaped them.

None of this negates the power of the arts, and the importance of having others in the world experience the great creations of U.S. choreographers, and the stunning performances of U.S. dancers. More of this kind of endeavor could overcome the negative media reporting that exists about our country. Audiences get to see performances they love and enjoy, and they have respect for the artists. The dancers appear as flesh and blood, and the choreography proclaims that beauty, imagination, and the spiritual components of life are strong values. If some choreographers and groups carry a specific message in terms of their creative direction, that is the function of their personal vision, and not the function of a State Department directive. It was true in 1954 and it is true today, that the power of images on the stages of the world may not be quantifiable, but have enormous power in conveying the message that the United States has exports that have nothing to do with soldiers and guns.

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# Disabling the “Tourist Gaze”

## *Protecting and Projecting Cultural Heritage through Dance*

BY JARED PRUZAN

**W**E HURRIED ALONG THE SLIM EMBANKMENT ON THE BOHEMIAN side of the river as night fell in the city, nervously evaluating our distance from the dimly lit bridge that would carry us to a more cosmopolitan borough. Imagining the theater's great gilded doors slammed closed before our arrival in the famed sixth district, we struggled to increase our pace, forsaking many sidewalk cafés en route to the night's festivities but our stiff, new dress shoes were slowing us down. We had been fortunate enough to purchase tickets for the Magyar Nemzeti Balett only hours before the curtain; buying new shoes and changing clothes at the last minute had been my idea. Given the vintage tuxedos and arabesque ballgowns that I expected to find in the audience, I did not want to suffer the embarrassment of my jeans-and-T-shirt ensemble.

At least, this is how I sold the idea.

In truth, the decision to scramble for dress clothes was predicated on my belief that our lackluster outfits would diminish the aura and authenticity of the event. After all, this was *grand ballet*. This was the state opera house. This was preserved Budapest, 1884—and one simply does not attend informally attired.

I did not remember feeling the same pressure to “dress the part” on my first encounter with the Mexican hat dance thirty miles outside Acapulco, nor could I recall any similar desire before a professional limbo show in Antigua. In those instances, I was perfectly content with my “costume”—whether donning beach garb or even jeans and a T-shirt. Why, then, was I so intent on maintaining the integrity of the audience's collective fashion as to risk missing the performance entirely?

Privileged tourists (and make no mistake; sprinting across the Danube, unable to hail a taxi, we were very much tourists) tend to regard Euro-American cultures differently from those of developing nations. Even with the utmost intrigue and admiration, tourists typically receive Latin American cultures, traditions, and styles with a more casual, informal attitude. Dance is no exception.

Indeed, as Yvonne Payne Daniel notes in her seminal essay on dance tourism, it took famed anthropologist Joann Kealiinohomoku many years to thoroughly convince her academic community that ballet actually “has much in common with touristic dance performance elsewhere in terms of [1] intentions that frame the ‘exotic other’ in traditional or extravaganza dance style, [2] motivations that conserve and present national or ethnic cultures, and [3] packaging that creates viable, mesmerizing products that generate profits” (*Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 23, 1996).

Despite Kealiinohomoku's attempt to extricate dance from dialectical thinking, European and U.S. tourists still tend to revere waltzes and minuets as high culture, while interpreting the “exotic other” and its ethnic costumes as low-culture signals that it is permissible to behave, dress, and even come and go as one pleases.

Anthropologist Matthew Krystal candidly describes this experience at the Festival de Bailes Tradicionales in Totonicapán, Guatemala: “The presence of tourists at the festival alters the performance.

The audience, unlike the community, does not understand the story or the rules of etiquette associated with watching; for example, that one does not enter the arena to take a picture or absent-mindedly walk through an ongoing performance” (*Ethnology*, vol. 39, 2000). At the ballet, wandering onstage to snap a quick photo for the family album would be unthinkable; yet, when witnessing an equally formal and professional performance of Zapotec religious dances or Guatemalan fiestas commemorating their independence, lax behavior is practically commonplace.

Of course, there are exceptions to every generalization. In Cuba, which Payne Daniel adopts as her paradigm of successful dance tourism, visitors are encouraged to learn the history and techniques of dances like the *rumba* or *chancleta* by attending discussion forums and participatory workshops called Rumba Saturdays. As Payne Daniel writes, Cuban presentations of their dances “actively engage tourists in genuine Cuban culture as opposed to simply viewing a vivid sense of the ‘authentic’” (*Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 23, 1996). Most tourists come to understand Cuban dance through this physical participation and involved dialogue, with garish performances relegated to a few nightclubs.

Thus, Latin America serves as a compelling arena in which to explore the successes and shortcomings of dance tourism. Without venturing far into broader historical and post-colonial explanations, one may consider the various framing techniques that dictate audience reception, relegating some dances to an exercise in marginality while enabling others to harness the significant economic benefits of tourism without succumbing to cultural distortion.

By and large, success depends on audience participation. While active participation need not entail audience members whirling and gyrating beside dance instructors, it does necessitate a willingness to engage mentally or physically with the performance at a basic level. Question and answer sessions, step-by-step tutorials, or even dressing to the expected code all move toward meeting this threshold.

Even the smallest step forward is significant, for the very act of participating in the performance disables the “tourist gaze,” as John Urry terms it—a masculine, colonial legacy that empowers tourists to legitimate or invalidate a dance performance simply by imparting or withholding their viewership. In contrast to spectator tourists, those that participate in the event are forced to abandon one-dimensional, judgmental consideration. As equal participants or audience members seeking answers, tourists are not permitted the lofty, superior stations required to judge.

Culturally, therefore, the stakes are high in permitting a disengaged reception. As cultural anthropologist Susan Reed writes, borrowing from Marta Savigliano's research on Argentine tango, audience members who wield a passive, disconnected gaze can produce only two outcomes: “One that is empowering, granting local recognition to certain social groups and their practices, the other co-opting and binding, reifying a ‘tasteful’ exotic that served to maintain the (neo)colonized population's dependent status.”



The BanRraRra at the Villa Panamericana in Cojimar, Cuba, east of Havana, performs a Haitian-influenced carnival dance.

Regardless of the outcome of this trial, whenever *gazers* remain disengaged from the performance, “The threat of withdrawal of recognition [is] always in their power” (*Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 27, 1998).

In turn, dances that rely too heavily on audience approval are bound to suffer, becoming typified and repetitive commodities that restrict creative freedom in order to meet expectations consistently. Reed cites Richard Schechner as among the first to condemn this touristic approach, arguing that anyone who “establishe[s] ‘normative expectations’ for ‘traditional’ performances perpetuate[s] colonial thinking by valorizing one version of performance as ‘true’ while dismissing others as corrupted” (*Drama Review*, vol. 34, 1990; *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 27, 1998). Payne Daniel echoes his sentiment, noting that “With a shift from ‘performance by participants’ to ‘public show for outsiders’ (or routinized performance for tourists), the spontaneity of public involvement and the creativity in communal effort that were seminal to particular dance events are often diminished or transposed” (*Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 23, 1996).

The goal, then, for many Latin American dance performances is to engage tourists as Cuba has: to engage them physically in the movement of the dance; to engage them economically in the purchase of local goods commemorating the event; and to absorb them as temporary members of the community, so as to remove them from the role of outside “gazers.”

In other words, dances should be framed so as to persuade tourists to dance, spend and “dress the part,” by which I mean, engage tourists in the cultural presentation as a means of controlling and ensuring its integrity. One way or another, dances must

create an aura akin to that of the ballet, without the benefit of gilded stage.

But how?

After all, few dances enjoy the benefit of a fully financed Ministry of Culture to organize lectures, lessons and workshops, which fueled Cuba’s behemoth success of Rumba Saturdays.

The Zapotec *danza de la pluma* in Teotitlán del Valle, for example, represents only a small Mexican community with extremely limited public funds, rather than a coordinated national dance. Nevertheless, the Zapotec festival has managed to engage tourists and their dollars by integrating visitors into the event itself. Anthropologist Jeffrey Cohen describes his experience at the celebration in Oaxaca, where he witnessed the Zapotec convert outsiders to momentary members of the community, first through free shots of fiery local *mezcal*, which everyone imbibes at once, then through the more complicated technique of burlesque. “It is not uncommon to watch a Cara Negra [dancer] burlesque both tourist and [native] *danzante* during the celebration,” writes Cohen. “They move back and forth between dancers and audience, making fun of everyone. Breaking the ritual frame momentarily dissipates the threat of the outsider by incorporating him or her into the event...mediat[ing] the dialectic relationship of local and non-local communities.” It is a subtle but successful technique, especially in drawing tourist dollars. As Cohen concludes, “By taking the initiative and opening their celebration, the Zapotec create a symbolic debt that is not easily repaid,” though expensive local weavings are offered for sale as one viable type of compensation (*Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 66, 1993).

