

BROKEN WINDOWS AND DANCING BODIES: POLITICS OF MOVEMENT IN NEW
YORK CITY'S SALSA SCENE

BY

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Within this thesis, I explore various facets of New York City's salsa scene. I first examine the political history of cabaret laws in New York City throughout the 20th and into the 21st century, and demonstrate that these laws had drastic impacts on marginalized populations within the city. Although I include other genres within my exploration of these laws, I give particular focus to salsa music and dance, which I contend were silent casualties of Mayor Rudy Giuliani's enforcement of the cabaret law in the late 1990s and early 2000s. I then move to discuss my own experiences learning to salsa dance within contemporary spaces in New York City and the context-specific meanings that accrue on the site of the dancing body. While utilizing a phenomenological approach and contextualizing my own movements within the complex, highly contested history of nightlife within New York City, I assert that the processes of learning to dance can engender spatial and interpersonal transformation.

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INTRODUCTION

Why Salsa Dancing?

Within this thesis, I present a critical historical and ethnographic examination of salsa dancing in New York City extending from the early twentieth century up through today. As I will illustrate in this research, salsa dancing, and dancing more generally, is not a neutral activity (Daniel 2011; Desmond 1997). Dance and movement are always laden with layers of significances that are negotiated through individual bodies, across time and space, within different social and historical contexts (Buckland 2001; Delgado and Muñoz 1997; Hutchinson 2013; Meintjes 2017). Here I will explore some of the meanings accrued within New York City salsa venues over a century of social control, as well as those that emerged out of my own body as I danced salsa for the first time within these spaces.

A primary objective of this thesis is to examine New York City governance throughout the 20th and 21st centuries and its impact on the historical trajectory of dancing and music in New York City, and to contextualize present-day salsa dancing within this framework. I seek to understand how local governmental policy and policymakers have historically impacted salsa, and nightlife more generally. In exploring methods of social control that have been aimed at clubs and nightlife, I aim to demonstrate that minorities and people of color have historically been the most heavily impacted by these policies, and that musical life and nightlife within New York City has always been highly contested. Another objective of my research is to demonstrate how learning to dance can offer new relationalities and modes of being within club spaces (García 2013; Halberstam 2011). I do this largely through my own experiences dancing in New York City, which are inherently embedded within the complex history of nightlife within the city. As I examine both of these topics, I contend with the power of the dancing body. This

study is valuable in that dancing in New York has always been a site through which individuals and communities have negotiated the politics of gentrification and city space, freedom of expression, race and race relations, and gender and sexuality. Many of the political actors discussed here are still active today and continue to shape modern New York and national politics. Moreover, examining the social control of dance within New York can grant insight into the historical values of a city central to American society, and insight into the values of society at large.

Project Background

This project emerged from a research trip conducted in New York City in January of 2018 funded by the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. My original intent was not to study salsa dancing, or salsa music, or even to travel to New York City. When first envisioning this project in September of 2017, I planned to travel to Puerto Rico to conduct research within small, local recording studios on the island, addressing questions about the gendered divisions of labor within these spaces and about the negotiation of gendered relationships through recording technologies. After Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico and the island's power grid later that same month, I reconfigured my project to take place within a New York City recording studio; the project would have been geared toward Latin American music producers operating within the city, and would have addressed questions similar to those of my original research plan. However, my plans changed yet again when, the day before departing for New York, the studio which I intended to work with emailed and told me they could no longer host me.

I arrived in New York City with a few ideas of directions that my research could take, an intimidating prospect at the outset of my first "field" experience, but in hindsight, the

malleability with which I entered the city proved to be an asset at the outset of my research. I was able to explore and consider various possibilities for my project, and landed on a topic that continued to grow and morph well after my travels had concluded. On the first two days of my research trip, I spent my time canvassing the city, stopping in record stores, music shops, cafes, music venues, and bars, trying to gain insights into the city's musical life that I could explore. I went from Flushing in Queens, to lower Manhattan, to Harlem, to the South Bronx, spending large amounts of time and money on the subway travelling between locations I had mapped out the night before.

I am endlessly grateful to have happened upon Casa Amadeo, a Puerto Rican music store and community centerpiece in the Longwood section of the South Bronx on the second day of my travels, and to have met the owner of this establishment, Mike Amadeo, during my visit. The first time I visited Casa Amadeo, I briefly talked to Amadeo about my research, telling him that I was in the city to learn about Latin music. I asked him where I could go to hear salsa music, since the materials and memorabilia within his store were highly geared toward New York salsa, and he recommended I go to Willie's Steakhouse in the Parkchester area of the Bronx. Upon Amadeo's recommendation, I would visit Willie's the following evening and would return multiple times throughout my time in New York. At this location, I met a wonderful community of musicians, dancers, and enthusiasts that gave me my first insights into New York's salsa scene.

The first time I attended a salsa dancing night on a rainy Wednesday at Willie's, I was asked multiple times whether or not I knew how to dance. Wishing I could say that I did, I decided that I would spend my time in New York learning about salsa and learning how to dance salsa. After visiting Willie's, I began to explore other salsa venues around the city as well with

the goal in mind that I would be able to return to Willie's at the end of my research trip and join the dancing without completely embarrassing myself. I did dance at Willie's at the end of my trip, although I certainly stood out amongst all of the older, more experienced dancers.

However, as I learned more about salsa dancing and danced with numerous people in different spaces, I learned to embrace the processual nature of learning to dance and all of the missteps that come with it. The first part of my project emerged from these experiences, as I began salsa dancing for the first time and simultaneously grappled with my body and its meanings across these spaces.

The second part of this project developed long after the conclusion of my field research. As I reviewed my notes and as the first half of my research began to take shape, a comment made by Mike Amadeo involving Rudy Giuliani, the mayor of New York City from 1994-2001, began to call my attention. During an interview, Amadeo made an offhand comment that Giuliani had closed down all of the city's salsa clubs in the 1990s. I grew curious as to what exactly Amadeo was referring to when he made this comment, wondering what role Giuliani had in changes to New York City salsa. From here, my research took a historical turn as I began to explore the complex politics of 1990s New York and thereafter the history of the cabaret law¹ within the city, learning that Giuliani had been a vigorous enforcer of this law within the 1990s in his "quality of life" campaign that aimed to clean up the city. Salsa music and dance were heavily affected by the enforcement of the cabaret law within the late 1990s and early 2000s, as was nightlife throughout New York City.

¹ As I will explore in Chapter 1, this was controversial legislation in New York City throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century used to control music and dance.

As I came to comprehend the long history of the cabaret laws and their oftentimes discriminatory and racist enforcement, I also came to understand my own dancing body within this complex historical matrix in which social dancing in bars and clubs, particularly by people of color and other minorities, has been met with oftentimes violent governmental and societal pushback. Contextualizing my own experiences within this history led me to consider, often self-consciously, what perceptions others might have had of me within the spaces that I visited. An overarching theme that continuously arose in my research about Giuliani was that his administration was instrumental in initiating the gentrification of New York City, and while I cannot draw large conclusions because of my limited time spent within New York salsa clubs, my initial observations suggest that salsa dancing was not immune to this. Although I do not thoroughly explore this issue within my research, it seems as if divisions do exist between spaces along lines of socioeconomic status, race, and generation, as well as physical location within the city.

Other conversations and experiences that I had in New York led to potential research questions that I unfortunately do not have the space to address here, but nonetheless were notable and lent texture to my understanding of salsa while I was in New York. A conversation with a salsa instructor after a lesson stands out, in which she explained to me that salsa is a uniquely “American” style of music, with origins in communities of Cuban immigrants. I left this interaction with questions about the ownership of salsa music and dance, and as I conducted secondary research for this project, I learned that ideas of ownership as they relate to salsa are disputed and incredibly complex. I noticed other tensions within the relationships to technology that many of my interlocutors had. Many seemed to hold negative views toward younger generations of musicians who preferred genres like rap and *reggaetón*, which they claimed have

contributed to the decline in popularity of salsa and to the lack of opportunities for gigging salsa musicians. Yet many of these same individuals also embraced salsa DJs as part of their communities as well as made use of streaming services, to which they also attributed the decline of live music, seemingly in contradiction with their views that technological innovations had been generally harmful to salsa in the city. The relationships that many salsa musicians have to technology, especially those of older generations, is incredibly complex. Furthermore, I devote very little attention here to sound despite the rich and intriguing musical and non-musical sounds that I encountered while in New York salsa clubs. While I regret that this integral component of my experiences in New York and salsa as a genre goes unexplored here, I instead focus my attention on dance, the mode through which I was first able to engage with this genre and an activity equally vital to salsa as a whole.

Literature Review

This research draws primarily from bodies of scholarship on salsa music and dance. Although much of the existing scholarship examines salsa's musical component, which I do not do here, this work has nonetheless been highly useful in guiding this research and developing my understanding of the genre. Christopher Washburne's ethnography *Sounding Salsa: Performing Latin Music in New York City* is one of the most prominent contributions to scholarship on New York salsa and offers unique insights into New York's salsa scene in the 1990s (Washburne 2008). Washburne provides a view into this scene through an ethnographic account of his experiences as a gigging salsa trombonist in the 1990s. He describes playing with various groups in bars throughout the city, as well as the difficult and oftentimes dangerous situations in which gigging musicians often found themselves during this time. Particularly harrowing is Washburne's anecdote of his band being caught in the crossfires of a gun fight in an alley outside

of a bar with his band, only to rush inside and play a set minutes later (Washburne 2008, 109). Washburne also gives particular attention to the musical sounds of salsa and the genre's aesthetic of violence, which he relates to his own experiences gigging.

Other literature has provided a historical background to the formation of salsa in New York City and the trajectory of Latin music within the city more generally. Ruth Glasser's 1995 book *My Music is My Flag: Puerto Rican Musicians and their New York Communities, 1917-1940* provides an important glimpse into the socio-historical context out of which salsa music arose, giving particular attention to race relations within the city and their effects on musical activity, and provides a history of the formation of Puerto Rican cultural and musical life there throughout the first half of the twentieth century (Glasser 1995). Through an ethnographic and oral history approach, Glasser concentrates on genres that were precursors to salsa, such as mambo and plena, and their development in New York communities. Juan Flores' work *Salsa Rising: New York Latin Music of the Sixties Generation*, similarly provides insight into the development of multiple Latin music genres in New York City (Flores 2016). Flores devotes most of his attention to the development of salsa within the 1960s and 1970s, particularly how salsa emerged from older genres of music, and the styles of Latin music that developed after salsa's heyday. Vernon Boggs's 1992 volume *Salsiology: Afro-Cuban Music and the Evolution of Salsa in New York City* is one of the earliest collections of scholarship on salsa within New York; the essays within this volume address diverse topics related to salsa including influence from other genres, race relations within the music scene, and profiles of prolific salsa musicians (Boggs 1992).

As salsa has taken hold as a global genre throughout the 1990s and 2000s, increasing scholarship has focused on localized renditions of salsa outside of New York City, as well as on

issues of identity. One important contribution in this vein is Lise Waxer's edited volume *Situating Salsa: Global Markets and Local Meanings in Latin American Popular Music*. Contributors analyze salsa within numerous locales and through a variety of theoretical lenses, including examination of the political, national and transnational, and gendered characteristics of salsa (Waxer 2002). Frances Aparicio's 1998 book *Listening to Salsa: Gender, Latin Popular Music, and Puerto Rican Cultures* also considers politics of gender identity within salsa music (Aparicio 1998). Still one of the most important critical examinations of the interplay of gender and salsa aesthetics, Aparicio pays close attention to the gendered and racialized meanings of salsa and other Caribbean dance genres, claiming that gendered subjectivities are constructed through the sounds and lyrics of salsa. Contributors to Sydney Hutchinson's edited volume *Salsa Dance: A Global Dance in Local Contexts* interrogate the globalization of this genre (Hutchinson 2014). Many within *Salsa Dance* discuss local salsa dancing scenes within urban locations throughout the United States, including Los Angeles and New Jersey, but also those of rural America, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, France, Spain, and Japan. Like Waxer's earlier work, Hutchinson's volume is an effort to contend with this genre as it has been met with globalizing forces and adapted by communities around the world.

I also draw from literature which considers salsa dancing in its own right, somewhat independently from its musical component, as Hutchinson's volume does. For example, within her ethnography *Salsa Crossings: Dancing Latinidad in Los Angeles*, Cindy Garcia recounts her experiences dancing salsa in Los Angeles and her initiation into this scene while arguing that salsa clubs are sites in which individuals enact nationality, race, and citizenship through subtleties of movement which signal differing conceptualizations of *latinidad* (Garcia 2013). Garcia's perspective is primarily an anthropological one; other studies of salsa dancing written

by dance scholars have also proven valuable to this research. Yvonne Daniel's 2011 work *Caribbean and Atlantic Diaspora Dance: Igniting Citizenship* explores various dance forms from the Caribbean performed within diasporic communities, as well as dances that have formed in diaspora within communities of Caribbean migrants, including salsa (Daniel 2011). Daniel interrogates the complexities of national identity, citizenship, and belonging that arise within the context of cultural and economic globalization experienced by diasporic communities.