Still, other dances have not been as successful balancing internal cultural pressure with tourist engagement. In the Bolivian migrant





Left: Callejón de Hamel; Right: Narciso Medina dances the orisha Changó and Doris Fleites Pérez dances Ochún in Havana.

community of Villa Pagador, fiesta dances aim primarily to revive village traditions. The community is extremely “segregated as performers/audience,” writes anthropologist Daniel Goldstein. Tourists remain uninvolved—a vantage point that enables outsiders to withhold their dollars in favor of a comfortably judgmental role. As Goldstein notes, however, locals do not ignore tourists intentionally. In fact, most value tourists’ attendance at the fiesta as an essential part of their village’s economic improvement: they simply do not have a plan in place for engagement. Instead, locals tend to conceive of tourism as a panacea, like Don Eleutorio, founder of the village’s main dance troupe, who prognosticates, “When tourism can come to the barrio, tourists from other countries, let’s say, then there will be a shortage of lodgings, a hotel, all that, and one of these days for sure, someone is going to create a lodging, a [multi-story] building and the tourists will stay there” (*Ethnology*, Vol. 37, 1998).

Thus, though Villa Pagador’s dancers acknowledge the importance of tourism, they do not see themselves as its necessary ambassadors. Consequently, Eleutorio’s message is imbued more with hope than pragmatism. For now, a few tourists have been satisfied to witness the village’s revived traditional dances briefly before moving on; soon, however, they may withdraw their gazes of recognition—and money—entirely (*Ethnology*, Vol. 37, 1998).

The various successes and failures in Cuba, Teotitlán del Valle, and Villa Pagador remind us that tourist involvement is important only inasmuch as it promotes both the sustainable inflow of tourist dollars and an environment that preserves cultural heritage by mediating tourist expectations. It is a delicate balance that, when handled correctly, works to create an interesting experience for the tourist as much as it does to support local tradition. After all, Krys-

tal concludes, “[Dancers] are motivated by their desire to see their traditions survive and their community prosper. Tourism is simply a tool to serve those ends and an opportunity to reverse cultural exploitation (*Ethnology*, vol. 39, 2000).”

But that opportunity is far from a *fait accompli* and requires that principles of *active engagement* be consciously manufactured into the presentation of traditional dances. For their part, dance promoters must create a framework for physical, conversational or emotional involvement to make it incumbent upon the tourist to respect the cultural coherence of the dance experience—a pressure I knew all too well as I ran through the narrow streets of Budapest, but regrettably failed to recognize elsewhere.

This mutual dialogue is not easy when tourists are accustomed to unilateral exhibition, but active engagement can successfully extricate Latin American dance from the stilted, infertile grounds of “the exotic other.” Given the breadth of dances in Latin America, there can be no formula for weaving tourists into performances, but a dance’s ability to generate tourism income without necessitating a permanently typified performance is dependent on it.

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# MY TIME AS A BRAZILIAN PASSISTA

BY ANNA ELSE PASTERNAK

Although my behind is not all that curvaceous and I lack melanin in my skin tone, I somehow managed to pass as a *mulata passista*.

I am neither *mulata* nor a trained *passista*—a young woman, generally with a tiny outfit and curvy physique, who usually dances in front of the *bateria* during Rio's carnival parade. I was a Harvard sophomore studying abroad in Rio de Janeiro and my training in ballet, modern and world dance had taught me a little something about my new job.

It was more important to the Japanese audience and the Brazilian managers that I was able to sell the Brazilian national dance—samba. That is exactly what I did for three months in hotels, theaters and amusement parks throughout Japan. Most of the official *mulata passistas* in the samba troupe travel to Japan every year, since professional samba dancers have little work outside of *carnaval* season in Rio de Janeiro. I arrived, however, on a whim to the troupe's audition. There, I encountered a sea of silicon breasts and buttocks. This was quite an astounding and somewhat intimidating scene to happen upon after years of dancing with bony and underfed ballet and modern dancers, but I loved the scene and was thrilled when I was accepted.

My two months as a Brazilian *passista* not only taught me a great deal about samba, Brazil, Japanese mariachi bands and the names of thirty different types of seaweed, but also made me question the identification and creation of popular culture. Dance is used quite frequently among nation-states to create a national identity and unity among their people. Brazil has been particularly successful at nationalizing many such artistic expressions such as samba and capoeira. What interests me is the process of creating a national or popular culture. Is popular culture what some Brazilians enjoy doing or rather what can be sold abroad...or perhaps a little mixture and tweaking of both? In my time as a *passista*, I peddled a commercialized performance created to show the public transcript of Brazilian popular culture to Japan.

I traded in my leotards, bare feet and technical modern dance styles for a beaded thong, four-inch heels, exaggerated headpiece and fake smile. I transformed my Californian self into a certain kind of Brazilian—the stereotypical and commercial one that Japan and the tour managers wanted to see. We did not perform the *samba no pé*, the spontaneous movement improvised in gatherings throughout Brazil. This was a dance preprogrammed and perfected to the point that the improvisation and African roots of the samba were extracted, creating a new kind of experience.

I should not be surprised, given the new manifestations of dance emerging around the world as a result of increased contacts of different dance forms. Afro-Cuban modern emerged in the late 1950s and Afro-Silvestre has become increasingly popular in Brazil. Both dance forms syncretize Graham, Humphrey and Limón techniques (North American modern dance) with African beats and movements. Hence, our Las Vegas samba show—equipped with snippets from the *Phantom of the Opera* and seg-

ments in fake leather costumes, dancing to a lip-synching Cher acted out by our resident drag queen, Jadson—should be seen as completely normal. After all, dance can be commercialized to sell. However, after being educated at the San Francisco School of the Arts in ballet, modern, contemporary and world dance, with emphasis on the intellectual and spiritual side of dance, this “selling” aspect was hard for me to accept.

Dance had always been my Eros, something I did to linger in a threshold between this world and another. The last thing I saw myself doing was a Las Vegas-type commercial show. I felt as if I were betraying the feeling behind dance. Lingering in my subconscious was the idea of “selling out,” yet going commercial means financial perks and more job options. In my case it meant one of the most interesting experiences of my life.

I arrived the first day of rehearsal in Rio de Janeiro, thinking I had gone to the wrong practice and was instead the next star of *Flashdance*. While being able to execute some complex samba steps was important, it did not seem as necessary as my ability to *rebolar*, *requiebrar* and generally *mexer* my body. In other words, the most pertinent element of the show was the dancers' ability to shake their booties and gyrate at dangerous speeds. In the three hours that we paraded each stage in Japan, only ten minutes were devoted to a samba routine. During the remaining time, the *Phantom of the Opera* was sung, Jadson (the drag queen) did a strip-tease across the laps of the Japanese businessmen in a Carmen Miranda outfit (appropriate, given Miranda's controversial image



The author, Anna Else Pasternak, (on the right) poses in her beaded thong and exaggerated headpiece with a fellow Brazilian *passista*.

## DANCE!

as a commercial sell-out) and the director of the show belted out the famous lyrics “Brasil...homem de negocios[businessman]... Brasil, Brasil...” Our gyrating was good for one thing: the chopsticks. These were no ordinary chopsticks, however: between the two pieces of frayed wood were crisp 10,000 yen notes. At first I was disgusted by the idea that these Japanese men, women and children would strategically stick these chopsticks into our bikinis and tops as a token of their appreciation. I was a trained dancer, not a stripper! The more I whipped my waist around in circles, the more yen I had coming out of my “fio da morte” (literally, string of death, what the other dancers liked to call the small pieces of string worn between our legs and around our tights and bikinis to hide material that might protrude in inappropriate directions and to lessen the risk that we might lose our bikinis to the floor). We became chopstick hounds. Most dancers live a life absorbed by competition and these chopsticks only added a whole new level of intensity to the already competitive environment.

Altogether, a month traveling with nine Kenyan human pyramid makers, two Japanese comedians and a Japanese mariachi band with matching mini-mustaches, cowboy boots and gold studded suits created a hilarious spectacle for the citizens of the cities where we performed. For the first week our eclectic group traveled marvelously together. At first I acted as translator jumping between each group with a little bit of English, Spanish and Portuguese here and there. Later on, performers seemed to have claimed their spots on the bus and stuck to their side of the lunch buffets. The rice and beans were on the left for the Brazilians and the rice and eel on the right for the Japanese. The Kenyans—and I—picked from both sides of the table.

While I peddled commercial samba and a stereotypical Brazilian image, the Kenyans were selling a stereotypical image of Africa. In revealing animal print outfits the Kenyans jumped through burning hoops and climbed on top of each other to make

impressively dangerous human pyramids. They confessed to me that the pre-recorded drum music played throughout the show was from South Africa. I guess it didn’t matter. This was the Africa the audience wanted to see and the Africa the performers were willing to present as their public transcript. Mexico is not just mariachi and Brazil is more than thongs and samba, but what pays the dancers and artists unfortunately tends to be the commercial, or perhaps, in our case, just the thongs.