Additionally, Celeste Fraser Delgado and José Esteban Muñoz's edited volume *Everynight Life: Culture and Dance in Latin/o America* provides a framework for studies of Latin American and Latino dance which valorizes the counterhegemonic and rebellious possibilities that dancing enables within the context of the numerous oppressions faced by Latin/o bodies (Delgado and Muñoz 1997). These ideas are explored within the editors' introductory chapter, "Rebellions of Everynight Life." Jane Desmond's chapter "Embodying Difference: Issues in Dance and Cultural Studies" is also useful; Desmond suggests that movements serve as markers of social and cultural identities, and that these markers are inherently embedded within local and global structure of power between groups of people.

Finally, there is a considerable body of ethnomusicological literature on Latin America and the Caribbean from which this project draws and to which it is indebted. Contributions from scholars such as Paul Austerlitz (1997), Gage Averill (1997), and Gerard Béhague (1979; 1994) have laid the groundwork for this body of literature and remain influential to studies of music and dance in and of the Caribbean. Peter Manuel's *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae*, in which he explores the entanglements of music and dance genres throughout the Caribbean (Manuel 1995), remains an important contribution to this body of scholarship, as does his other work on music in the West Indies (Manuel 2000; Manuel 2015). Jocelyne

Guilbault's ethnography *Zouk: World Music in the West Indies* is another seminal contribution to ethnomusicological scholarship in the Caribbean in which she examines a world music genre, *zouk*, and contends with how this genre was strategically formed and deployed by musicians within the Caribbean and in France to appeal to the world music market of the 1990s (Guilbault 1993). Within *Bachata: A Social History of Dominican Popular Music*, Deborah Pacini Hernandez became one of the first within ethnomusicology to offer an exploration of music from the Dominican Republic, demonstrating how bachata as a genre has historically been a vehicle of social commentary and empowerment of disenfranchised Dominicans (Pacini Hernandez 1995). Also from this era, Katherine Hagedorn's powerful ethnography *Divine Utterances: The Performance of Afro-Cuban Santería* examines folklore, ritual, and religion in Santería performance troupes in Cuba (Hagedorn 2001). Hagedorn candidly discusses her own initiation into Santería, contending with herself as a gendered being within this context in a manner that was unusual during this time, while simultaneously asserting that religious rituals of Afro-Cuban Santería were reappropriated for secular and folkloric contexts by the performers with whom she works.

Scholarship from this body of literature into the 21st century continues to address a diverse array of topics and musical styles. In her recent ethnography *Tigers of a Different Stripe: Performing Gender in Dominican Music*, Sydney Hutchinson explores issues of gender, race, and transnationalism that underpin *merengue típico* of the Dominican Republic and demonstrates how various instrumentalists and bandleaders have challenged traditional constructions of masculinity and femininity (Hutchinson 2016). In his work in Trinidad and Tobago on steel pan, Shannon Dudley describes this instrument as a symbol of resistance and as an icon of national culture and studies how steel pan music has been used as a means for musicians to overcome

social disadvantage (Dudley 2008). Susan Thomas' work *Cuban Zarzuela: Performing Race and Gender on Havana's Lyric Stage* closely considers the intersections of race and gender as they relate to Cuban zarzuela (Thomas 2008). Thomas contends that zarzuela in Cuba during the early 20th century functioned as a pedagogical device through which feminine and masculine ideals were propagated. Like Hutchinson, Thomas makes use of performance studies in her analysis of this genre. Within his earlier work on music of the Caribbean, *Arsenio Rodríguez and the Transnational Flows of Latin Popular Music*, David F. García addresses issues such as racial consciousness, exile, and nostalgia as they relate to the development of musical genres and the career of the musician Arsenio Rodríguez; he continues to contend with race as it relates to musical styles in his more recent work on African diasporic music in which he claims that modernist attempts to link black music with Africa have contributed to the perpetuation of harmful dichotomies between the West and African and between black and white (García 2006, 2017).

Methodology and Sources

This research makes use of several research methods. Much of the material for this thesis is derived from a two-week ethnographic fieldwork trip conducted in January of 2018. The information gathered about salsa in New York during this time was done through observation of dancing in bars and clubs, as well as phenomenologically, through participation in dancing. During my time in New York, I conducted formal interviews with musicians and dancers whom I met. Most of my interactions, however, were more casual, and for the most part I learned about individuals' thoughts, feelings, and values surrounding salsa music and dance through these informal exchanges. Additionally, while in New York City I conducted archival research at Hunter College's Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, which hosts extensive collections of

photographs, scores, newspaper clippings, and other ephemera relating to Latin American city life, including salsa music, throughout the 20th century. This research is also extensively informed by secondary source material from intersecting bodies of literature on salsa, music of the (Hispanic) Caribbean and its diaspora, and dance. Additionally, I base a large portion of this project on archival research conducted within newspaper and media archives, which I accessed remotely.

Chapter Outline

I begin the first chapter of this thesis with an exploration of the history of the cabaret law within New York City. This law dates back to 1926, and I examine the various permutations that the law underwent throughout the 20th century. I connect the law's early history to Rudy Giuliani's harsh enforcement of it in the late 1990s and the early 2000s, and eventually, to the law's repeal in 2018. I illustrate how this law has historically been used to target minorities and people of color, and argue that the quality of life campaign under which this law was used by Giuliani had disproportionate effects on these populations and their music and dancing. By unpacking this law's racist legacy and the demonizing discourse with which nightlife was met in the 1990s, I aim to show the drastic changes that nightlife, including salsa, underwent in this era, the effects of which are still felt by musicians and dancers today.

Within the second chapter, I offer an account of my personal experiences learning to dance salsa while in New York City. I provide vignettes of three different salsa spaces as a means of comparing the diverse experiences that I had while exploring New York's salsa scene and to illuminate some of the tensions that arose within the site of my body while dancing. Engaging the scholarship of Fiona Buckland (2001), Cindy García (2013), Celeste Fraser Delgado (1997), José Esteban Muñoz (1997; 2009), and Judith Halberstam (2011), I outline a

theoretical framework in which I understand and interpret my own dancing and the dancing of others around me. Within this chapter, I aim to illustrate the multivalent nature of salsa dancing, as well as valorize beginner dancing as a means of transforming spatial and interpersonal relationships.

CHAPTER 1: THE CABARET LAW, RUDY GIULIANI, AND THE POLICING OF NEW YORK NIGHTLIFE

When I first met Mike Amadeo at his music store, Casa Amadeo, in the Bronx in January 2018, one of the first things I asked him was where I could go to hear salsa music in New York City. He thought for a minute and gave me only one recommendation, saying sadly that all of the salsa venues that he had known while he was still performing throughout the second half of the 20th century had closed down. I asked him why they had closed, and he replied that “Giuliani closed them down in the 90s.” I returned to talk to Amadeo multiple times after this conversation, but we did not discuss the closings of salsa venues much further. Later in the week, while talking to a musician at the bar Amadeo recommended to me, I again heard about salsa venues closing down. The musician, José, described to me the hardships that gigging salsa musicians in New York City face; José told me he travels all over the country to play music, to Chicago, Los Angeles, and other major cities, because there simply are no longer enough venues open in New York to support all of the salsa musicians looking for work. I asked him when most of the venues began closing down, and he told me that they had all begun closing 20 years prior, in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

I did not think much about what had happened to salsa venues twenty years before my time in New York, but after I left the city I later began to wonder what exactly had led to the mass closing of these clubs. Had all or most of the city’s famous salsa clubs closed during this time? Why had they closed? What role did Giuliani play in these closings? And how did these club closings impact the state of salsa in New York City? Musicians that I talked to in New York clearly still felt the effects of the late 1990s era; multiple people described to me how work for salsa musicians was increasingly scarce due to the lack of venues and how the salsa music

scene of the city had truly begun to change during this time period. I turned my attention to Rudy Giuliani and his time as a public servant in New York City throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, hoping to gain insight into the politics of this era and how they affected salsa.

Rudy Giuliani was elected mayor in 1993 and held office for two terms, from 1994 until 2002. After an unsuccessful campaign for mayor in 1989, Giuliani ran his 1993 campaign with an intense focus on decreasing New York City's high crime rate. The city was facing a small economic crisis in the early 1990s as income inequality grew alongside the decline in industrial sector jobs, and this was coupled with high rates of both violent and non-violent crime that had risen continuously throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Polner 2005, 79; Polner 2005, 118). In his mayoral campaign, Giuliani promised to crack down on crime, particularly on petty offences that his administration maintained posed a threat to the quality of life of the average citizen. Giuliani became known for his espousal of the broken windows theory of policing, which holds that these small offences create an environment in which larger crimes are permissible (Kramer 2011, 230). Giuliani therefore aimed to eliminate petty crime so as to also decrease the rate of violent, more severe crime within the city. This methodology had drastic effects on the landscape of the city, sanitizing city space and ushering in an era of gentrification and, moreover, substantially impacting cultural life.

Night clubs and dance spaces quickly came under attack after Giuliani took office, and ultimately, nightlife was once of the components of city life most strongly impacted by the administration's broken windows policing. According to the Giuliani administration, clubs epitomized the social ills of New York society that threatened public safety and order; they were the sites of drug use, alcohol consumption, violence, and they were noisy (Buckland 2002, xxiii). The vast majority of complaints against New York City nightclubs during the late 1990s and

early 2000s were made by residents in surrounding neighborhoods who were impacted by noise that persisted late into the night.² The frustrations of residents with the non-conformity of club spaces to the ethos of public order became an impetus of the Giuliani administration to extend quality of life policing to these spaces, as did the perceived violence of these spaces.

Instrumental in this was Giuliani's revival of the anachronistic cabaret law which, throughout its long history, had been used to curtail music and dancing in clubs (Muñoz 2009, 66). The cabaret law in New York City extended back to the 1920s; the original law banned dancing and certain genres of music in unlicensed clubs. The law was modified numerous times throughout the 20th century and went through periods of strict and lax enforcement. Giuliani was the most prominent enforcer of the cabaret law, drastically impacting New York City nightlife.

In this chapter I will look closely at the history of the cabaret law in New York City throughout the 20th century, and will focus on how the cabaret law was revived with fervor in the 1990s and the early 2000s by Mayor Rudy Giuliani under the guise of quality of life policing. Drawing primarily from newspaper archives, I will examine events surrounding several nightclubs, including but not limited to salsa clubs, giving particular attention to instances of violence and other occurrences that led to the raids and closings of many spaces.³ Within this chapter, I consider the broad impact that enforcement of the cabaret law has had on New York City nightlife; I include salsa within this account, but draw heavily from material concerning other types of spaces as well. By examining the transformations in nightlife under Giuliani and other New York City mayors who utilized the cabaret law, I aim to show how cabaret law

² Work has been done on the politics of noise control in cities by scholars such as Leonardo Cardoso, who writes about noise pollution and urban inequality in São Paulo, and Karin Bijsterveld, on noise legislation surrounding sound technologies.

³ Although newspaper reports may contain factual inaccuracies, taken collectively they are useful for constructing a timeline of past occurrences and are good indicators of public sentiments surrounding these events.

enforcement—as well as discourses of safety, quality of life, and cleaning up the city—have historically had disproportionate effects on already marginalized communities and musical cultures.

The Cabaret Law

The cabaret law in New York City has a lengthy and complex history dating back to the early 20th century. The original cabaret law was instated in 1926, and in the subsequent ninety years of its existence underwent many permutations, sometimes referred to collectively as the cabaret laws. Throughout its history, the law restricted movement and musical activity in clubs, outlined licensing requirements for clubs, as well as defined zoning regulations for these spaces. The first cabaret law is believed to have been created to curtail miscegenation within jazz clubs during the Harlem Renaissance in an American society that was highly segregated at the time (Chevigny 1991, 40; Olivares 2017; Lerner 2017). Clubs during this time, specifically jazz clubs, frequently hosted patrons of multiple races and were some of the few spaces that were generally less segregated than outside society, posing a potential threat to broader social order (Chevigny 1991, 41).

The initial cabaret law adopted in 1926 required spaces that sold food and drinks and hosted music, dance, or similar entertainment to obtain a cabaret license in order to continue these activities, which were thereafter banned in unlicensed venues (Chevigny 1991, 56; Freedman 1986; Lerner 2017). In proceedings of the New York City Council from 1926, the council cites their reasoning for these new harsh regulations:

These night clubs or cabarets are simply dance halls, where food is served at exorbitant prices to the tune of jazz and tabloid entertainment. A very frank opposition was voiced

by one of the licensees, on the ground that when strangers came to New York they wanted to “run Wild [*sic*].” Well, there has been altogether too much running ‘wild’ in some of these nightclubs and in the judgment of your committee the “wild” stranger and the foolish native should have the check-rein applied a little bit.

Proceedings from this council meeting continue:

Your committee believes that those “wild” people should not be tumbling out of these resorts at six or seven o’clock in the morning to the scandal and annoyance of decent residents on their way to daily employment. Favorable action is recommended (Proceedings of the Board of Aldermen, City of New York 1926, 572).

It seems as if lawmakers’ perceptions that nightlife was becoming unmanageable served as the primary motivation for the cabaret law’s writing. Club goers are referred to as “wild” and “foolish,” reflecting the general attitude of the city council that aligned club goers with immorality and scandal. Although Giuliani’s quality of life campaign did not begin until nearly seventy years later, lawmakers in the 1920s were already concerned with protecting residents from the depravity of people exiting clubs after a night of drinking and dancing, and laws were created to limit and confine these activities so as to shield others. The language of the initial cabaret law, particularly the use of the term “wild,” also takes on a racialized connotation when contextualized within the highly segregated American society of the time, combined with the fact that the committee specifically identifies jazz music—a genre that was primarily created and performed by African Americans during this era—as problematic.

The first amendments to the cabaret law came a decade after its inception. In 1936 the law was rewritten to allow radio and piano playing in unlicensed venues, the first time under the

law that any music was permitted in spaces that did not possess a cabaret license (Correal 2017). However, more restrictive measures were implemented in the years that followed this initial modification. In 1940, a clause was introduced that required all musicians to carry a cabaret card in order to perform in New York's clubs and bars, which had drastic influences on which musicians were able to perform in the city. To obtain a cabaret card, musicians were required to submit to an extensive background check and fingerprinting, and cards became renewable after two years (Chevigny 1991, 57-58). All of those who performed in New York City were required to carry a card; it was against the law for establishments to employ musicians or other entertainers who were not in possession of a cabaret card. Despite the lengthy and troublesome process that performers had to undergo in order to obtain a cabaret card, performers frequently had their cards suspended for minor criminal offences, often at the whim of authorities (Lerner 2017; Correal 2017).

Several high-profile musicians were affected by the cabaret card laws. Thelonious Monk had his cabaret card revoked three times through the 1940s and 1950s, and Billie Holiday was denied a cabaret card after a very public narcotics conviction in 1947 (Chevigny 1991, 59). Frank Sinatra boycotted performing in New York City while the cabaret card laws were in effect (Correal 2017; Chevigny 1991, 63). However, this law was more detrimental to local musicians—particularly jazz musicians—who depended on performing in New York City to make a living. In his book *Gigs: Jazz and the Cabaret Laws in New York City*, largely a discussion of legal proceedings surrounding the cabaret law throughout the 20th century, lawyer Paul Chevigny describes the racism thinly veiled behind the law's guise of protecting club patrons from criminal influences. New York's Alcoholic Beverage Control Law during this time “forbade the employment in a bar of anyone convicted of a felony or certain other offenses,

including narcotics crimes,” and although this provision might have been written to curtail mafia activity within nightclubs, as many were owned and operated by members of organized crime families, musicians were included under this as well (Chevigny 1991, 59). Yet according to Chevigny, this provision did little to actually protect club patrons, as there is no record of a musician ever having been denied a cabaret card for an offence committed specifically in a club. Rather, it served to establish a link between crime and musicians that had little basis in any actual threat that musicians posed in club spaces, aiding in the social control of these spaces by police and judges (Chevigny 1991, 59).

The provision of the cabaret law that required performers to possess a cabaret card was met with vigorous pushback at the beginning of the 1960s. There were several high profile lawsuits throughout the beginning of this decade that drew the public’s attention to cabaret cards and conditions under which musicians worked. Writer and activist Harold Humes organized a Citizens Emergency Committee in 1960 that fought for an end to the enforcement of the cabaret card system all together (Chevigny 1991, 62). As previously mentioned, Frank Sinatra famously took a stand against the cabaret card system. In an interview, Sinatra stated “I will not seek a cabaret card in New York because of the indignity of being fingerprinted, mugged and quizzed about my past.” Frank Sinatra had repeatedly worked at the Copacabana nightclub without a cabaret card during the 1950s, and when this came to light in the press, an investigation was launched by the police commissioner at the time which found that many clubs throughout the city were flouting cabaret card laws by employing performers without cards (Chevigny 1991, 63). This strengthened the call of the Citizens Emergency Committee to end enforcement of cabaret card laws; however, it took over five years after this for the card provision to come to an end. Mayor John Lindsay entered office in 1966, and brought with him a more relaxed attitude

toward nightlife. The era of the cabaret card ended in 1967 with a simple administrative decision made by Lindsay to stop implementation of this aspect of the law, yet the provision within the city's Alcoholic Beverage Control Law that forbade bars from employing people with criminal records remained in place (67).

Changes were made to the cabaret law in 1961, which began to loosen restrictions on performances in unlicensed clubs. Starting in this year, unlicensed clubs were permitted to host musical groups of three or fewer musicians, but the musicians could play only piano, accordion, or string instruments; if the ensemble were to include winds, brass, or percussion, a cabaret license would still be required ("New York's Ill-Tuned Cabaret Law" 1986; Glasel 1986; Pareles 1986). With this addendum to the cabaret law came criticism that the instruments that were allowed in unlicensed venues were those associated solely with whiter genres of music, typically performed by white musicians. Many have pointed out that jazz and jazz musicians would have been particularly affected by this clause. Salsa music, too, which was emerging throughout the 1960s and 1970s, would have been impacted because of its instrumentation.

Throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, musicians and others began to resist portions of the cabaret law. The law's enforcement rose steadily throughout the latter half of the 1980s during the third term of Mayor Ed Koch, who, similarly to what Giuliani would do in the 1990s, initially ran for mayor on a platform based on law and order (Pareles 1987; Strober and Strober 2007, 171). This renewed application of the cabaret law under the Koch administration was quickly met with protests from musicians. In 1985, a jazz combo staged a protest of the cabaret law, specifically the 1961 amendment that only allowed certain instruments within unlicensed clubs, and attempted to gain traction to overturn the law altogether (Goodman 1985; Wilkerson 1985). According to one musician, they were protesting the discriminatory nature of this facet of

the law, which many claimed disproportionately affected the livelihoods of black and Latinx musicians (Goodman 1985; Wilkerson 1985). Furthermore, challengers to the law cited its outdated notions of which instruments were loud and which were not. Electronic amplification became more accessible and common throughout the 1980s, and members of the jazz combo argued that the clause of the cabaret law banning certain instruments was rendered obsolete by the fact that a single string instrument or other instrument allowed under the law could be amplified to the volume of a full orchestra (Goodman 1985).

In early 1986, a New York City chapter of the American Federation of Musicians filed a suit in the State Supreme Court challenging this same section of the law, but before this case received a court date the City Council reversed the instrument ban, allowing wind and percussion instruments to be played legally in unlicensed cabarets (Pareles 1987). However, there were still restrictions in place that limited performing forces to three musicians (Pareles 1987). Moreover, the process of obtaining a cabaret license continued to be prohibitive for many small venues who might have wanted to host more than three musicians. The licensing fee alone for a moderately sized club could reach between \$500 and \$1000. Additionally, venues had to comply with fire and safety rules that were part of city zoning ordinances. Sprinkler systems that were required of licensed cabarets, for instance, could cost tens of thousands of dollars, as could construction necessitated by emergency exit regulations (Pareles 1986). Although obtaining a cabaret license still remained difficult for most small venues after the reversal of the instrument ban, more opportunities opened up for gigging musicians. Members of the American Federation of Musicians had long argued that the law had affected the livelihoods of many musicians and saw this repeal as a significant step in dismantling the laws discriminatory language which targeted people of color (Purnick 1986).

The three musician limit in unlicensed cabarets was ultimately reversed in January 1988 by the State Supreme Court in Manhattan, to the elation of many musicians. Jazz musicians, in particular, rejoiced as unlicensed clubs immediately started bolstering already-booked bands and combos with more musicians. Similarly to the revision early in the 1980s which overturned the instrument ban, the end of the three musician limit was expected to create more work opportunities for musicians within the city, particularly for younger or less well-known musicians who did not typically perform in larger, licensed venues (Pareles 1988). While many unlicensed venues had ignored the musician limit while booking live music up until this point in time, many others had refused to host groups with more than three musicians, and the lifting of this section of the cabaret law nonetheless brought peace of mind to club owners who risked booking larger performances on a regular basis (Pareles 1988).

Up until the end of the 1980s, most of the efforts by musicians and other activists to repeal the cabaret law had focused on the portions of the law which restricted musical performance. The string of legal victories throughout the latter half of the 1980s slowly dismantled the components of the cabaret law that delimited the constitution of musical groups in unlicensed cabarets. Yet the section of the cabaret law which barred movement and dancing in these establishments went unchallenged throughout most of the law's history up until the late 1980s, perhaps because this portion of the cabaret law was not seen as having effects on the livelihoods of performers, nor was it as obviously discriminatory against a single group. Discourses surrounding the cabaret law shifted to lifting the dancing ban in the 1990s and early 2000s following the revisions concerning musical groups, but the restrictions on dance would remain in place for nearly 30 years after the musical regulations were eliminated. New York City as a whole saw many changes throughout the 1990s, largely ushered in by Mayor Rudy

Giuliani, who would later be remembered as the most vigorous enforcer of the cabaret law throughout its long history (Correal 2017; Musto 2017; Romano 2002). Within the following section, I will explore the years preceding, during, and following the mayoral terms of Rudy Giuliani, and how his revival of the cabaret law to control dancing spaces impacted New York City's nightlife.

Broken Windows and the Revival of the Cabaret Law

The political, economic, and social changes in New York City throughout the 1970s and 1980s paved the way for Rudy Giuliani's election to the mayor's office in 1993. Beginning in the 1970s, New York was hit by a wave of arson which drastically altered the city's landscape. Many of the fires were allegedly started by landlords who aimed to collect insurance money on their apartment buildings. The fires—which mostly took place in the outer boroughs in low-income neighborhoods, particularly within the Bronx—displaced large numbers of people, and later would contribute to the Bronx being likened to a war zone, as no new buildings were being constructed in place of the old ones and the rubble would frequently sit for months or years (Contreras 2013, 41-42). Coupled with the lack of funding from the city to repair the infrastructure of outer boroughs, New York City, like many other cities during this time, was hard hit by the nation-wide crack epidemic that began in the 1970s and escalated throughout the 1980s (52). The influx of the drug and the activity surrounding its buying and selling have been largely associated with the simultaneous increase in crime within the city; rates of violent and non-violent crime increased dramatically and continuously throughout the 70s and 80s, skyrocketing at the end of the 1980s (Polner 2005, 118). Tensions also arose during this time due to the HIV/AIDS crisis that began in the early 1980s and escalated into the 1990s. Discourses of safety and order arose in New York politics throughout the late 1980s and early

1990s as a result of these events which largely had the effect of inflaming extant tensions between racial and sexual minorities and policy makers.

Rudy Giuliani began his career within this highly politicized milieu. Born in Brooklyn in 1944, Giuliani worked as a clerk in a New York law firm after graduating law school in 1968, and in 1975 moved to Washington, D.C. to work as Associate Deputy Attorney General during Gerald Ford's presidency. Giuliani continued working as a prosecutor throughout the latter half of the 1970s at a private law firm, and in 1981 was appointed Associate Attorney General under the Reagan administration (Polner 2005, 13). However, Giuliani did not remain in this position for long; he returned to New York City in 1983 after being appointed U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, a position in which he gained notoriety as a prosecutor (Polner 2005, 9).

Giuliani developed a reputation for his hardline approach to crime during his time working as an attorney for the City of New York. He gained recognition during this era for indicting, prosecuting, and imprisoning numerous members of organized crime families, after which his successful prosecutorial record against members of the mafia became a large selling point in his political career. It was also during his work as an attorney throughout the 1980s that Giuliani became well known for popularizing the "perp walk" as a prosecutorial tool (Haberman 2018). Now widely used beyond criminal cases in New York City, during a perp walk the individual accused of a crime is walked or escorted by police into the courthouse preceding trial, often restrained or handcuffed, in a public event amongst media and reporters who have been previously alerted to the walk taking place. This technique was particularly effective in the high-profile, white collar crime cases that Giuliani often oversaw, as the accused was painted as guilty in this event of public shaming. The perp walk has been widely criticized for its violation of the

accused's right to privacy, as the perpetrator's image is potentially promulgated by the media thereafter, as well as its violation of the right of the accused to be presumed innocence until proven guilty (Haberman 2018).

Giuliani served as attorney for New York's Southern District until 1989, after which time he set his sights on the position of mayor of New York City. Giuliani's 1989 campaign for mayor was ultimately unsuccessful despite his platform to clean up the city at a time when crime rates were at an all-time high; he lost the race by less than three percentage points to the man who would become New York City's first black mayor, Democrat David Dinkins, in what remains one of the closest mayoral races in the city's history (Strober and Strober 2007, 84). He ran for mayor again in 1993, this time focusing more intently on his "quality of life" platform. He vigorously appealed to residents who felt the effects of the crime rate that had skyrocketed in the city over the previous two decades. By the time of Giuliani's 1993 campaign for mayor's office, crime rates were already steadily declining under Dinkins' leadership, but New York City was hit hard by a nation-wide economic recession in the early 1990s, and Giuliani was able to capitalize on anxieties produced by the increasing rate of unemployment in the city as well as those present from the political and social hardships undergone by the city throughout the preceding decades (Tomasky 2008). Giuliani's 1993 campaign was successful, and he was elected mayor over incumbent David Dinkins by a margin of fewer than 50,000 votes (Strober and Strober 2007, 96).