Our trip continued to Hamamatsu, where street signs were always written in Japanese and Portuguese due to the large Brazilian community of Japanese descent contracted to work in the car factories of the region. While the Brazilian women I was with went to great lengths to chemically straighten their naturally kinky hair, here in Hamamatsu the Japanese girls went to even greater lengths to rat and curl their hair to resemble that of the Brazilians. In the local bath-houses, it was a competition to see who could keep their hair the driest. The Brazilian girls dared not get their hair wet in fear of a return to curls and the Japanese sat just up to their waist in the pools as to not ruin their artificially inflated hairdos.

During my time as a passista, perhaps I was only helping to instill a stereotype just as the Kenyan acrobats only reinforced a stereotypical Africa, and the mariachi band a stereotypical Mexico. I was hired to present an image of a place and its people created and exported by show managers in positions of power. Those presenting the public image had no say in its production, nor did it really matter if they hailed from the places they represented. Brazil, Kenya and Mexico were sold as cute, tidy and amiable party favors. And all the while we dancers were busy gyrating and grinning away for a few extra chopsticks.

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## DANZAS Y JUEGOS EN LAS ALTURAS

**POR LIZZA BOGADO**

La difícil transición democrática paraguaya ha significado para los artistas un nuevo escenario lleno de desafíos emergentes. Desde entonces hemos visto las dificultades de construir un lenguaje lleno de vitalidad, compromiso y de alegría de vivir en libertad.

Hemos percibido en estos 18 años de democracia que el Paraguay un país lleno de vitalidad musical, se ha visto confundido en sus rasgos identitarios y no ha podido fortalecer su ethos nacional con creatividad y originalidad. Fue como si el arte de resistir a la dictadura nos volviera incapaces de proyectar compromisos nuevos en democracia. Cuando iniciamos “Danzas y juegos en las alturas” en Caacupé en un escenario natural lleno de cerros y colinas a 50 kilómetros de Asunción, queríamos honrar la vida de una forma sencilla que por un lado recuperara la inocencia de nuestros niños con los juegos tradicionales del Paraguay y por el otro, convirtiera el evento al aire libre en una manifestación jubilosa que entrelazara diferentes tipos de ritmos y pusiera en contacto a artistas venidos de todo el Paraguay, de países vecinos y también de Estados Unidos y Europa. El éxito ha sido tan grande que sobrepasó nuestras expectativas iniciales. “Danzas y juegos en las alturas” cada septiembre es una explosión de vitalidad y de alegría de vivir, es una especie de Woodstock telúrico donde bailar, cantar, jugar representa un lenguaje lleno de vitalidad y de recreación a la vida en el Paraguay. Y es también nuestro aporte para innovar, crear, recrear el país a través de la danza que sintetiza en América Latina nuestras raíces indígenas, europeas, africanas, árabes y las distintas influencias que viven en los ritmos, el vestuario, el movimiento y los colores. Para un país como el Paraguay, sin salida al mar, con alturas no superiores a los 800 metros, encerrado entre varios cauces de aguas torrenciales, este evento anual es una celebración que nos enlaza, sugiere y eleva.

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**Lizza Bogado** es una bailarina y cantante paraguaya fundadora de Danzas y juegos en las alturas. Vea [www.enlasalturas.org.py](http://www.enlasalturas.org.py) y [www.lizzabogado.com](http://www.lizzabogado.com).

# Beyond Tourism

## *Are Blocos Taking Back Carnaval?*

BY MANUELA S. ZONINSEIN

**A**TALL AND THIN, TAN, DARK-HAIRED YOUNG CARIOCA—A NATIVE of Rio de Janeiro—is costumed as an indigenous Brazilian. Her long feathered skirt covers flip-flopped feet; atop, a simple cotton tank is adorned with necklaces, armbands obscuring her upper arms. The thick stripe of yellow paint across her eyes and dart of red across the bridge of the nose don't reveal her intent: soon she is jumping up and down, then swinging round and round, and finally kissing her male partner, who is costumed in what could be none other than a Brazilian interpretation of Alex, the protagonist from *A Clockwork Orange*.

Conflations and inversions of gender and identity, local and international, myth and reality, fiction and truth abound during Rio de Janeiro's *Carnaval* festivities in the streets to the point where I can no longer keep track or make sense of them. As opposed to the institutionalized, expensive and elitist samba school parades that are televised nationally and internationally from Rio, the *Carnaval de Rua* or street *Carnaval* is an exercise in individual interpretation and creativity—a veritable circus of color, costume, cacophony and chaos. I no longer care to stare, instead concentrate on ducking past confetti to keep up with André, the photographer with whom I'm working on a magazine article. We weave through the playing and prancing partygoers in Praça XV, the historic district of downtown Rio. Thousands throng around the bandstand.

This past *Carnaval*, I experienced the newly resurgent *Carnaval de Rua*, a celebration that attracted people from all social groups—a conscious attempt to revitalize the city's celebratory traditions and inject them once again with a democratic and open-minded spirit. The street party that I witnessed was organized around *O Bloco do Boitatá*, known for diligently promoting the most popular and well-known *marchinhas*, traditional, tried-and-true samba marches. All attendees could sing along and participate, rather than simply view the day's events.

*Blocos* are local bands which parade and play regularly, either in a specific locale or along known routes, their music and character often identified by the neighborhood (and thus audience) where they perform. Each *bloco* has a unique “brand”: Bola Preta, or “black ball,” for example, has the oldest history and invites participants to interpret the black-and-white polka-dot theme as they desire, resulting in rainbows, color inversions and rebellious monotonies. The *Suvaco de Cristo bloco* winds through the Jardim Botânico neighborhood, conveniently located below the Christ the Redeemer statue's left armpit (hence the name “Christ's Armpit”), and draws progressive yuppies and a large homosexual contingent.

Blocos play all varieties of samba, including some Northeastern axé and pagode, and even an occasional rendition of rock, parading through Rio's plazas and streets, primarily during *Carnaval* but increasingly throughout the summer months, December through February. In response to price-inflating tourism (sexual, festival, outdoor, cultural and otherwise) and the classist impetus to exclude, the growing popularity of the *bloco* tradition among all cariocas and

the concomitant propagation of such bands attest to the recovered popularity of the *Carnaval de Rua*, and a decidedly activist and participatory political ideology.

Are we thus witnessing a return to the more democratic—and spontaneous and chaotic—street celebration, which first propelled Rio into the world's imagination in the 1930s and 40s? In 2005, when the *bloco* craze was just beginning, the official municipal records office listed 88 bands; in 2007, that number increased to 107; from the 51 *blocos* listed for 2001, that's a 209% increase. Pop- and funk-inflected Monobloco, one of the newer but certainly most popular of the *blocos*, attracted nearly 60,000 to each parade it led in 2006; for the last five years, it has maintained a weekly house-capacity audience at Rio's famed Circo Voador performance space (where Gilberto Gil and renowned international acts perform).

Historian Jeff Lesser (1999) wondered: “What does it mean to be a public ‘Brazilian,’ and how is ‘Brazilian-ness’ contested?” I would further query, “What does it mean to be a public ‘Brazilian’ if that identity is considered irrelevant by citizens?” or “What does it mean to be a public ‘Brazilian’ if no one participates in the so-called public events?” The notion that a single dance and festival could represent a nation is an overgeneralization that “leaves behind”—as Culture Minister (and famed musician) Gilberto Gil declared during his visit to Harvard in Spring 2005—many other cultural expressions that are valued by Brazilians, including, but not limited to, such dance forms as *forró*, *maracatu* and *capoeira* or other celebrated *Carnavals* such as those of Salvador da Bahia and Recife-Olinda in Pernambuco state.

The historian Darién Davis (1999) believes that “[t]he commodification of popular forms such as the samba allowed the creation of a national culture.” However, I think that as long as the majority of Brazilians feel excluded or detached from such a nationalist framework, this constructed identity will fail to unite the country. What is a national identity and community if many Brazilians feel disconnected from their so-called national cultural expression? And what is the potential for improvement to democracy and civil society? I am particularly intrigued by this new popular exuberance because it contrasts so dramatically with the content of the interviews I conducted with *cariocas* in 2005. Popular engagement with Rio's *Carnaval* was the focus of my Harvard undergraduate Social Studies senior thesis, an ethnographic study grounded in the first-hand experiences of a cross-section of *cariocas* concerning the contemporary cultural and social value of *Carnaval*. “Rio's *Carnaval*: A Paradox of Non-participation” was the none-too-subtle title of my final paper, which chronicled an overwhelming individual dissociation from what had once been Brazil's premier public party as a result of heightened institutionalization and commercialization.

“Samba is Brazil's ‘national rhythm,’” wrote Hermano Vianna in 1994. Echoing the sentiment of many scholars of Brazilian culture and national identity, Vianna affirmed: “It is the foremost symbol of its culture and nationhood.” He claimed that all perceive that



## DANCE!

"Samba and the famous pre-Lenten carnival of which it is the centerpiece...symbolizes the racial and cultural mixture that...most Brazilians have come to believe defines their unique national identity."

Similarly, Alma Guillermoprieto (1991) characterized "*Samba*—the whole broad genre of highly ornamented two-by-four rhythms... as Brazil's national music"; Barbara Browning (1999) observed that samba is known as Brazil's national dance; and Bryan McCann (2004) asserted that samba is Brazil's "widely recognized symbol of national identity." Browning (1995), author of the incisive ethnography, *Samba: Resistance in Motion*, writes that historically, samba is "known as the Brazilian national dance [and] has contributed to a world image of Brazil as a country of exaggerated elation."

Yet, of the 42 people I interviewed in Rio de Janeiro in 2005, only seven respondents said they actually knew how to dance samba. The respondents varied in age, gender, race, educational background, profession, and class, and represented a wide range of perspectives. Their overwhelming reactions to *Carnaval* approached lack of involvement and interest in the so-called shared identity-forming quintessential Brazilian experience.

My research challenge was twofold: first, to question the notion that samba is the Brazilian national dance form; and second, to explore how Brazilians living outside the circumscribed world of samba practitioners, beyond the widely publicized "production of narratives and spectacles of nationhood," actually think about and relate to *Carnaval* and its accompanying dance form. Precisely because, as Vianna (1994) points out in the introduction to his own work on samba music and dance, "the transformation of samba into Brazil's national music [is] a process that centered on Rio de Janeiro," I chose the *Cidade Maravilhosa* as the site of my study. "The city of Rio has long been—and perhaps remains—utterly central to representations of Brazilian national unity," he wrote; and so it is widely recognized that samba's origins are rooted here. The promulgation of the cultural expressions of samba and *Carnaval* as central elements in the composition of the nation's identity were initiated and publicized from Rio.

One respondent, a law student whom I will call Isabel (I have changed names to protect the identities of my respondents), thoughtfully addressed my inquiries about *Carnaval's* growing global popularity and simultaneous identification as a central icon of Brazilian culture by responding that it was more a question of international marketing: "what makes it over there is what's made to make it over there." As she saw it, the current world image of Brazil—sun, sea, samba, soccer and sex—is the result of the huge amount of money spent advertising *Carnaval* "to attract gringos... Japanese, Germans, the whole world capturing the spectacle on video tape. It's no longer a *feita popular*...it's made to have a global resonance. It's sold as this...this was the image that was selected and which subsequently arrives abroad."

The *feita popular* to which she refers is a party that is public, welcoming, and *popular*, in the Brazilian Portuguese sense of the word. The adjective "popular" is also used to define something that is accessible to all people, regardless of social class or purchasing power, as opposed to those products that only the elite or those with financial means can access. The question now is whether *Carnaval* is once again returning to its roots.

*Carnaval* for several years had transformed into an elitist event; now there are indications that blocos are reclaiming its popular nature.







Any current reference to foreigners of Rio de Janeiro's pre-Lenten ambience will generally elicit stereotypical images of scantily-clad, feathered and sequined *mulatas* dancing atop parade floats; Afro-Brazilian men playing a "contagious" rhythm with drums or *bateria*; and older black women in their *baiana* outfits, large swirling embroidered white skirts and shirts, whose heads are festooned with small Carmen Miranda-style wraps. Most likely, they are imagined parading down an overflowing Avenida Sapucaí, otherwise known as Rio's *Sambódromo*, the actual stage for Rio's *Carnaval* parades.

Built in 1984, the *Sambódromo*, or Sambadrome, occupies the Avenida Sapucaí and serves as the official parade grounds for the *Escolas de Samba* during Rio's *Carnaval*. As a result, some of Rio's wealthiest and most influential citizens, along with wide-eyed first-world travelers, are amongst the few who gain entrance. The *Sambódromo* was seen by those whom I interviewed as taking the samba schools out of the streets, away from ardent supporters and the public at large, transposing *Carnaval de Rua* or "street *Carnaval*" into a private (and costly) theatrical spectacle. For example, 52-year-old Maria Luisa, a mixed-race security guard at my grandmother's residential apartment building, remembers when she didn't have to pay to participate in the celebrations of Viradouro, one of the most popular samba schools. "You could go out with them, dance in the streets." Now, even the most simple costumes range in price between R\$300 and R\$1,000, about \$150 to \$500 U.S. dollars in 2005 (*Época*, 5/1/2007). Considering that a maid working for a middle-class family in Rio earns between R\$60-100 per day, with the average approximately R\$80 per day, it would cost her four days' pay to parade in a samba school.

Both Glaucia, a 29-year-old black woman who works as a housekeeper for a family friend of mine, and Edivaldo, a lower-class 54-year-old carpenter who moved from the Northeast of Brazil as a child, live in the *favela* affiliated with Beija Flor, the neighborhood that gave birth to one of the most famous of samba schools of the same name. Neither is a particularly enthusiastic fan of *Carnaval* or the school, nor could recall how the neighborhood reacted to "their" school's Sapucaí 2004 victory—the Olympic gold for any samba school, awarded by a panel of judges. They admitted that their community did not reap any benefits, financial or otherwise, from the *escola* victory. Cecilia, a white, middle-class university professor in her 50's, argued that the "packaging" of *Carnaval* "ultimately distanced the celebration from the communities."

Now, two years later, people from all walks of life seem to be taking back their craft and traditions through *blocos*. Rallying against commodification and exclusion, the *carioca* public seems to be beginning to translate its yearning for a more democratic and participatory *Carnaval* into a more localized samba beat. Imagine my pleasure upon reading *Época*: "Quem quer saber de sair na Sapucaí?" In our words, Who cares about parading in Sapucaí?




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*Manuela Zoninsein just completed an internship at the Council on Foreign Relations in the Latin America Studies department. She's spending the year leading up to the Olympics in Beijing, teaching at the China Foreign Affairs University through Princeton-in-Asia and working as an international correspondent. Her senior thesis research was made possible thanks to grants from the Harvard College Research Program and DRCLAS.*

## Insects and Internet

*Saving a national treasure in Hispaniola*

BY BRIAN D. FARRELL

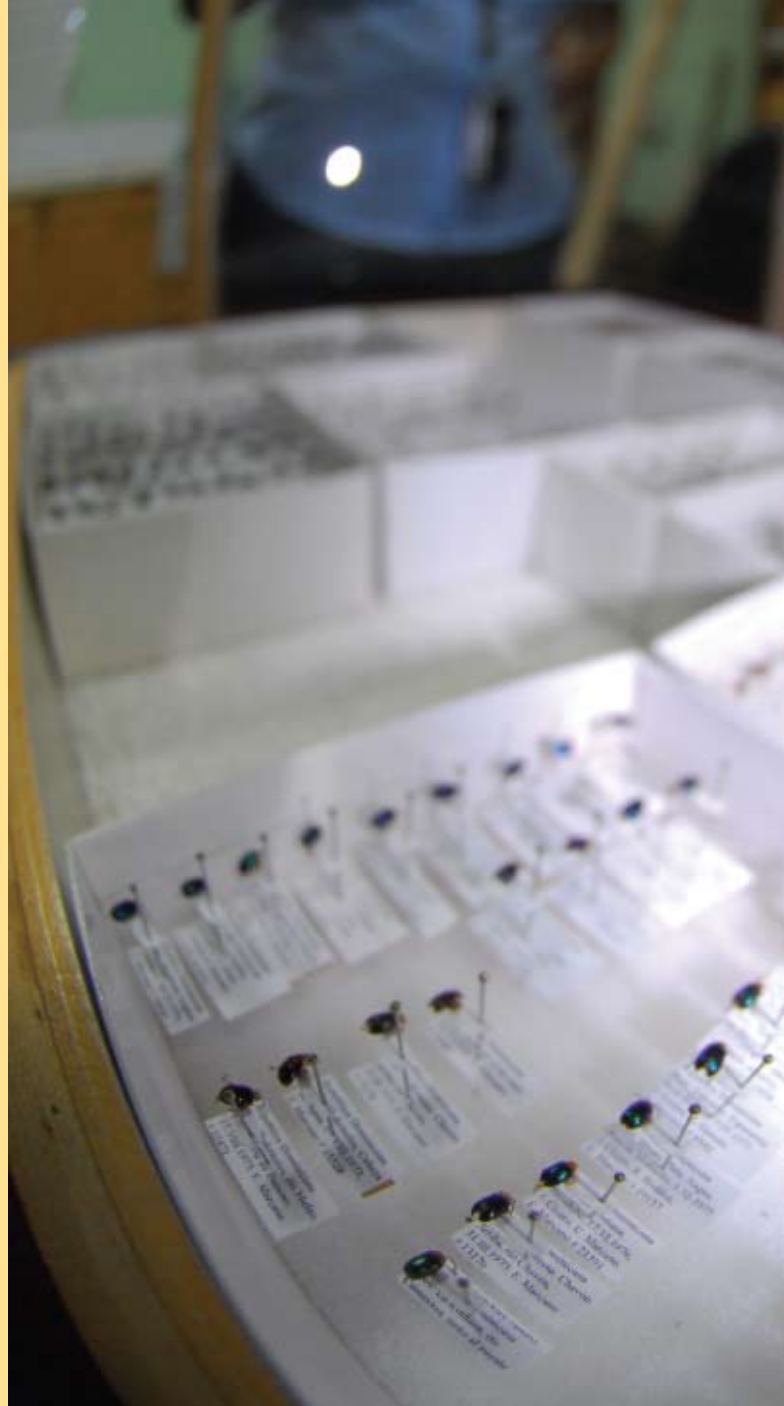
On July 11, 2007, the oldest university in the Americas, the Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo (UASD), marked the first anniversary of the entry of its natural history collections into the digital global community (biocaribe.org). These priceless collections record the changing abundances of species over the 20th century, including many species new to science and some that are perhaps already extinct. The collections of insects alone are estimated at more than 50,000 specimens. Add to this innumerable other invertebrates such as spiders, scorpions, plus lizards, plants and fossil specimens, and you have the extraordinary legacy of an unusual man, Eugenio de Jesús Marciano Fondeur, who passed away in September 2003 at the age of 80.