The central promise of Giuliani's campaign—to crack down on crime—was immediately upheld once Giuliani entered office at the beginning of 1994. Police forces throughout the city were quickly bolstered, and this increased manpower aided in carrying out the broken windows policing that Giuliani espoused throughout his time in office. As I explained earlier, the broken

windows theory maintains that smaller petty crimes and general disorder within an urban environment create an atmosphere in which larger violent crimes are permissible. Therefore, through harshly policing smaller infractions, more serious crimes can be prevented (Kramer 2012, 230). The Giuliani administration was notorious for its adherence to this criminological theory; Giuliani's police force harshly patrolled small offences like graffiti and vandalism, public urination, jaywalking, and marijuana use and possession in efforts to restore quality of life, and to curtail violent crime and make the city safe. The city's "squeegee men," panhandlers who cleaned cars on overpasses and often relentlessly demanded payment, came to symbolize the degradation of city space and immense efforts were made by police to remove them from the city (Romano 2002; Tomasky 2008). Aiding in the Giuliani administration's broken windows policing was the development of the CompStat system, a data-driven computer aid to policing which mapped crime in New York (Marshall 2008, 25). This system, still in use today, identifies patterns of crime throughout the city and, more controversially, quantifies officer performance by charting their number of arrests and apprehensions, which critics have pointed out could entice law enforcement officials to make unwarranted and unjustified arrests. Nightlife became a target under these policing philosophies after Giuliani took office. The existing cabaret law aligned well with Giuliani's broken windows policing, and was quickly adopted by the administration in its efforts to clean up nightclubs and the city.

While the harshness with which Giuliani utilized the cabaret law to curtail nightlife was new and unusual, his use of the cabaret law was not without recent precedent at the time of his 1994 inauguration to mayor's office. The year 1984 marked a watershed year in the city's crackdown on raucous nightlife, after which time enforcement of the cabaret law increased dramatically (Pareles 1987). During the mid-1980s, the majority of cabaret law citations were

issued to venues for hosting musical groups with more than three musicians or that played instruments that were banned at the time. But even as the components of the cabaret law that restricted musical activity were dismantled over the latter half the 1980s, discourses surrounding nightlife and clubs within media morphed from portraying clubs and the musicians within them merely as noisy nuisances who inconvenienced neighbors, to violent, oftentimes deadly, drug-filled spaces that posed a serious threat to the safety and order of the city. This shift within the city's imaginary was aided by several high-profile incidents throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s within clubs around the city.

The subject of illegal, unlicensed clubs began to gain more attention in 1988 after six people died and 33 were injured in an accidental fire at an unlicensed social club in the Morris Heights neighborhood of the Bronx. Described as a cramped basement space underneath street level shops and housing, the Latin club, El Hoyo (the hole, the cave), was, according to nearby residents, a spot where prostitutes and drug dealers gathered, and a spot where neighbors gathered to dance salsa (McQuiston 1988). Police had raided the establishment five times within the six months leading up to the fire, but had been unable to permanently close the establishment as under the 1984 "padlock law," police were only permitted to shutter an establishment if two criminal convictions and a third criminal arrest occurred during raids over a period of 12 months (Pitt 1988). In the case of El Hoyo, only misdemeanor citations had been given out during the prior raids. After this incident, Mayor Ed Koch issued a call to "locate all these illegal premises and close them down," referring to the hundreds of small, unlicensed clubs that were in operation in the city at the time (McQuiston 1988). Koch established the Social Club Task Force within the New York Police Department specifically to conduct raids on clubs and enforce the cabaret law. The task force initially consisted of ten teams of officials which each contained two police

officers, one buildings inspector, and one fire inspector; six months after the fire at El Hoyo, Koch reduced the task force to one team (McKinley Jr. 1990).

Larger clubs, too, attracted public ire as many gained reputations for being dangerous. One such nightclub, Club Broadway, originally opened in Times Square in 1942, was ultimately closed as a result of its bad reputation garnered by violence. In its heyday in the 1940s and 1950s, Club Broadway was known for hosting New York City's most famous musicians (Iverem 1987). After a nine-year-long stint as an art-house movie theater that showed pornographic films from 1969-1978, the space became a discotheque for about a year named 22 Steps, and then began to host stage productions in 1980 as the Princess Theatre. The space was rebranded as Latin Quarter from 1984-1987, but changed its name again to the Penguin Club as frequent fighting and violence had already begun to damage the club's image in the preceding years (Arnold 2018).

In her 1987 *New York Times* article "Violence Plagues New Latin Quarter," Esther Iverem describes some of the contentions surround Latin Quarter upon its reopening at the end of the 1980s. "Robberies and fights are frequent and shootings are not uncommon" in Latin Quarter, writes Iverem. She continues: "[police], patrons and club employees all say the violence is not related to drugs or gangs but, rather, stems from criminals who loiter near the club and prey on patrons, primarily teen-agers and people in their early 20's from across the metropolitan region" (Iverem 1987). During this time, Latin Quarter was open to those under the age of twenty one, making for a slightly younger and potentially more vulnerable club audience. Moreover, according to Claude Gray, a Latin Quarter employee whom Iverem interviews in her article, most of the patrons at Latin Quarter were black or Hispanic and therefore less police security was devoted to the area around the club. Additionally, the space drew complaints from

neighbors regarding the violence and the noise, culminating in its closing in 1989. Upon the club's reopening in 2003, it once again began to cater to Latin music styles including salsa and hip-hop, yet it remained host to many fights and shootings which continued to damage its image.

Another one of New York's most prominent nightclubs, the Palladium, was similarly host to a number of violent incidents throughout the early 1990s which contributed to New York City residents' declining attitudes toward nightlife. The most infamous of these, which occurred in 1990, came to be known as the Palladium murder. In November of 1990, a bouncer, Marcus Peterson, was shot and killed and another was injured in a dispute that took place outside of the club after a third bouncer threw out a patron (Jacobs 2005). Two men were convicted of the crime, yet other instances of violence surrounding the club tarnished the popularity of the space. The declining patronage throughout the first half of the 1990s coupled with owner Peter Gatien's 1996 indictment on various charges including tax evasion and drug trafficking following raids on several of the clubs he owned ultimately led to the Palladium's closing in 1997. The space was sold to New York University and was thereafter converted into dormitories. Neighbors to the Palladium apparently rejoiced at the closing of this iconic nightclub. Citing the violence that occurred within and around the club, the deputy director of the 14th Street Local Development Corporation stated that the Palladium was "not the kind of place that encourages other retailers to do business on 14th street" (Jacobs 1996).

Perhaps the biggest stimulus in the worsening reputations of nightclubs and the resulting enforcement of the cabaret law in the years leading up to Giuliani's election occurred in 1990 with the notorious Happy Land fire. Happy Land, an unlicensed social club in the Bronx, was set on fire in an act of arson in the early morning of March 25. The arsonist, Julio González, poured gasoline in front of the only entrance to the club and set it alight after an argument with

his ex-girlfriend, a club employee. In 1988, Happy Land was raided and ordered closed due to its lack of fire safety measures, but no follow-up visit was recorded and the club remained in operation until the deadly fire in 1990. The majority of the victims in the Happy Land fire were Honduran and on the night of the fire had been celebrating Carnival (Roberts 2016).

In the immediate aftermath of the Happy Land fire, Mayor David Dinkins took drastic measures against unlicensed clubs and within five days had ordered an additional 179 clubs to be closed throughout the city—added to an already existing list of problem night spots—as well as bolstered the Social Club Task Force to 20 teams of officials (McFadden 1990; McKinley 1990). Increased attention was drawn to how these illegal clubs that had become pervasive throughout New York City were being policed. An op-ed published in *The New York Times* less than a week after the fire, “The Knights of the Padlock Sweep Forth,” provides an interesting look into a night on the Social Club Task Force. The author, Robert D. McFadden, follows the task force on a typical weekend night as they raid numerous clubs listed for closing by the mayor’s office. McFadden paints a picture of an exasperated taskforce, members of which were frustrated at their transfers to the unit from others that provided more interesting work. Of the 89 clubs visited by the taskforce on this particular evening, 74 of them were not open. At the others, 17 summonses were issued to patrons and owners, as well as 36 notices for safety violations (McFadden 1990). It seems that salsa clubs and bars were frequent targets of these police raids. McFadden writes of the typical spaces raided by the taskforce, referring to them as “dreary, salsa-blaring bars where patrons drink flat beer and dance on cracked linoleum, where thugs guard the doors and no one in charge has a name.” A club called the B.M.W. raided and closed by the taskforce on this night after having been found committing exit door violations was described as “a small basement club with a broken pool table” containing “an ancient juke box

with salsa hits, a video game that didn't work and linoleum dance floor.” In an anti-climactic final raid for the evening, a club in Brooklyn that was “emitting loud salsa music” at five in the morning was raided, only to be found not committing any violations (McFadden 1990).

Spaces that hosted salsa dancing and music clearly came under fire during David Dinkins' time in office in the increased raid activity that followed the Happy Land fire, as did Latin cultural life within New York City more generally. After three months intensive enforcement by the 20-team Social Club Task Force, Dinkins cut the forces down to ten teams (McKinley Jr. 1990). Within the year after the Happy Land arson, over 1,500 clubs had been raided throughout the city; 570 of these clubs had been ordered to close as a result of these raids (McKinley Jr. 1991). Many of these were illegal nightclubs, but dozens of social clubs and informal cultural centers, particular among immigrant communities, had been caught in the crossfire of this crackdown. New York City's Honduran community, which had been the most heavily impacted by the Happy Land fire, also suffered great loss of community spaces in the months and years following the arson. Washington Heights, a predominantly Dominican neighborhood in upper Manhattan, similarly endured the closings of many community spaces during this period of time. The closings of informal communal spaces, as well as the closings of illegal nightclubs, greatly impacted Hispanic social life in the city. Moreover, these closings still did not fully address the safety issues presented by illegal nightclubs, as still others popped up and communities turned to those spaces (McKinley Jr. 1991).

Throughout the second half of David Dinkins' term, cabaret law enforcement fell, as did the number of club raids conducted, and this somewhat lax enforcement lasted through Giuliani's first term in office from 1994-1997. Anti-nightclub sentiment, however, did not disappear during this time. Residents that lived near clubs still consistently voiced concerns about their

noise violations and the violence which surrounded them. In reference to a particularly unruly space in her neighborhood, Mr. Fuji's Tropicana, Village resident Carole Shander complained about the "garbage, broken bottles, vomit, [and] urine" left outside the club after busy nights, and went so far as to say the club "looks like a war zone after every weekend" (Lambert 1994). Another resident referred to Mr. Fuji's as the "most offensive" club in the neighborhood, while still others complained about the shootings, gunfights, and shouting that surrounding residents were forced to hear, coupled with the thumping music that lasted until the early hours of the morning. Another space, an illegal social club in East Harlem, drew complaints from residents after a 1996 shooting left one dead and seven others injured. The club reportedly "was a legitimate salsa club" until two years prior to the shooting, at which time the owner had moved to Puerto Rico, and unlicensed partiers had moved into the space, bringing with them drugs and hand guns (Kocieniewski 1996).

Rather than focusing his attention immediately on the problems presented by nightclubs upon entering office in 1994, however, Giuliani instead directed his campaign of social control at what he saw as a larger threat to morality and safety: New York City's public sex culture (Muñoz 2009, 53). Adult businesses were easily maligned within the anxious environment of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In early 1994, almost immediately after Giuliani was inaugurated, his administration proposed strict zoning regulations for adult establishments, such as sex clubs or adult video stores, which stated that if these stores were to remain open in central locations throughout the city, they would need to limit adult material to less than forty percent of their inventory (Buckland 2002, xxi). Were they to not adhere to this regulation, adult businesses would only be allowed in certain areas of the city, and these were typically neighborhoods on the waterfront or poor neighborhoods. Furthermore, most of the land available to adult businesses

was already occupied by other retailers, and they would not be allowed within 500 feet of another adult business, a house of worship, a school, or a day care center, drastically limiting the already marginal zones allotted for these establishments (Warner 1999, 158). This proposal was immediately met with challenges from business owners and residents who decried the zoning regulations unconstitutional saying that they were in violation of first amendment rights. A series of court appeals followed Giuliani's proposal, but the zoning regulations were ultimately ruled constitutional by New York's highest state court in 1997, after which time stores and venues with adult content began to close down (Buckland 2002, xxiii).

Just as sexual culture was increasingly relegated to the private sphere, so too was nightlife met with censure because of its perceived threat to public order within the quality of life era. Existing zoning requirements for night clubs in the early 1990s allowed clubs to be located near or in the same buildings as residencies, creating tensions between "people who want to sleep at night and those who want to dance" (Howe 1992, 1). The main incentive for the Giuliani administration to police clubs was the negative impacts that these spaces had on residents surrounding them and the resultant complaints made to the city. In 1994, just a few months into Giuliani's mayoral tenure, City Councilman Thomas K. Duane began advocating for a bill "to make it easier for officials to close clubs," and City Councilman Antonio Pagan began drafting a plan to enforce the existing cabaret law in order to do so (Lambert 1994). While officials in the Giuliani administration began drafting plans to restrict nightlife in the early years of his tenure, and while there were still club raids being conducted, the harshest enforcement of cabaret laws under Giuliani did not begin until 1997.