Known as the godfather of Dominican natural history studies, Marciano corresponded regularly with curators at Harvard and the Smithsonian Institution and elsewhere. Known to all as a nearly omniscient biology professor, he is fondly remembered at the UASD as the overseer of "La Cueva," (the cave) a large basement-level space housing his collections and desk, opening via a large garage door to the tree-lined avenue on the spacious campus. Students and visitors were always welcome to visit, but Marciano was very careful—some would say overly

so—of his collections. In later years he protected them jealously, but without fumigant or other deterrent to pests that are a constant threat to collections of organic objects.

I had known Marciano since 1989, last visiting him five months before his passing. In La Cueva we spoke of his links to Harvard and of our growing effort to digitize the natural history collections for Hispaniola and the Caribbean, and he expressed great enthusiasm for including the UASD collections. He showed me the insect collections and the great tomes in which he had recorded the data on each specimen, where, when and by whom it was collected, information that normally would be written or printed on tiny labels which, together with the specimen, would be impaled on pin in a specimen drawer. The problem is that if something happens to the books, the collection will lose its scientific value. This time-saving device no doubt helped Marciano keep up the processing of specimens as he collected in near-weekly trips to the field.

After Marciano's passing, I began conversations with UASD biology professors Manuel Váldez and Ruth Bastardo about stepping in to save the Marciano collections from inevitable deterioration. After two years of negotiation with the university, we were more successful than we hoped. The



Priceless insect collections have now been digitalized. It's one way that Harvard is making a difference in Latin America.

collections were in surprisingly good shape, and were moved to a spacious, newly refurbished, brightly lit space. Bastardo was appointed curator, in addition to professor. UASD Rector Roberto Reyna and I signed a formal agreement in July 2006. We at Harvard would provide training, equipment and very modest stipends to create a bioinformatics center for UASD undergraduates. The first objective of the center is to bring the Marciano collec-

tion to the highest curatorial standards by transcribing and printing modern labels and creating an online database of images and collection information for every species.

We have achieved this and more. With direct oversight by Bastardo and Váldez, the Instituto de Investigaciones de Botánica y Zoología (IIBZ) has become a lively center of research and learning, creating a culture of inter-generational teaching. Now our first gen-





eration of Dominican undergraduates, Arlen Marmolejo and Josué Domínguez, trained by MCZ staff at the National Botanical Gardens, are employed by the UASD and engaged in training the second generation of IIBZ biology undergraduates. The experience is as valuable as the product. Students learn the latest techniques of data capture and digital imaging, and feel the excitement of seeing the specimen images online, together with those from Harvard and other

world collections. Scientists worldwide are studying the online collections, with the formality of loans of specimens for research now facilitated by their accessibility.

This enterprise started four years earlier with a sabbatical year in Santo Domingo, when I met with Milciades Mejía, director of the National Botanical Gardens (and a UASD graduate and student of Marciano) to inquire of space for an imaging station for digitizing plant and insect specimens. Mejía graciously offered space in the new herbarium building and here we started to digitize specimens collected by our students on the Botanical Garden grounds and elsewhere in the coastal and mountain forests of the island.

These efforts to capture the past, taken together, become larger than their sum by providing a basis for exploration and discovery by future generations. By honoring the achievements of pioneers in science and culture such as Marciano, we forge partnerships based on common appreciation, the basis for any long relationship, and the foundation for making a difference.

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## CONNECTING THE DIASPORA WITH CARIBBEAN NGOS

E.One.Caribbean, an initiative based at LASPAU, seeks to engage the Caribbean diaspora in reinvigorating their home countries by providing financial, volunteer, and capacity-building resources to NGOs whose work addresses the social problems that threaten long-term economic and cultural viability.

The program was developed by Norris Prevost—a longtime member of the Parliament of Dominica and recent graduate of the Mason Fellows MPA/Midcareer Program at the Kennedy School of Government (KSG)—in conjunction with fellow KSG social enterprise students. An initial series of workshops held in Dominica, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent drew representatives from nearly one hundred NGOs interested in working with E.One.Caribbean, including the Windward Islands Farmers Association, the St. Vincent National Council of Women, the St. Lucia Medical and Dental Association, and the Peace Corps in Dominica. In addition, a Harvard University senior, Daniel Littlejohn-Carrillo, was awarded a KSG Institute of Politics Director's Internship to spend the summer of 2007 interning with Prevost at the Dominica Parliament to further the goals of E.One.Caribbean.

—ELIZABETH LANGOSY, LASPAU

## The Promise of Good Governance

By Merilee S. Grindle, *Going Local: Decentralization, Democratization, and the Promise of Good Governance*, Princeton University Press, 2007, 228 pp.

A REVIEW BY DIANE E. DAVIS

This methodologically rigorous and carefully crafted book is an exercise in good scholarship. Like its subject of good governance, it is an embodiment of leadership, performance, accountability and a commitment to constructive policymaking. Merilee Grindle has already made her reputation as a painstaking scholar of governance, bureaucracy and policymaking in Latin America and across the developing world, but *Going Local* seals her standing as a leading analyst of governance. Grindle, Edward S. Mason Professor of International Development at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government (KSG) and director of the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, guides the reader in the study of decentralization and its impacts on local governance in post-PRI Mexico. The book uses a model research design that focuses on tangible outputs—in this case, a set of propositions about what makes for good governance at the local level. It seeks a comprehensive, reasoned and non-hyperbolic assessment of the promise and limits to decentralization. Grindle's powerful conclusions call into question much of the received wisdom about the nature of decentralization and its relationship to democratization, accountability and efficiency of local policymaking.

The benefits of these insights for local and multilateral policymakers are enormous, as will be discussed in more detail below. But they should also be welcomed by a wide range of academic scholars, primarily because Grindle makes her case with an inclusive treatment of a broad range of theories and policy literatures, and does so while demonstrating analytical accountability to the concerns of multiple actors in the world of local governance, ranging from elected officials and city administrators to local citizens and civil society more generally.

The book is the result of several years of fieldwork by KSG researchers. Under Grindle's supervision, fieldworkers executed a comprehensive survey designed to measure the policy impacts of decentralization and categorize the quality of local governance, as well as highlight which institutional, social, political, or other factors might account for variation in performance. Fieldworkers also generated considerable qualitative evidence through participant observation, ethnography and informal interviews. The project sampled a total of 30 municipalities with varied socio-economic profiles in all six regions of Mexico so that differences in local government performance could be assessed on a variety of non-economic factors. These criteria include political

competition, extent of entrepreneurial determination among public officials, public sector modernization and civil society activism. While the latter three factors speak to issues considered relevant to all public policy analysts, independent of the developmental context, the focus on political competition highlights Grindle's concern with understanding governance outcomes in a recently democratized environment. Among scholars of Latin America, and Mexico particularly, there is great interest in understanding whether the recent transition to (or deepening of) democracy in formerly authoritarian political regimes has made much of a difference in policy implementation, efficiency and good governance at the local level. The question is of particular relevance for Mexico, which in the last decade has seen the demise of one-party rule at both the local and national levels.

As a variable, political competition is not a perfect proxy for democratization of an entire political regime, and thus there may be certain interpretive limitations to the findings presented in *Going Local*. The lack of evidence drawn from the pre-democratic period makes it hard to say whether and how local government performance in a more democratic Mexico truly departs from the dynamics operating under one-party rule. A similar



caution could be raised when seeking generalizations beyond Mexico, whose unique social and political history of corporatism may produce results different than would be seen in other newly democratic countries. This is suggested by much of the ethnographic evidence presented in the book. Indeed, the longstanding patterns of clientelism in Mexico are so bound to the culture and history of the place that they still remain entrenched in some locales, even in the newly democratic context. Likewise, Mexico has a long history of regional inequality, which also persists and is reflected in the socio-economic profiles and performance scores of the municipalities (see Tables 2.4 and 4.1), despite the advent of democratization. (One of the striking findings of this research is that there appears to be no direct correlation between economic marginality and local government performance.) Accordingly, to truly understand the impacts of history and regionalism on local government performance

in Mexico, let alone elsewhere, would have required a slightly different methodology, one that allowed for variation over time and a more anthropological study of cultural traditions related to caciquismo, clientelism, regionalism, and their durability at the local level despite political regime change.

Still, Grindle has been more than successful in confronting and transcending these and other methodological limitations to produce a work of enormous importance and insight. For one, she offers an extensive chapter on the history of regionalism and local governance in Mexico, which gives an analytical benchmark for comparing the present with the past, and for understanding cultural and social differences across the nation, qualitatively at least. For another, her comparison of political competition across the 30 different municipalities grounds her claims in an understanding of differences across cities and regions, rather than over time. She is able to indirectly measure whether local government performance is linked in some way to electoral conditions—namely, to citizens' willingness and capacity to recall their leaders and find replacements if policy success is not achieved. This certainly is a form of democracy; and on these and other counts, her findings are both critical and counter-intuitive, especially to the legions of inside-the-beltway policy wonks who tend to see decentralization, democratization, and good governance as all of a piece. Her critical stance is best evidenced in her

claim that "democratization of elections does not necessarily lead to less conflictive politics, easier decision making, or better functioning governments" (p. 83).

Many of Grindle's findings contradict conventional wisdom or raise questions about the assumptions commonly held by promoters of decentralization, analysts of good governance, advocates of civil society empowerment and purveyors of political discourse in Mexico. One is that despite the fact that strong civil society activism may help extract beneficial resources from local government, it does very little to assure government accountability or reinforce a rights-based, citizenship approach to good governance (p.141). That is, activism can help the particular group engaged with local government, but it does not generate a wholesale sense of citizen responsiveness on the part of local leaders nor does it sustain deep commitments to democratization and social inclusion across local civil society more generally. Such findings should give pause to those who link civic activism to either accountability or democratization, and who tend to make generalizations about the positive relationship between decentralization, local governance and democratic ideals of citizenship.

Another key conclusion offered by Grindle is that state entrepreneurship, defined in terms of the preferences and activities of high-level officials in town hall, has a critical and positive effect on local government performance independent

of party affiliation (p. 103). Stated differently, no single political party had a monopoly on entrepreneurial capacity at the local level, and no single political party could claim more expertise in local government performance; it all came down to the entrepreneurial wherewithal of local officials. This finding lends an opening salvo to the raging political discourse in contemporary Mexico, where PRI, PAN, and PRD spokespersons competing for the hearts and minds of the democratic electorate continue to trade claims about their parties' monopoly on local performance expertise.

Perhaps the most significant, albeit most complex, finding presented in *Going Local* is the claim that although "decentralization can contribute to improved performance of local government...it does not necessarily achieve these ends" (p. 178). This statement, combined with the prior finding about competitive democracy at the local level, suggests that the relationship between performance, democratization, and decentralization is indirect at best, and far from being causal. In policymaking terms, this means that anyone interested in promoting or enabling better performance of local governments must work to change a variety of institutional relations, social and political relations, and leadership attitudes and strategies. Among the few suggestions for achieving such aims, which are summarized in a concluding chapter, Grindle boldly highlights the importance of investing in material projects

(i.e. "bricks and mortar") and in producing local economic development. In short, one message here is that good governance is much more contingent on the availability of fiscal resources—and other individual and institutional capacities—than on democratization or decentralization per se, and there is no direct relationship between the latter and the former.

This important finding raises a final question for me about one element that remained relatively under-examined in this book. It is the institutional and political relations between local and national governance in Mexico. Granted, this book is primarily about local governance, and cannot be faulted for not looking more extensively at federal involvement in localities. But ultimately, the extent to which local leaders were successful or performed well, according to Grindle at least, had a lot to do with how well they could "work" the national governance system to secure funds and other resources for local projects (see p. 93, 179). Accordingly, any study of the possibilities and limits of good local governance must incorporate an understanding of the national administrative and political system into its framework. Doing so might produce evidence that party politics does matter after all. After all, one would suspect that local public sector entrepreneurs would have more success securing federal resources—for innovation, bricks and mortar projects, responding to civil society demands—when they come



from the same party in power nationally. Such a hypothesis is no more than that, and no doubt would be mediated by a variety of other regional, historical, social and political fac-

tors. But it is something I would love to see explored in the next book by Merilee Grindle. Until then, we have plenty of great material for both answering and raising questions about

good governance to keep us stimulated and busy for quite a while.

**Diane E. Davis** is Professor and Head of the International Develop-

ment Group at the Department of Urban Studies and Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the editor of *Political Power and Social Theory*. She is co-director of MIT's Jerusalem 2050 project.

## New England Bridges to the Hispanic World

**Iván Jaksic**, *The Hispanic World and American Intellectual Life, 1820-1880* (New York: Studies of the Americas, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)

A REVIEW BY BRIAN LOVEMAN

Iván Jaksic's highly original and engaging scholarship on the origins of U.S. academic interest in Ibero-America brilliantly reveals previously unknown trans-Atlantic and Western hemisphere intellectual networks. His research focuses on the life, interactions and contributions of those Jaksic calls "the pioneer American scholars and lifetime students of the Hispanic World"—Washington Irving, George Ticknor, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Mary Peabody Mann and William H. Prescott—and a raft of Hispanic intellectuals. Jaksic, a former DRCLAS Santo Domingo Visiting Scholar (1997-98) and Library Scholar, has uncovered primary material that offers fascinating new insights into the beginnings of Hispanism and Hispanic studies in the United States.

Jaksic's book is intellectual history and biography, organized as chapters on the five main protagonists. Researched deeply and carefully, it reads as a novel set in an era when "the breakdown of the Spanish empire in the Americas, and the resulting emergence of new nations in the Western Hemisphere, presented enormous challenges and opportunities for the United States—when Americans of the early republic

deliberately engaged in an effort to define their culture, history, and uniqueness as a nation" (p.1). The book is full of surprises even for experts on the American historical and literary tradition and will surely be a cornerstone for all future efforts to understand the interplay between the construction of American political culture and national identity and the formation of U.S. perceptions, attitudes, and policies toward the Hispanic world. It is impossible to disagree with the book jacket blurb by Richard L. Kagan (editor of *Spain in America: The Origins of Hispanism in the United States* (2002): "This is unquestionably the best study on Spain's place in the imaginary of nineteenth century America."

The discoveries Jaksic made in unknown, little-known and unpublished memoirs, letters, diaries and manuscripts is a tale of its own, worthy of publication as a testimony to the solitariness, tedium, disappointment and elation that come with a five-year long quest. He relentlessly tracked the lives, adventures and intellectual contributions of a small group of Americans who pioneered the serious study of Spain and Latin America in the United States during the first half of the nineteenth century.

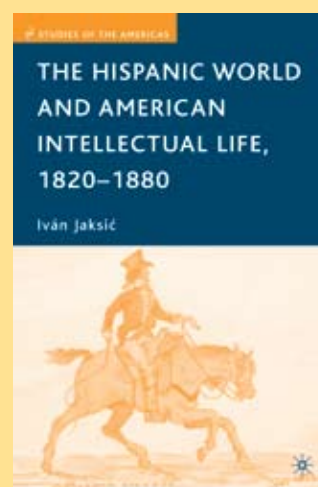
At Harvard, the Houghton Library contained a virtually unknown collection of correspondence between Longfellow and Hispanic intellectuals, unpublished Longfellow translations and evidence of a romance with the daughter of a Spanish innkeeper, Florencia González. The findings at Houghton resulted in a three-month exhibition curated by Jaksic in 2005.