After this time, gay bars came to be prominent targets under quality of life policing. Much of the media coverage surrounding the closings of club spaces involved gay bars and the

high frequency that cabaret law closings seemed to affect these spaces. A 1997 article in *The New York Times* details the cabaret law violations of Rome Bar in Chelsea and the owner's subsequent legal struggles. Like many other instances of cabaret law violations throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, Rome Bar was located in a residential neighborhood and was subject to numerous noise complaints by surrounding residents who were frustrated with loud music being played well into the early hours of the morning. Michael Pacca, the owner of Rome Bar, was found guilty of cabaret law violations when people began to dance in his club in the presence of undercover officials (Ramirez 1997).

Defending his establishment in an interview, Pacca stated that “you can't have 250 people in one place and not have at least one person wiggling” (Ramirez 1997, 1). His rebuttal to the citation was that his establishment was persecuted because it was a gay bar outside the typical area of Manhattan that hosted queer communities. “I am a gay businessman trying to operate a gay business and I'm coming up against some prejudiced people,” Pacca stated in an interview regarding the violation; he claimed that “he had violated an invisible barrier by establishing a gay business above 23rd Street” (Ramirez 1997, 1). Comments following Pacca's interview by Tim Gay, the co-chairman of the quality of life committee within Chelsea at the time, rebuffed Pacca's allegations of discrimination, stating that unlike other gay bars in the area, the Rome seemed to have gone out of its way to alienate its neighbors. “There are many other gay bars who do a good job of keeping their noise down,” claimed Gay, in line with a destructive practice of labeling minorities as “bad” when they don't conform to the behavioral standards of the majority. Considering that the majority of bars that received cabaret law citations under the Giuliani administration were operated by members of minority communities, Pacca's claims of discrimination do not seem unfounded (Ramirez 1997, 1).

Within Giuliani's quality of life milieu, large bars or clubs like Rome Bar often drew complaints of neighbors, but so too did smaller clubs and community spaces that received less attention in the press as did Rome Bar and others like it. These spaces were identified as problem spots by city officials and then raided or inspected repeatedly. During Giuliani's time in office and thereafter, the police unit responsible for conducting club raids was the notoriously un-transparent Multi-Agency Response to Community Hotspots task force (MARCH), which was created from and to replace the previously existing Social Club Task Force. Once labeled a problem spot, MARCH agents would frequently enter the offending club, often undercover, looking for safety, noise, or dancing violations; at other times it would storm in with full SWAT gear. The exact locations that MARCH agents would raid were kept well under wraps during the late 1990s era, and to this day the precise movements of the unit, the locations it raided, and the reasons for the raids have not been released to the public, despite many requests of the NYPD and other associated city departments under the freedom of information act. Currently, strong efforts are being made by the NYC Artist Coalition to gain transparency on MARCH operations throughout its history; leaders within the coalition are advocating to pass Bill #1156, known as the Talks Not Raids Bill, which demands details of MARCH operations be released to the public.⁴ The bill is still under consideration by the City Council at present.

While it is difficult to ascertain precisely which clubs were targeted by MARCH and for exactly what reasons during the Giuliani administration, it is less difficult to determine what kinds of venues were impacted by this latest nightlife crackdown. Gay bars were a well-publicized casualty, with the official narrative being that these spaces were targeted for the drug use proliferated by rave culture of the late 1990s and early 2000s, rather than the sexuality of the

⁴ <http://nycartc.com/>

owners and patrons of these establishments (Steinhauer 2001). But other spaces also fell victim to Giuliani's quality of life policing and cabaret law enforcement that, as far as I can ascertain, were given little press and received minimal outcry at their closings. According to a 2002 article in *The New York Times*, in 1999, 680 locations within the city were ordered closed by Giuliani's taskforce. The same article estimates the number of closings in December of 2002 to be approximately 578 (Steinhauer 2002). Assuming that similar numbers of night clubs were ordered closed each year starting in 1997, when Giuliani began strictly enforcing the cabaret law, upwards of thousands of clubs were impacted during this time. Only a handful of these received any media attention, and the ones that did were typically larger establishments.

If hundreds, even thousands, of unidentified nightclubs were closed during this time, what kinds of spaces were these? A *New York Times* article published in March of 1997—soon after the aforementioned October 1996 shooting in the illegal East Harlem social club which helped to catalyze Giuliani's cabaret law enforcement—describes the preparation of the MARCH task force to conduct raids on a growing list of clubs in Brooklyn (Kennedy 1997). The list of approximately 40 nightclubs, similar to those included in a set of raids carried out in Queens at the end of the prior year, was assembled by the task force based on complaints of surrounding residents, and was comprised of both illegal clubs and legal establishments. Officials interviewed within the article declined to name any of the clubs that were going to be raided so as to not warn the venues committing violations, but also in effect creating the atmosphere of fear and surveillance for which MARCH and Giuliani's era of cabaret law enforcement was well known. According to the article, “the majority of the clubs that may be raided are tiny, illegal social clubs that have begun to flourish once again in places hidden from public view: above bodegas, in garages or behind the blacked-out windows of shuttered stores”

(Kennedy 1997). According to this same article, these were the same kinds of spaces that had been shut down by the Dinkins administration in the immediate wake of the Happy Land fire:

Such social clubs have been the subject of intense scrutiny by the police since the devastating fire on March 25, 1990, at the Happy Land club in the East Tremont section of the Bronx...over the last three years, some community leaders have complained that more of the clubs began to open or reopen after a task force, put together shortly after the fire, was scaled back (Kennedy 1997, 1).

We can recall that the venues raided extensively after the Happy Land fire were none other than “the salsa-blaring bars where patrons drink flat beer and dance on cracked linoleum,” the clubs with “ancient juke boxes with salsa hits,” the clubs where “salsa blares from a jukebox” at five in the morning (McFadden 1990, 1-3). These were the kinds of spaces that had been thoroughly vetted after Happy Land: salsa clubs. And these were the spaces that were still identified as problem spots throughout the Giuliani administration.

Larger, more affluent spaces certainly did suffer under Rudy Giuliani’s quality of life policing. Numerous high-profile clubs were forced to close in the late 1990s and early 2000s as a result of the Giuliani administration’s policies, and as a result of cabaret law enforcement preceding and during Giuliani’s tenure. Yet the media attention granted to a handful of well-known clubs from the mid-1980s up until the early 2000s does not account for the thousands of other club spaces that were raided, cited, fined, padlocked, and shut down throughout this time period. The vast majority of these spaces, it seems, were small, unlicensed social clubs; oftentimes impromptu, communal spaces that played integral roles to the social life of various communities, particularly racial minority and immigrant communities, throughout New York City. It is true that cabaret law enforcement coupled with the demonization of nightlife

throughout the end of the 20th century decimated some of the last vestiges of New York's golden age of nightlife, like the Palladium, Latin Quarter, and the Copacabana. However, these had more pernicious effects on the smaller, oftentimes illegal operations which lacked the fiscal and cultural capital to resist quality-of-life policing, but were still integral to the sociality of minority communities throughout the city. I highlight these closings not to advocate for the existence of unregulated illegal establishments, nor to dismiss the concerns of residents during this time that struggled to peacefully conduct their lives because of an increasingly noisy city soundscape. Rather, I aim to illustrate the flaws of a governmental policy which, in its heavy reliance on residents' complaints to identify offending establishments and communities, disproportionately affected minorities and marginalized populations that were already perceived as threatening. More often than not, cabaret law raids were conducted to the sounds of salsa hits blaring from a jukebox.

After Giuliani

Only a small degree of protestation emerged against Giuliani's quality-of-life policing and its effects on club and dance culture during his time in office. In 1999, a group was formed termed the Dance Liberation Front that staged dance demonstrations around the city in efforts to eliminate the cabaret law clause which curtailed movement in unlicensed clubs (Moynihan 1999). However, these protests were relatively ineffectual and ultimately short lived. The events of September 11, 2001 had a drastic impact on how the cabaret law was enforced, if only for a brief period of time. MARCH ceased its operations entirely for a period of almost seven months immediately following 9/11 (Steinhauer 2002). It seemed nightlife was, for a time, reinvigorated, as dancing was once again seen as a unique offering of the city that could be enjoyed in the absence of tourists and should be enjoyed because of the human connections it

offered in the wake of disaster (Leland 2001). This period of time coincided with the first term of Mayor Michael Bloomberg, whom constituents believed would be a lax enforcer of cabaret laws throughout his time in office because of this precedent.

This was ultimately not the case, however, as the Bloomberg administration continued to enforce the cabaret law in a manner similar to the Giuliani administration, in line with its quality-of-life agenda, despite efforts by Bloomberg early in his tenure as mayor to rewrite the portion of the law that prohibited dancing. The argument made by many club owners supporting efforts to rewrite the law was that owners already had to apply for multiple permits from city departments in order to open a licensed club space; applying for a cabaret license that granted the same privileges was redundant (Steinhauer 2003). However, nearly a year after the start of this campaign, at a news conference in February of 2004, Bloomberg stated that his administration probably would not “get to” revamping the cabaret law during that year (Hernandez 2004).

The Bloomberg administration never did get to reworking or abolishing the cabaret law, despite numerous protests and motions to dismiss it that arose throughout Bloomberg’s time in office until 2013. In February of 2007, a group of dancers in New York filed a suit against the city to dismiss the cabaret law and argued that social dancing, like staged dancing that was exempted from cabaret law regulations, was a form of expression (Romano 2007). The group staged a dance parade through Midtown and Lower Manhattan in May of the same year to draw attention to their legal motion and to bring together dancers of all different styles and backgrounds from around the city (Ryzik 2007). This suit against the city was ultimately unsuccessful and yet again, the cabaret law remained in place, unaltered (Lucadamo 2008).

Nearly ten years later, the cabaret law was finally repealed under the current mayor of New York City, Bill de Blasio. In June 2017, Councilman Rafael Espinal Jr. proposed a bill in

City Council to create a nightlife task force which would consist of both artists and musicians as well as members of the NYPD and other city officials who would be responsible for addressing concerns and issues within New York City's nightlife. One of the principal responsibilities of this task force proposed by Espinal would be working to dismantle the cabaret law (Evans 2017). This bill passed and on September 19, 2017, de Blasio signed the bill into law, creating an Office of Nightlife and a Nightlife Advisory Board (Lerner 2017). A little over a month later, on October 31, 2017, the New York City Council voted to overturn the cabaret law, and a month after that, on November 27, de Blasio signed the bill into law (Aswad 2017).

Despite the cabaret law being little known to the general public, news outlets around the city and throughout the country exploded with the news that the 91-year-old law which forbade dancing in New York City, one of the world's biggest nightlife destinations, was repealed. Club owners interviewed by media outlets rejoiced that they could now conduct business without fear of reprisal if someone started to nod their head or shake their hips. Many of those who ran clubs that were interviewed following the repeal of the cabaret law referenced the effects that the cabaret law had had on what kinds of music was played in their bars: "If we were to host DJs or electronic dance music or hip-hop or merengue or salsa or anything like that people would dance. And we would run afoul of the law" (Olivares 2017); "since the repeal, the café hopes audience members will get up and move their feet more. Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays draw the biggest crowds, and that's when Gallant is planning to add more salsa and tango to the roster" (Gollayan 2018, 1); "we couldn't have entire genres – Latin music of any kind, electronic. We had to censor our music to make sure no one danced" (Correal 2017, 4). Many mentioned the groups historically affected by the cabaret law: "historically, the law has been enforced to shut down spaces for marginalized groups, such as Harlem jazz clubs, Latin dance clubs, and DIY

venues” (Gordon 2017, 2); “it was, and continues to be, particularly damaging for smaller Latin clubs above 59th Street” (Kerry and Bullock 2017, 7); “It’s curious, then, that 99 percent of hip hop, salsa and merengue establishments have been effectively rendered unlawful” (Evans 2017, 4). Still others reveled in likening New York City up until the repeal of the cabaret law to the town in the 1984 film *Footloose*, in which dancing was prohibited (Olivares 2017; Correal 2017).

Social dancing was never eliminated in New York City, but the selective enforcement of the cabaret law throughout its long history did drastically impact nightlife within the city. The law managed to remain in existence for nearly a century, despite its clearly racist origins, its historical use to suppress the activities of minorities and people of color, and the many legal challenges that arose against it. Taking advantage of the declining attitude toward nightlife amongst the general populace of New York City throughout the early 1990s, Mayor Rudy Giuliani became known as the harshest enforcer of the cabaret law throughout its history as he appropriated it for use within his quality of life campaign in effort to clean up the city. Giuliani did clean up the city; crime rates fell dramatically, but in the process of restoring quality of life to the city, city spaces were “Disneyfied,” Manhattan was turned into a “giant mall,” and an era of gentrification was ushered into the city (Nigro 2015; Ehrenreich 2007). This begs the question, whose quality of life was restored under the Giuliani administration?