At the Harvard University Archives, Jaksic also discovered valuable materials related to the work of George Ticknor, Smith Professor of French and Spanish and a founder of Hispanic studies in the United States at Harvard (1819-1835) and Longfellow, who succeeded Ticknor as Chair in 1836. Among the Ticknor materials, Jaksic recovered the annotated version of his course syllabus, correspondence related to instruction in literature and Spanish language with College administrators, and manuscripts with notes for the course on Spanish literature. These materials made evident not only the thinking of the country's premier Hispanist, but also the fact that university curriculum and organizational reform were no easier in the 1820s and 1830s than they are today; fossilization in academia started early,

often resisting even the most extreme efforts to inject new life and new forms.

Harvard was not the only place where Jaksic explored archives to create this intriguing story. The Real Academia de la Historia (Spain), the Massachusetts Historical Society of Boston and the Rauner Special Collections Library at Dartmouth all revealed precious secrets that contributed to this painstakingly researched book.

Each of Jaksic's intellectual biographies is a fascinating story on its own account, intertwined in the description of previously unknown intellectual networks that reached across the Atlantic and between the southern and northern nations of the Western Hemisphere. Revelation of how the protagonists did their work,



came to know one another and Hispanic colleagues, and exchanged documents by land and sea provides a colorful and humanizing lens on American and Ibero-American intellectual history in the 19th century. It also makes clear how the largely negative attitudes toward Spain and Latin America became fixed in U.S. popular and academic culture. From Prescott's characterization of Mexicans as a "degraded race" and his claim that "fanaticism, bigotry and greed" were Spain's legacy to Latin America to Mary Mann's embellishment on Sarmiento's description of caudillismo and barbarism in Argentina as the essence of Latin American politics, all the prejudicial mainstays of modern American attitudes toward Latin America come spewing forth from the Hispanist pioneers. So too do the Latin

American responses as Jaksic recounts the reactions of Spanish and Latin American intellectuals, especially historians, to the work of Ticknor, Mann, and Prescott. Chilean historian Pedro Félix Vicuña (1858) even pleaded with Prescott to write a book that would "put a stop to the emerging evil" of U.S. territorial conquest, racism and interventionism in the Hemisphere (p. 158).

Jaksic concludes that the inspiration for the beginnings of "Hispanic studies" in the United States stemmed less from concern for Ibero-America itself than for the shaping of U.S. national identity. The didactic interpretation by these scholars of the rise and fall of Spanish Empire came to serve as warning of the dangers to the U.S. republic of foreign wars and incipient imperialism: "Spain was essential as a

point of origin, as well as an example to be avoided, in the American search for a unique national identity" (p.4). Washington Irving even believed that "Spanish history held the key to the origins of the United States as a nation" (p. 186).

Jaksic ends his book with a masterful short account of Herman Melville's *Benito Cereno* as a metaphor for the incomprehension of, and disdain for, the Hispanic world typical of popular and official America by the end of the 19th century—and to the present. Unfortunately, he does not do for Melville, and several other key characters in the narrative, what he has done for the main protagonists, leaving this reader wishing that the biographical research and intellectual history had continued still further and that a bit more explicit connections had been made

to the ongoing development of the Latin American Studies and history curriculum that emerged from "borderlands studies" (most notably, Hubert Howe Bancroft) and institutionalism (most notably, Bernard Moses, at Berkeley) on the U.S. West Coast in the late nineteenth century. Perhaps this only means that Jaksic will have readers enthusiastically looking forward to the "rest of the story" when he is ready to tell it.

---

**Brian Loveman** is a professor of Political Science at San Diego State University. He is the author or editor of more than twenty books on Latin American history and politics including *Chile: The Legacy of Hispanic Capitalism* (3rd edition, 2001), *For la Patria. Politics and the Armed Forces in Latin America* (1999) and *The Constitution of Tyranny: Regimes of Exception in Spanish America* (1993).

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## Another Mexican Invasion

**Editor, Forrest Gander, translation editor, Luis Cortez Bargalla, *Connecting Lines: New Poetry from Mexico*, Louisville, KY: Sarabande Press.**

**April Linder, editor, *Líneas Conectadas: Nueva Poesía de los Estados Unidos*, Louisville, KY: Sarabande Press.**

### A REVIEW BY KEVIN GALLAGHER

Lou Dobbs and other talk show hosts want us to believe that a so-called Mexican invasion is denying "true" Americans their jobs, democracy and destiny. Few among them comment on a peaceful, more subtle Mexican "invasion" that will help us see why fears of blending Mexican and U.S. culture are misplaced. One by one, since the turn of the century, anthologies of a Mexican poetry trumpeting innovation and diversity have been sneaking into the country. Watch out! If you read one you will realize that Mexico is a rich and complex

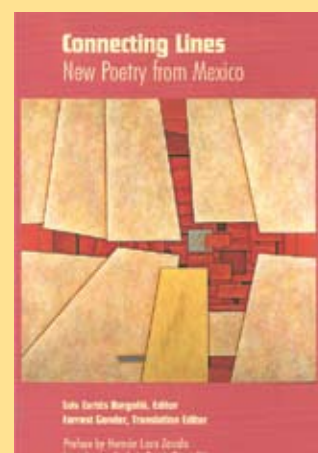
country and its culture will only enrich you and yours.

Before 2002, the most recent comprehensive Mexican poetry anthology in English had been published in 1970. Since then there have been three, and *Connecting Lines* is the broadest sample of Mexican poetry to date. That 1970 anthology, *New Poetry from Mexico*, was a masterpiece that whispered through U.S. poetry louder than whisper campaigns on talk radio today about migrants stealing our jobs. *New Poetry from Mexico*, edited by the U.S. poet Mark

Strand. It was an abridged version of the landmark *Poesía de Movimiento* (1966), edited by literary luminaries Octavio Paz, Ali Chumacero, Jose Emilio Pacheco and Homero Aridjis. These books collected and canonized Mexican poetry's turn to modernism and opened the door to their international acclaim.

In his introduction, Paz argues that Mexican poetry is one of a broader history:

The poetry of Mexicans is part of a larger tradition: that of the poetry of the Spanish language written in Spanish



America in the modern epoch. This tradition is not the same as that of Spain. Our tradition is also and above all a polemi-

cal style, at war constantly with the Spanish tradition and with itself: Spanish purism against cosmopolitanism; its own cosmopolitanism against a will to be American. As soon as this desire for style asserted itself, to part with "modernism," it set up a dialogue between Spain and Spanish America.

Why then did it take until 2002 to get another dose of contemporary Mexican poetry? Part of the reason is that poetry in the United States took a provincial turn for a spell. Another reason is that the immense popularity of Paz among poetry readers here took up the "room" for a Mexican poet. After all, if you were versed in world poetry in the 1980s and 1990s you had to be reading Joseph Brodsky (Russia), Zbigniew Herbert (Poland), Bei Dao (China), Ernesto Cardenal and Daisy Zamora (Nicaragua), Kamau Brathwaite (Barbados), Denis Brutus (South Africa) and Seamus Heaney (Ireland) to be able to hold your own.

Paz passed away in 1998 and will go down in history as one of the 20th Century's greatest modern poets. Ironically, his death has opened a window to a new generation of Mexican poets. Shortly after his death Copper Canyon Press published *Reversible Monuments: Contemporary Mexican Poetry*, edited by Monica de la Torre and Michael Wiegers. The volume is the broadest yet in scope and gives the deepest treatment of poets born after World War II. The book features 31 male and female (women were excluded from *New Poetry of Mexico* number) poets over a (bilingual) span of 675 pages. What's more, one can find translations of indigenous Mexicans as well. Natalia Toledo, for instance, is from Oaxaca and writes in Zapotec.

*Connecting Lines* provides much broader coverage than *Reversible Monuments*, including more than fifty poets from a variety of threads in Mexican poetry. It is the place to start for Mexican poetry in English, while individual poets may be covered in more depth in *Reversible Monuments*. (Some, such as Pura Lopez-Colome and Coral Bracho, now have book-length collections in English.)

Kenneth Rexroth, one of the best translators of his time, said of the process of translation, "The first question must be: is this as much of Homer, or whomever, as can be conveyed on these terms to an audience? Second, of course, is it good in itself?" In other words, the second test is that the work in English has to rank among solid poetry by U.S. poets.

In many ways the recent wave of anthologies is cursed by the first. *New Poetry of Mexico* had some of the best poets of the time as translators, W.S. Merwin, Philip Levine, Mark Strand, and Donald Justice. Yet the new poetry anthologies, and *Connecting Lines* in particular, also include some greats. Carolyn Forché and Forrest Gander (former Briggs-Copeland Poet at Harvard) are the most accomplished and best known. Translations by Monica de la Torre and Jen Hofer (poet and editor of a 2003 anthology by University of Pittsburgh Press titled *Sin Puertas Visibles: An Anthology of Contemporary Poetry by Mexican Women*) and Don Share (poetry editor of *Harvard Review*) stand out as well. Others are more uneven.

It is hard to characterize the poets in *Connecting Lines* or Mexican poetry in general. Like poetry in the United States, Mexican poetry has splintered into political, formal, personal and historical in rich ways.

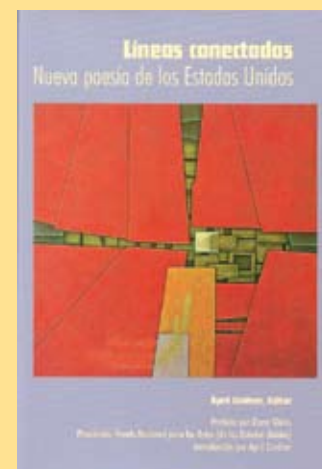
However, it is striking—in stark contrast with U.S. poetry—that the vast majority of the poets are translators themselves. Quite a few U.S. poets do not read foreign languages well enough to translate them, leading them to an insular set of (worked over but endlessly rich) influences in the English tradition. Mexicans are much more internationalist and thus can draw on more history and style for innovation and perception in language.

Francisco Segovia is one such poet. He works as a researcher at El Colegio de Mexico putting together a "Mexican Dictionary" and treats Mexican Spanish very much as William Carlos Williams treated American English as its own language. Like Williams, Segovia's poetry is imbued with knowledge of the great metaphors of Spanish and Asian literature and the particulars of Mexican reality—Pemex and the city together in a poem translated by Harvard's Don Share with César Pérez:

Pigeons eat bread on the sidewalk,  
blindly hammer crumbs  
on the hard street, nail  
their beaks to the cement, poke  
the ground  
like flocks of derricks  
in the oil fields.

This Mexican poetry "invasion" is comparable to the British invasion of rock and roll over thirty years ago. British musicians "discovered" African-American blues, absorbed it, and breathed a different life into it that was then rediscovered such that it "took over" the U.S. music scene. Mexican poetry has also absorbed the best of U.S. and world poetry and is now coming back into the country with a set of gifts from the deepest core of Mex-

ico to the far out reaches of the world. It will be a treat to those who read Spanish or English and some of its certainly more fun than *The Hollies*!



A final note on the companion volume, *Lineas Conectadas: Nueva Poesía de los Estados Unidos*. The publisher decided on a two-volume bilingual set: one of Mexican poets for a U.S. audience, one of U.S. poets for Mexico. Interestingly, there is actually no other anthology of U.S. poetry like *Lineas Conectadas*. Most anthologies of poetry in this country are from a particular "school" that is trying to distinguish itself. This volume is an amazing representation of the breadth of poetry in the United States today. Followers of U.S. poetry will be refreshingly surprised to find Sherman Alexie and Gjertrud Schnackenberg in the same book. Thus, it does great service to the craft for Mexicans, but also readers of English who don't read poetry much might start there for poetry in their own language.

**Kevin P. Gallagher** is assistant professor of international relations at Boston University and co-author of the new book *The Enclave Economy: Foreign Investment and Sustainable Development in Mexico's Silicon Valley* (MIT Press).



Te confieso que el colorido de la página me sorprendió, al igual que la foto, y tengo "mixed feelings" sobre si el formato deba cambiar o deba permanecer el tradicional bicolor de *ReVista*.

Pero te estoy escribiendo sobre otro asunto. En el artículo "The Brazilian Fight Against AIDS" escrito por mi y Mauro Brigeiro, faltan los créditos de las fotos e imágenes. Las referencias de las revistas con las que se ilustra el artículo son (en orden de aparición):

1. Banco de Horas ~ IDAC (Instituto de Ação Social). *Aids, Sujeito e Comunidade*. Rio de Janeiro, 1997.
2. Grupo Pela Vidda. *O que acontece quando o exame é positivo. Viver a vida positivamente*. Rio de Janeiro, 1993.
3. *Cadernos Pela Vidda*. Aids, informação e ativismo. Ano XII, Nº. 36, agosto de 2002.
4. BEMFAM ~ Sociedade Civil de Bem-estar familiar no Brasil. *Conversando é que a gente se entende*. Rio de Janeiro, julho de 1992.
5. *Saber Viver* ~ uma revista para quem vive com o vírus da Aids. Ano 2, Nº. 7 Octubre/noviembre de 2000.

6. RIOS, Luis Felipe; ALMEIDA, Vagner; PARKER; Richard (organizadores). *Juventude e Homossexualidade: o que os pais precisam saber*. Rio de Janeiro: ABIA ~ Associação Brasileira Interdisciplinar de Aids, 2002.

GRACIAS POR PUBLICAR LA CORRECCIÓN.

CÉSAR ERNESTO ABADÍA-BARRERO

*[The author, together with Mauro Brigeiro, wrote the article, "The Brazilian Fight Against Aids" in the Spring 2007 issue of ReVista. The letter explains that the photo and image credits were inadvertently omitted and supplies the correct information. ]*

For Merilee Grindle, DRCLAS director (in a telegram)

INCUMBIU-ME O SENHOR MINISTRO DE ESTADO DA CULTURA, GILBERTO GIL MOREIRA, DE AGRADECER O ENVIO DA REVISTA HARVARD REVIEW OF LATIN AMERICA SPRING 2007.

O MINISTRO GILBERTO GIL MOREIRA PARABENIZA-A PELA PUBLICACAO DA REFERIDA REVISTA

ATENCIOSAMENTE,

MARISA BORGES

CHEFE DE GABINETE, SUBSTITUTA

*[Brazilian Culture Minister Gilberto Gil through his Chief of*

*Staff Marisa Borges thanks her for sending the Brazil issue of ReVista and congratulates her on its publication.]*

I love the color!

I have been reading *ReVista* for several years now, and the Brazil issue is the first I've seen in color. It looks so sharp, and is a nice change from the standard format.

As much as I look forward to and enjoy reading *ReVista*, I think this color format looks so much more appealing. The photographs are true to life, and color on the pages drew me in closer and encouraged more interest.

The previous format now seems bland by comparison, painting articles and photos with the same, monotone grey color. This new format brings a fresh approach to such engaging material. I'd encourage you to maintain this format if funding is available.

ALAN RIVERA, ED. M. 1998

The *ReVista* is fun in color. I like the thought of punctuating with color now and then like this, rather than each issue in color. The content is terrific, as always.

BARBARA W. FASH

DIRECTOR, CORPUS OF MAYA HIEROGLYPHIC INSCRIPTIONS  
PEABODY MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETHNOLOGY

Ignorance of TB is not an exclusively Brazilian problem—cuts have appeared everywhere, despite the appearance of totally drug-resistant strains. Even Robert K. Altman misreported from the South African TB conference last year, mak-

ing it appear that the resistant strains had not reached US shores (they have—and had—as the AP reported, inartfully, the same day).

STEVEN S. ROSS

*The writer is a consultant and science writer, formerly of Columbia University.*

Brazil issue is the best issue by far I have seen. Color and layout are terrific. Articles are provocative; comments by students add a lot. Keep it up.

BOB GROSS, MD

I was thrilled to find an edition of *ReVista* in my mailbox this spring. I have time to read it more thoroughly than I did as a student! I appreciate that you continue sending it to me after graduation, and I especially appreciate the focus on Brazil and equity this spring. My roommate is entering the urban planning program at Harvard School of Design, and the magazine sparked a provocative conversation. She wants to read *ReVista* too!

Thank you for producing a high quality magazine!

LAURA BLANK, HARVARD '06

## FE ERRATA

I received the Natural Disasters magazines last week and I think the cover looks very good! One bit of misinformation on one of the inside pictures; the one of the police in Popayan was taken during a police operation not after an earthquake.

REGARDS, JOE GUERRIERO [JOEGPHOTO1@MINDSPRING.COM](mailto:JOEGPHOTO1@MINDSPRING.COM)

<[WWW.JOEG.COM](http://WWW.JOEG.COM)>

*The author was the photographer for the cover photo of the Winter 2007 issue of ReVista.*

## Note from the Editor:

**Thanks, Laura! And everyone who has changed addresses, remember to update your information through our website or by e-mail.**

**And as for color in *ReVista*, as I noted in my opening letter, we will joyfully use it from time to time. We hope you've enjoyed its use in this issue.**

# DANCE!



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**Tango, Samba, Modernity and Nation**

*By Florencia Garramuño*

**Why I Do Not Like Tango** *By Diana Sorensen*

**Memories of Tango** *By Sylvia Molloy*

All Tangled Up in Tango *By Alba Barberia*

**Contributions to a Critique of Tango**

*By Rafael Filippelli and Federico Monjeau*

El Tango en El Aula *By Irene Coromina*



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**Disruption in the Immigrant Experience**

*By Claudia Giovanna Pineda*

**El Colegio del Cuerpo: The College of the Body** *By Álvaro Restrepo Hernández*

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