As others have said before, it certainly was not the quality of life of club owners, nor that of those who attended clubs to dance, that was of concern to the Giuliani administration. Although the effects of Giuliani’s cabaret law enforcement were felt by clubs across boroughs and demographics within New York City, the hardest hit were the small venues, both licensed and unlicensed, legal and illegal, that served as centers of social and musical life for numerous

individuals and communities but were perceived as threats to neighborhood well-being. It was at these types of venues that genres such as salsa were most popular, but Giuliani's use of the cabaret law also altered how this genre was promulgated in larger venues throughout the city, as owners often refused to program salsa out of fear that people would dance. Ensuring the safety of club goers was a valuable goal of cabaret law enforcement, not just during Giuliani's years in office but throughout the end of the 20th century up until the law's abolishment. But the manner in which the law was enforced during Giuliani's time in office ultimately had damaging effects on nightlife as those who attended clubs were painted as violent criminals destroying city space, as the trajectories of genres such as salsa were drastically altered, and as club goers—particularly those in Latino and other minority communities—were deprived of the intimate connections that are forged when bodies move together.

CHAPTER 2: EMBODYING FAILURE: TRYING TO DANCE SALSA IN NEW YORK CITY

I first observed salsa dancing during a research trip to New York City in January 2018. Upon recommendation from prolific salsa musician and composer Mike Amadeo, whom I met while visiting his music store, I travelled to Willie's Steakhouse in the South Bronx on a Wednesday night hoping to hear a live salsa band. There was not a band playing, but a DJ. Yet the restaurant was still filled with patrons who had come to drink, socialize, and dance. As the music grew louder and as the lights in the bar dimmed throughout the night, the dancefloor grew progressively more crowded and increasingly drew my eye. I was struck by the conviviality and sociality of the dance floor, and by the plurality of movements, gestures, and happenings that transpired within this space. After observing this night at Willie's, I resolved to learn the basics of salsa dancing over the next week and a half of my time in New York in the hopes that I could return to Willie's and join in the dancing.

Within this chapter, I interrogate the various meanings and tensions that arose out of my body and within various spaces as I learned to salsa dance. As I consider it, salsa dancers within New York are entangled within the complex historical matrix explored within the previous chapter; the governmental policies of the City of New York throughout the 20th and 21st centuries have contributed to the formation of a salsa dancing scene in which various tensions exist between uptown and downtown venues, between older and younger generations, between individuals of differing classes and races, and between experienced and inexperienced dancers. I contextualize my own dancing within this landscape and, moreover, contend with the unique world-making possibilities enabled by the ephemeral interactions between bodies and subjectivities that salsa dancing presents within this context. I envisage my own body as a site of

analysis and reflect upon how my experiences within salsa spaces shaped and were shaped by my bodily comportment and the perceptions that others had of me while dancing. My movements while learning to dance were typical of any beginner: awkward, uncoordinated, and full of missteps. Yet as I will discuss here, this non-expertise, the process of learning to dance, and the clumsy movements which accompanied this process still proved valuable and transformative, opening new modes of existence for myself within these various spaces and relationalities with the people with whom I danced.

Within the next section of this chapter, I discuss scholarship that has contributed to my understanding and interpretation of my salsa dancing within New York. From these I fashion a framework through which I view my own body dancing, and salsa dancing within the spaces I explore, as historically situated, which valorizes non-expertise, and that embraces the possibilities created through the processual nature of learning to dance. Following this, I present vignettes of three salsa clubs that I visited while conducting my research. These vignettes all involve my experiences learning to dance salsa, but the character of each instance differs drastically. The first anecdote that I present took place at the aforementioned Willie's Steakhouse, a Puerto Rican restaurant in the South Bronx that hosts salsa dancing on Wednesday nights and on weekends. During my visits, this space was host to an older Nuyorican clientele, many of whom had been active in New York salsa since the genre's early days. The second vignette occurred at Session 73, a relatively new midtown bar which hosts salsa nights on Mondays that are preceded by a free dance lesson, attended by myself and a few others on this particular night. The third occurred at Gonzalez y Gonzalez, a bar and Mexican restaurant in Greenwich Village, and a mainstay in Manhattan's salsa scene. Live salsa bands play at Gonzalez y Gonzalez multiple times a week, drawing large crowds to dance, even on weekdays.

Finally, I conclude with another vignette at Willie’s Steakhouse, which occurred on my last night in New York City.

I juxtapose my experiences at these venues to illuminate some of the complex meanings that emerged as I learned to dance, as well as to illustrate some of the intricacies of these spaces and the relationships that I formed within them through dancing. Due to the relatively short time that I spent in New York’s salsa scene, and due to the fact that I was able to visit each space I discuss only a handful of times, I do not intend to draw broad conclusions about the individuals and communities with which I interacted, or to make generalizations about salsa dancing in all locations. Rather, any conclusions at which I arrive are grounded in conversations that I had with dancers and musicians during my research and in interactions with others felt through the locus of my own dancing body. I focus on occurrences at specific venues at particular moments in time, and while I imagine these events to be historically situated, I focus here on the significances within these moments.

Literature

I draw primarily from literature which contends with the world-making and transformative possibilities of dance—both within and outside of club spaces—in my conceptualization of salsa dancing and salsa bars that I visited. In her book *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making*, Fiona Buckland utilizes the concept of “lifeworlds” to theorize dancing in queer club spaces in New York City (Buckland 2001). Buckland uses this term to refer to environments and spaces which are created when a plurality of identities, voices, and subjectivities come together (Buckland 2001, 4). Lifeworlds are distinct from communities; they are constituted by too many identities to create a cohesive community or group. Rather than focusing on the shared qualities of a group of individuals, Buckland instead asserts that club

spaces are “sites of interaction and intersection” of numerous subjectivities within which processual “world-making” is realized through the ephemeral, moment-specific productions of creative, expressive, and transformative possibilities by bodies in motion (Buckland 2001, 4-5). Buckland contends that lifeworlds in gay club spaces are utopic imaginings created by way of dancing.

Celeste Fraser Delgado and José Esteban Muñoz also address the world-making possibilities of social dance in their edited volume *Everynight Life: Culture and Dance in Latin/o America* (Delgado and Muñoz 1997). In their chapter “Rebellions of Everynight Life,” Delgado and Muñoz discuss the politicized nature of various forms of Latin dance throughout both Latin America and its diaspora, and suggest that the politics of places and peoples are inscribed on dancing bodies through movement and gesture (Delgado and Muñoz 1997, 9). Unlike Buckland, identity and community are central to Delgado and Muñoz’s figuration of social dance. Delgado and Muñoz give particular attention to marginalized and oppressed Latinx communities, and assert that dance’s world-making possibilities lie within the rebellious performances of queer nightlife which resist this oppression (Delgado and Muñoz 1997, 28).

Delgado and Muñoz take care to historicize dancing bodies within the specific social contexts out of which they emerge, but also believe that aside from being inherently historically situated, the dancing body has the ability to reconfigure the subjugating histories that are written on it (Delgado and Muñoz 1997, 17-18). Muñoz continues this vein of thought in his book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (Muñoz 2009). Muñoz explores gestures, which are specific physical acts that “atomize movement” and work together in constituting and historicizing a subject (Muñoz 2009, 67), and while Buckland for the most part contends with the moment-specific production of space within *Impossible Dance*, she, too,

acknowledges that movements are historically contingent, and that the same movement can generate various meanings within different spaces, times, and amongst different groups of people (Buckland 2001, 7). Dancing in queer clubs in New York in the 1990s and early 2000s, Buckland writes, was not simply an escape from the harsh policies of the Giuliani era which curtailed social dancing, but a response to these policies which challenged and subverted them (Buckland 2001, 8).

In her ethnography *Dust of the Zulu: Ngoma Aesthetics After Apartheid* Louise Meintjes examines Zulu *ngoma* dancing and its import in the socio-political milieu of post-Apartheid South Africa (Meintjes 2017). While *ngoma* is not a social dance in the same sense as the dances about which Delgado, Muñoz, and Buckland write, it nonetheless possesses the ability to produce effects within the world. According to Meintjes, the futures toward which *ngoma* dancers reach are inscribed and embodied in their vocalizations and movements during performance, as are the histories of violence, segregation, and oppression from which they emerge (Meintjes 2017, 17). *Ngoma* dancers' voices are "heard" through their dancing bodies: "the way that *ngoma*'s body-voice carries histories likewise enhances *ngoma*'s persuasion, while the links between experience in and out of the dance arena open the possibilities for one domain producing effects in the other" (Meintjes 2017, 18).

Sydney Hutchinson also addresses the conflation of the dancing body with voice and speaking within the introductory chapter to her edited volume *Salsa World: A Global Dance in Local Contexts*, "Dancing in Place" (Hutchinson 2013). In the opening paragraphs of this chapter, Hutchinson provides an anecdote in which observers of her salsa dancing in New York City immediately told her that she danced "Colombian" based on the way that she moved her feet while dancing (Hutchinson 2013, 1). Thereafter, Hutchinson explores the concept of "dance

accents,” bodily expression of localized and individualized ways of dancing that can be read and interpreted by others (Hutchinson 2013, 2-3). Similarly, in her ethnography of salsa dancing in Los Angeles, *Salsa Crossings: Dancing Latinidad in Los Angeles*, Cindy García addresses the meanings that observers attach to specific movements (García 2013). While discussing her experiences in the Los Angeles salsa scene, García writes that one whose movements are interpreted as stylistically different from the majority of dancers will be relegated to outsider status, while even a newcomer whose movements coincide with local practices can be quickly granted insider status (García 2013, xx). García also devotes attention to the “missteps, miscues, and mistranslations” which are unavoidable when one learns to dance salsa (García 2013, xxi). Dancing salsa the “wrong” way, García argues, can serve to label the dancer as outsider, but oftentimes can serve ethnographic purposes as well; it can help to engage other dancers, and can illuminate the values of dancers within certain spaces.

In addition to García’s ideas regarding the valuable missteps that accompany learning to dance, I draw inspiration from the work of Judith Halberstam when considering the positive outcomes that trying and failing can bring. In her book *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam, like García, addresses movements and actions that do not adhere to traditional standards of expertise and success (Halberstam 2011). Halberstam’s theorization of failure explores the negativity and loss that failure can bring while simultaneously acknowledging “happy and productive” failures, which can have positive and unexpected outcomes in their departures from conventional logics of success (Halberstam 2011, 23). Halberstam contends that actions and movements that lie outside of dominant and heteronormative discourses of success and expertise can generate new pleasures, new knowledge, and new ways of being within the world; in other

words, movements that are considered “wrong” possess their own unique, valuable, and powerful world-making possibilities.

I conceptualize my salsa dancing and the following occurrences within various salsa venues with the help of the ideas outlined here. The worlds of dance venues are constructed through the interactions of people dancing, as identities collide while individuals negotiate these spaces. Although significances arise that are intensely moment- and space-specific and that are bounded within each of these spaces, dancing is always historically situated, and, moreover, social dance is a means by which people navigate and transform these histories. Finally, these possibilities are enabled not solely through performing expertise on the dance floor, but also through the processes of learning to dance and the missteps and failures which accompany it, through which new understandings and modes of being are realized.

Willie’s Steakhouse

The first salsa venue that I visited during my time in New York was Willie’s Steakhouse in the Parkchester area of the Bronx. As I mentioned within the introduction to this chapter, I heard about Willie’s when I met Mike Amadeo in his store Casa Amadeo on one of my first days in the city after asking him where I could go to hear salsa music. When I asked him this, Amadeo thought for a minute, and replied “Willie’s Steakhouse, if it’s even there anymore.” Amadeo recommended I go the following Wednesday, as the restaurant typically had a live band on this night. I begin and end my series of vignettes with nights at Willie’s, as it was the place I began and ended my salsa dancing in New York. The patrons of Willie’s Steakhouse were, for the most part, in their 50s, 60s, and 70s. As I talked with people at this restaurant, I learned that nearly everyone within this community was of Puerto Rican descent, and had been involved in New York’s salsa scene for most of their adult lives. And as I quickly discovered, most

everyone at Willie's knew one another. Within the first anecdote that takes place at Willie's, I discuss my initial interactions with the community of salsa musicians, dancers, and enthusiasts that spend their nights at Willie's, and within the second, I reflect upon how returning to Willie's and dancing altered my status amongst this community.

January 10, 2018

Willie's Steakhouse sits on an unlit street a few blocks away from the Parkchester subway station. I walk past the restaurant on my first visit; the outside is dark, as is the restaurant's sign, and the windows have blinds pulled over them. I walk inside the restaurant and enter a foyer, through which I progress to the main seating area of the restaurant. It's around 8 o'clock at night and Willie's is quite crowded. The main room of the restaurant is large and rectangular. The bar lines the left hand side of the room, and an eye-level dividing wall separates the bar from the dining area, which is about twice the size of the bar and is filled with couples and groups finishing their dinner. I walk to the back of the bar, looking for a stool, but all are occupied, so I stand and wait. People crowd the bar waiting to get drinks, and others stand behind the bar stools talking in groups. A few women at the end of the bar vacate their seats, and ask me if I want to take one of them. I accept and thank them, and when the bartender asks me what I would like to drink, I order a Budweiser, which a lot of people around me seem to be drinking. I immediately notice that everyone at Willie's is at least thirty years older than me; most seem to be in their fifties or sixties, and many seem even older than this.

Almost immediately upon sitting down, the man sitting next to me strikes up a conversation. He tells me that his name is José, and I tell him that I am a student visiting New York and want to learn about salsa music; although he is amazed that I found my way to Willie's, he tells me I've come to the right place. I tell him Mike Amadeo recommended I come

here, and he smiles with recognition. José enthusiastically begins to point out random people throughout the bar, first telling me that I need to meet the men standing by the front door and that they are “big time” salsa musicians, and that I should meet the owner of the establishment because he has connections to all of the famous salsa musicians in the city, and that I should really be talking to the woman who is sitting two chairs to my right because she was a producer for Tito Puente almost forty years previously. After I talk to José for over an hour, he hands me off to another woman who has appeared behind us; he tells her to introduce me to people around that bar, and that I’m a student studying salsa. This woman—I unfortunately did not take down her name—takes me around the bar and introduces me to what feels like an endless number of people. I meet multiple musicians, the owner of the bar, the DJ who is playing salsa music over the speakers, the bouncer, the woman who produced for Tito Puente, and half a dozen of her friends. When greeting each person, the woman I’m with wishes them a happy New Year, even though it is almost February, and she tells them all, in Spanish, that I am a student here to learn about salsa, at which everyone gives me an encouraging smile.

Salsa dancing begins as I’m being introduced to people around the bar. The DJ has been spinning old salsa tunes over the loudspeakers for almost the entire night, but around 9, after most have finished their meals, tables in the dining room are moved to make room for a small dance floor sandwiched between the dividing wall and the mass of tables and chairs. I notice that an elderly couple initiates the dancing as I’m being walked around the bar. They confidently take to the dance floor that has been cleared in front of the DJ, smiling at one another as they slowly step and sway back and forth to the blaring music. Others begin to join soon after. The dance floor slowly fills up over the next hour, and soon enough people are crammed shoulder to shoulder trying to carve out a space for themselves and their partners amongst the mass of

moving bodies. The dancers are surrounded by a circle of onlookers, some of whom occasionally grab a partner and join in the dancing. Dancers freely rotate partners after the end of each song. The expertise and experience of everyone dancing in this space are conveyed to me through the unselfconscious ways in which people navigate the dance floor, despite most being able to move only in small steps due to the limits of the space, the limits of the ageing body, or a combination of both. Late in the night, one young man's dancing stands out to me, in part because he doesn't appear to be over thirty and is therefore the youngest person in this establishment, apart from myself, and in part because of his clothing—an acid green silk collared shirt, black flare pants, and black dancing shoes—alongside his equally flamboyant dance moves. He alone is able to create sufficient space for himself on the dance floor, as he performs elaborate shines (akin to solos; a member of the pair separates and dances in a more stylized, embellished manner) coupled with a woman at least twenty years his senior. Dancing continues well into the night during my first visit to Willie's; by the time I leave, close to midnight, the dance floor is still growing.

Session 73

As I discuss within the introduction to this chapter, after this first night at Willie's, I resolved to learn some basics of salsa dancing. It was relatively easy to find locations where I could learn to dance; many bars and clubs offer dance lessons before salsa dancing nights for free. Patrons are able to show up early before open dancing begins, learn basic steps in a group with the aid of an instructor, and then put their new knowledge to the test on the dance floor. I decided to attend one such lesson at a midtown Manhattan bar called Session 73 on a Monday night, assuming that this would be a low-stress situation in which I could learn amongst other beginners. Within this vignette, I provide an account of the lesson in which I participated at this

venue, and illustrate the camaraderie which emerged between a group of strangers as we engaged in the process of learning to salsa dance together.

January 15, 2018

I walk through Manhattan on a particularly cold Monday night, making my way to Session 73, my stomach doing backflips as I cope with the anxiety brought on by the thought of dancing in front of strangers. I arrive an hour early to have a drink and gather the courage to participate in the salsa lesson, but apart from myself and the bartender, the bar is completely empty. I vaguely wonder if other people will show up for this lesson, but over the next hour a few others arrive, all of whom, I learn, are beginners as well. There is one elderly woman, a younger couple, one woman about my own age, and one other man, also approximately my age. We all sit together at the bar, talking about our lack of previous salsa experience and trying to soothe each other's nerves. The only people in the bar are those attending the salsa lesson, which I guess might be typical for a Monday night.

Eventually, the instructor, Maria, arrives along with another older man. Maria addresses the group, saying that tonight we will learn the basic step of salsa as well as a few basic turns. Immediately after telling us this, Maria apologizes to me and the men in the group and tells us that we will only be practicing the woman's step tonight, but insists that we can all still participate because we will not be dancing with partners but individually. I'm briefly confused at why she's looking at me while saying this, but then realize she's probably mistaken me for a man. To start the lesson, Maria plays a relatively slow salsa tune from her phone that's connected to the bar's sound system, and takes a position at the front of our small group, which has assembled in the front of the bar. She turns her back to us so we can mirror what she is doing, and begins to describe how to stay in time with the music. The key to salsa dancing,

according to Maria, is to maintain a constant awareness of the first beat of each measure; the series of steps is initiated on the first beat so maintaining an internal count is crucial. She calls on the young single man to pick out beat one, who thinks for a moment and then cues the downbeat a few measures later.

After this, Maria has us begin to move our feet. We step forward with our right foot on the downbeat of 1, forward with our left foot on the “and” of 1, and backward with our right foot on the downbeat of 2. There is no foot movement on the “and” of 2, but the body continues moving backward to prepare the dancer to invert the first three steps on the second two beats of the measure. On the downbeat of 3 we step backward with our left foot, backward with our right on the “and” of 3, and then forward with our left foot on the downbeat of 4, again ceasing our foot movement, but moving our bodies forward to prepare to step forward with the right foot on the downbeat of 1 and start the cycle again. I later learn that this is salsa dancing “on 2,” as the body changes direction on beat two. We spend a long while practicing this very basic step, dancing to a song with a slow tempo as Maria chants “forward...forward...back, back...back...forward” over the music, drilling the pattern of the basic step into our brains and into our muscles. Most in the class catch on to the basic step after fifteen minutes or so of practice, and Maria begins to cycle through songs with faster tempi. The older man who entered the bar with Maria is obviously an experienced dancer; he moves his feet with flare and grace, and unlike the beginners in the group, he moves his arms to complement his footwork rather than dangle them uselessly to his sides like the rest of us are doing.

Maria eventually decides we are ready to move on to learning how to turn, which to our dismay and amusement is drastically more difficult than the basic step. To perform a turn on the right hand side, we start with the first half of the basic step cycle, but instead of moving straight

backward on beats 3 and 4, we spin outward and to the right on these second two beats, swinging our feet around quickly to reorient our bodies frontward in time to reinitiate the basic step sequence on the downbeat of the next measure. All of us are immediately lost; none of us are able to reconcile the movements of our feet with our flailing bodies. Most of us end up performing bizarre pirouettes, lacking the precision with which Maria and the other man step to complete the turn. As we each slow down our steps in order to align our feet, Maria changes the song again, back to a slower tempo. Most of us figure out the foot movements eventually, but can't fit them to the beat of the song, no matter how slow the tempo. The older woman in our group is struggling to keep up, but is smiling, trying her best, and Maria encourages her. The young couple, who are dancing immediately behind me, have completely abandoned trying to turn and are now giggling about how bad their dancing is. Despite most of the group being unable to complete the right hand turn, we try a turn on the left hand side, with similar results.

In the last few minutes of the lesson Maria tries to teach us one more move, the Susie Q, a kind of side step, with slightly more success than either of the turns. We conclude the lesson by dancing through an entire song while Maria calls out which steps we should perform measure by measure. We alternate right turns, left turns, and Susie Qs, with Maria bringing us back to the basic step when we begin to lose pace. It seems most of us have already forgotten the footwork to the turns we learned fifteen minutes prior. Nonetheless, we make it through the song. At this point, after almost an hour straight of dancing, my calves are aching, the tendons in my hip joints are tightening, and I am intensely aware of the strain that dancing for this long has placed on my body. I'm wearing a thick sweater over a long sleeved shirt, and I feel sticky and sweaty. I can tell that everyone else is tired too; the old woman has moved to a bar stool to rest, and one of the young men is wiping beads of sweat off of his forehead. But the nervous energy that proceeded

the lesson has dissipated. Everyone is sweaty and smiling, thrilled that we completed the lesson and laughing at how most of us were barely able to keep up with the basic step. We spend a while chatting after the lesson, and most stay for another drink. We all agree that we want to keep dancing.

Gonzalez y Gonzalez

The following vignette took place at a bar and restaurant in Greenwich Village, Gonzalez y Gonzalez, which I learned was one of the most popular places in Manhattan to dance and listen to salsa. This bar hosted live salsa bands every Thursday and Sunday evening, before which there were beginner salsa dancing lessons. I did not participate in the lesson at Gonzalez y Gonzalez on this night, but observed and joined the dancing after. As I will show here, my dancing at Gonzalez y Gonzalez brought to the surface questions of gender and presentation of self, and how these are negotiated through dance. These experiences provoked a reimagining of my own gendered position within salsa spaces, and coincide with larger discourses on the gendered nature of salsa dance.

January 18, 2018

I venture to downtown Manhattan on a Thursday night, hoping to finally see a live salsa band. My attempts to find live salsa music have thus far been unsuccessful. I arrive at my destination, Gonzalez y Gonzalez, at around 8:30, only to find a line of people waiting to get into the restaurant. Wanting some shelter from the cold, I go into the neighboring store, a Crate and Barrel, to wait for ten minutes to see if the line dissipates. I walk around and look at glassware and cookbooks, feeling somewhat anxious about returning to the restaurant to dance. I return to Gonzalez y Gonzalez and fortunately, the line is much smaller and it's still before 9, after which

time there is a ten dollar cover charge. Predictably, the space is already packed from wall to wall, with people crowding the bar trying to catch the bartender's attention to order a drink. Musicians are squeezing through the crowded front entranceway with their instruments and heading toward the stage, which is at the back of the bar. I can't find a single chair at the bar, so I begrudgingly order a thirteen dollar margarita and stand behind the tall bar chairs amongst the throng of people. I find myself growing increasingly irritated by the crowd, the noise, and by the group of people behind which I'm standing that have paid their tabs and put on their jackets, but who just won't leave their chairs. Waiters are slowly clearing out tables from the dining area as groups finish their meals; the empty tables are moved toward the back wall of the restaurant, presumably to make room for the impending salsa lesson. A few minutes after 9 pm, the last table is finally cleared and a woman grabs a microphone, announcing that the salsa lesson is about to begin.

This woman is the instructor for the lesson, but because of the size of the crowd it is extremely difficult to tell what's happening on the dance floor. The instructor shouts directions into the microphone, but even amplified she is barely audible over the noise of the crowd and the music that is still being played over the speakers. I stand against the wall opposite the stage with men who seem to be there alone and watch as the dance instructor calls directions from the back of the bar. She directs people who are participating in the dance lesson to form two parallel rows, one of men and the other of women, and I notice that most who move to join the lesson are young and white. At least forty people in the bar are participating; the two parallel lines stretch from the back of the bar near the stage almost all the way to where I am standing on the other side of the space. Once everyone dancing in the lesson is partnered up, the instructor begins to shout instructions to the dancers, first to the women, then to the men, alternating until each pair's

steps begin to line up. Most in the lesson seem to be struggling to hear exactly what the instructor is saying; she is nearly unintelligible from where I am standing. Nonetheless, everyone participating seems to be having a wonderful time. Couples in the dance lines are talking and laughing with one another, trying to figure out which foot goes where. Dancers near the front of the line next to the instructor seem to be catching on more quickly. Those in the back of the line clearly have no idea what's happening. Some give up on the lesson rather quickly and leave to get a drink before the band starts playing; throughout the lesson, the musicians continue to set up on stage. Others are more dedicated and remain in the line of dancers, trying to master the steps before the music starts. By the time the lesson is done and the band is ready to play, most seem to only have a vague idea of what to do.

The leader of the band introduces the group and they begin playing their first set. The dance floor quickly fills, already crowded with the people who participated in the salsa lesson, augmented by those who had been sitting and observing up until this point. I stand against the wall observing the dancing, too shy to join in since everyone is coupled up. After a few minutes a small older woman approaches me, her name is Cynthia, and she asks "did you come to just be a wallflower all night?" Cynthia invites me to dance and I apologetically accept, telling her I'm not that good, but she smiles and says she will teach me. As she leads me to the dance floor, she takes my right hand in her left, and places my left hand on her waist. She begins to dance in a slow shuffle that, from what I can tell, lags slightly behind the music. Her movements are subtle and slow, but confident. I try to complement her dancing, but I have trouble fitting my movements with hers. Dancing with a partner, I find, is much more difficult than dancing alone. Cynthia tries to show me how to move my feet, but it feels different from the salsa I practiced earlier in the week. Cynthia soon moves to alternating between dancing with me, and stopping

and standing next to me to have me imitate her steps. I can imitate her, but when we come back together we are both dancing the same part, and I can't figure out how to mirror her movements.

After a few minutes of my trying to simultaneously lead the dance and to imitate her steps, Cynthia asks me point blank "Do you want to be the guy? Because if you do I can't teach you how to dance, you need to ask a guy." A nervous excitement overtakes me when Cynthia asks me if I want to "be the guy." I do want to be the guy. I haven't been confronted with partner dancing until this point, which has been a large source of trepidation for me as I've anxiously contemplated how my body, my presentation, would fit into these spaces in which dancing often carries romantic or sexual connotations. Would I be perceived as woman or man? Who, if anyone, would ask me to dance with them, or would I be expected to approach others and ask them to dance? Would there be space for non-heteronormative partner configurations within salsa spaces? The comfort with which Cynthia dances with me, the nonchalance with which she asks if I want to be the guy, and the numerous queer couples that I see dancing throughout the space quell some of my anxiety, but I simultaneously am made newly, self-consciously aware of the gendered nature of my own body and what my gendered presentation means while dancing salsa within this space.

I say yes, I will "be the guy," so Cynthia leads me across the dance floor to find a man to teach me. Once she finds a couple whose dancing is satisfactory, she shamelessly interrupts and asks the man to teach me the male step. I stand there, feeling self-conscious and embarrassed about standing in the middle of a busy dance floor getting a private lesson from a stranger, and nervously wondering if the man who is demonstrating finds it odd that I want to learn the male role. However, the couple doesn't seem to mind the interruption, and the man seems happy to tell me what he's doing. He tells me the man's role is all about consistency and keeping the

woman in time. Cynthia laughs at this, and says it's actually the woman who's doing all of the work, but that the man gets the credit for a successful dance. The man we approached then demonstrates his steps. He doesn't break with a very simple pattern, barely shuffling his feet in time with the music.

I resume dancing with Cynthia, still trying to keep in time and hoping that I can be a satisfactory dance partner. It is hard to tell, but I think I'm doing a slightly better job dancing than I was before. But Cynthia still laughs at me and tells me that I'm not "feeling it." She's right, I definitely am not feeling it. Nevertheless, we dance for several more songs as she occasionally kicks my feet with her own, showing me which foot should go where and when. When we stop dancing, Cynthia tells me that I'm getting better, but that I just have to take the lead and be confident if I'm going to dance the male part. I leave Gonzalez y Gonzales feeling like Cynthia's suggestions are next to impossible.

Willie's Again

On my last night in New York City, I returned to Willie's once again hoping to run into some of the people I had met over the previous week one last time. This final anecdote concludes my experiences in salsa bars in New York. As I danced at Willie's on this final night, I saw the value that this community of dancers placed on the experiential learning that occurs when one dances.

January 19, 2018

It's Friday night and I'm walking to Willie's Steakhouse once again, wondering if a band will be playing tonight instead of a DJ. When I arrive I find the DJ is spinning again, however, the restaurant is the most crowded that I've seen it thus far. I quickly run into a woman I met the

previous Wednesday, the woman who had produced albums for Tito Puente, and ask her why there is not band playing. She replies that it is too cold outside for a band, yet it seems that the cold has not deterred people from coming out this Friday. I luckily find the only open bar table and sit down. Soon after, a group of three women approaches me and asks if they can take the other seats at my table. They join me and we spend much of the night talking. They tell me about their families, their careers. I learn that one of the women is visiting New York from Puerto Rico for the month of January. Another's daughter plays clarinet, like myself, and has been touring the country performing.

As the night progresses, dancing begins much as it had on the previous nights I had visited Willie's. The DJ gradually turns the music up throughout the night, and as the volume increases and the lights dim, more and more people join the dance floor. I sit at my table, where the women who are sitting with me take turns leaving to go talk to friends then returning to sit and sip their drinks. As I am watching the dancing, an older man, probably in his sixties, approaches me and asks "Quieres bailar?" Do you want to dance? I answer, in clumsy Spanish, that I'm not very good, but that I will try. He leads me to the dance floor where he takes my hand and my waist and begins to move. I try to fall into step with him, but I struggle to follow his lead. I am now dancing the woman's part, and my steps have changed yet again. The man I'm dancing with tells me to just follow what he is doing, and when I can't, he smiles at my effort and tells me I'm not feeling the music. Again, here is the elusive "feeling" that I evidently lack. I look around the circle that has formed around the dance floor, and I notice that quite a few people are staring at us dancing, smiling. I feel as if I and my dancing certainly stand out here more so than at the previous venues that I visited, my younger, whiter body moving with the clumsiness of a noticeably inexperienced dancer. When the song ends, the man I am dancing

with gives me a big smile and thanks me for the dance while kissing my hand. I thank him as well, and apologize again for my lack of skill. His smile grows even bigger and he tells me that I did a great job.

No sooner does the song end and I think I can escape the dance floor than another man, about the same age as the first, swoops in and exclaims loudly, so that everyone around us can hear, "I'll show you how to *really* dance!" The onlookers in the circle around the dance floor laugh and cheer, and I laugh as well as the man takes my hands in his. He tells me "this is all you have to do" as he starts to do a very simple back and forth step to the beat of the song. I easily fall into step with my new dance partner, and we spend the entire song doing the same simple step, until I feel relatively comfortable. When the song ends, he too, kisses my hand, and I return to my table and take my seat again. The women I am sitting with greet me, and tell me they were watching me dance, one says that she's impressed that I wanted to dance. I tell them that I just started trying to learn the other week, but they say I did a good job. One of the women who I am sitting with, says to me appreciatively "If you're here and you're dancing you must really want to learn! Dancing is the best way to learn about salsa." I spend the rest of the night talking with the women at my table, occasionally meeting someone that approaches our table. Two of the women offer to let me stay with them if I ever decide to visit Puerto Rico. A third tells me about a salsa music festival in Puerto Rico that I should attend. Another invites me to a concert at a university in the city the following evening, which I have to refuse because I am leaving town the next day. Sadness overwhelms me when I depart the bar in the early hours of the morning.

Conclusion

One of my primary observations across the dance spaces that I visited was that each catered to different types of patrons, different sets of knowledge, and different skill levels of dance. The two downtown venues that I describe here, Session 73 and Gonzalez y Gonzalez, prominently advertised salsa dancing and music on their websites. The dance lessons preceding the music were selling points for both of these venues; patrons could show up knowing nothing about salsa, and within half an hour could learn basic steps and start dancing. While there were certainly people in these bars and clubs who already knew how to dance salsa, the venues catered to the non-expert. Official space is made for the movements of beginner salsa dancers, and through these movements individual bodies are ingratiated into ephemeral moments of communality; the worlds of these dance spaces emerges out of the processes of learning to dance.

This is not to say that beginners are unwelcome at places like Willie's Steakhouse. On the contrary, my dancing seemed to be appreciated by other club-goers here, and I felt as if my participation in dancing legitimated my presence in the space within the eyes of others. Yet central to the ethos of this spaces is a presupposition of knowledge both about how to salsa dance, and, moreover, about the venue itself. When telling me about Willie's, Mike Amadeo commented to me that it was the "last place left" in the city to dance salsa. Others at Willie's made similar comments to me that all the other salsa venues in the city had been closed down. I would never have found this venue had I not talked to Amadeo; it sits far uptown in the Bronx, and does not show up on Internet searches for salsa venues in the city. Dancing at Willie's is not advertised on the restaurant's website or anywhere else, and salsa dancing nights seems to be insider knowledge. Willie's seems to be one of the last vestiges of the "old-school" salsa venues

of the genre's zenith, most of which were closed down at the turn of the 21st century. The movements performed at Willie's Steakhouse frequently reflect this experience, this history; older patrons packed together on a tiny dance floor shuffle in small steps that lag behind the beat of tunes played over the loudspeakers, but there is a familiarity, and ease with which they move and with which they interact with one another. Movements evince the lives spent dancing salsa together.

As I danced in these various spaces that I visited in New York, I became intensely aware of my own body and bodily expressions, and I continue to wonder how my comportment affected who I danced with and how we danced. My body took on new gendered meanings as I danced with both men and women, as both man and woman, and I often wondered how the traditional gender configuration of salsa dancing is being challenged throughout these spaces. In many instances, I felt other components of my expression and identity shift in and out of focus. At Willie's, for instance, whenever someone spoke to me in Spanish, I would respond in Spanish, after which they would continue our conversation in English. Most assumed I only spoke English, and would carry out conversations with each other in Spanish and translate them into English for me; I often tried to relay that I understood what they were saying, but apparently was unsuccessful, as this continued throughout my time in this venue. Additionally, multiple individuals across spaces commented on my young age, and I am certain that the fact that I am white had some degree of influence on the manner in which I experienced these spaces. I often felt like an outsider in all of the spaces that I visited, self-consciously aware of my own body and inexperience dancing, yet out of these instances grew new ways of interfacing with the surrounding world(s).

Within the occasions that I describe, the complex worlds of these club spaces were formulated through dance and movement. The interactions between individuals that arise within these spaces are oftentimes short-lived, yet are still meaningful and transformative; new modes of relationality are generated between selves within salsa dancing as subjectivities collide. Bodies speak and are read by others, and what bodily movements say are inherently tied to the contexts within which people dance. Learning to dance was at once an exhilarating and terrifying experience. Although incredibly self-conscious about my non-expertise throughout most of my time spent dancing, the processes of learning helped me to integrate into the worlds of dance spaces in various ways. Communal dance lessons created cohesion among inexperienced participants, while more intimate bodily connections were formed through dancing with and learning from a partner. During my last night at Willie's Steakhouse, my bad dancing was nonetheless met with appreciative smiles, nods, sympathetic laughter, and my friend's comment that since I was dancing I must really want to learn about salsa. In this instance I felt that my presence in this space was legitimated. That I had, in some small way, earned a seal of approval from those dancing around me and with me. In this anecdote and in others that I relay here, my movements, despite being rife with missteps, enabled me to transform my relationships to the individuals and worlds contained within these spaces. This transformation occurred not through the performance of an expertise, but through the messy and clumsy mechanisms of learning, trying, and oftentimes failing, which I contend can be equally as valuable and vital to arriving at an understanding of salsa dancing.

CONCLUSION

Within this thesis I have grappled with historical and contemporary issues surrounding salsa dancing in New York City. My approach to understanding salsa has drawn from both historical sources in an effort to understand the effects of governmental policies which have impacted salsa dancing and nightlife, and from a phenomenological approach which valorizes the bodily acts of doing and learning. Within the first chapter of this thesis, I explored the cabaret law, a controversial piece of legislation originally written to restrict dance and musical performance in nightclubs, and its effects on New York City nightlife. I considered the impact outside of salsa clubs that this law had throughout the 20th and into the 21st centuries, but asserted that salsa clubs were a major, and often silent, casualty of the enforcement of this legislation. The use of the cabaret law throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s was instrumental in efforts to clean up the city under Rudy Giuliani's quality of life campaign, which as a whole had devastating impacts on minority communities within the city. Within the second chapter, I reflected upon my own experiences dancing salsa in present-day New York City. My accounts of different salsa spaces highlighted some of the differences between these venues as I experienced them: as "worlds" that are formed, in part, through the movements performed within these spaces. Here I contended with my own body dancing and the meanings accrued by it in different spaces with and among different people, and proposed that the valuable missteps of learning to dance can provide insight and initiate integration into these spaces and others.

Both of these approaches and topics of study emerged, in part, from the brief nature of my fieldwork. My time spent in New York was necessarily short, and although the experiences that I had during this time were rich, a longer period of time spent within New York's salsa scene would have, no doubt, influenced the thrust of this project. My research concerning the

cabaret law, which draws primarily from archival materials, might have drawn more from these ethnographic experiences and might have more thoroughly addressed how musicians today negotiate city and governmental politics. Had I spent a longer time within the venues that I explore within the second chapter, I might have developed more insights into each of these spaces, their relationships to each other, and the complexities of the dancing that takes place within them. Moreover, had I spent a longer time dancing within these spaces, I am sure that my salsa dancing would have improved more than it did within the two short weeks that I spent trying to learn to dance, opening new possibilities and insights into the genre.

Additionally, I regret the minimal attention which I devote to musical sound within this project, also in part due to the rapidity of my research trip. Within the clubs that I visited, the most immediate manner in which to engage with the patrons and the space was through dance, so I consequently clung to this facet of New York's salsa scene. The sonic environments of the clubs and spaces I visited were intense and overwhelming at times, full of loud music, friends greeting each other, and happy exclamations as people who had one too many drinks let loose on weekend nights. I frequently wonder how the policies that I explore in chapter one have affected the sounds of these spaces. As I unfortunately lacked extensive background knowledge regarding salsa music before entering my field site, much of the music that was played within these venues and its meanings was lost on me. Pete Rodriguez's 1967 hit "I Like it Like That" seemed to follow me around the city those two weeks; it is one of my most memorable sound experiences while in New York. Mike Amadeo played this song each of the times I visited his store; on the four occasions that I went to Willie's Steakhouse, the DJ played this song; at Gonzalez y Gonzalez, the salsa band blared out a trombone-heavy cover. I wish I could have interrogated the significance that this song still holds within New York's salsa scene. A study of

this song, of other musical material in clubs, or of salsa club soundscapes would all be fascinating and valuable contributions that could build upon this research.

This project contributes to an understanding of salsa through its contextualization of the genre within the political contentions of New York City within the 20th and 21st centuries, as well as its consideration of the knowledges and relationships that arise and are negotiated through the processes of learning to dance. I combine an historical and archival approach with a phenomenological one to explore the power of embodied learning as it pertains to salsa dance situated within a complex sociopolitical matrix. Movements embedded within this milieu engender the complex “worlds” of salsa clubs, which have themselves always been and will continue to be heavily contested spaces where subjectivities collide.

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