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## **BEING / BECOMING PROFESSIONAL: EMERGING WORK PRACTICES AND THE POLITICS OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN LIGHT OF LEGISLATIVE CHANGE IN CUBA. (AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Dance teaching aimed at international tourists is a relatively new type of private business in Cuba, which creates the premises for capitalizing on cultural heritage both on the island and outside of it, while revealing newly emerging work practices and attitudes towards work. In this new context, tensions arise between notions of 'professionalism' defined from the point of view of the Cuban state and its institutions that specialize in dance education, on the one hand, and private businesses, on the other, where ideas of market, competitiveness and personal branding put forward new understandings of what it means to be professional.*

On New Year's Eve 2019, halfway through my eight-month fieldwork in Havana, I found myself at a house party organized by Isabel, one of my closest and dearest acquaintances in the city. Her son, Ernesto, had been my first dance teacher when I started traveling to Havana in 2011, and even though he had given up teaching tourists, we would still dance together occasionally and talk about my experiences with different salsa schools in the city. On the night of the party, Ernesto told me:

You see how this became good business in the past years? How many dance schools do you remember from the first time you came here? And look how many you have now. It's easy money, and any good dancer will have more knowledge than most of the tourists coming here, so what they do is they keep dancing with you during class, like I did with you tonight, but they call it teaching and they take your dollars.

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His words resonated with my own dancing experience in Havana. I took lessons in living rooms, basements, backyards, kitchens, studios, theaters, parks, terraces, rooftops – and this non-exhaustive list does not include the ‘lessons’ I received (sometimes even against my will) in the street, in bars or at parties. Year after year, the lessons started to resemble more my lessons in Europe than my first lessons in Havana: I was making online appointments on the schools’ websites, my teachers carried business cards and wore t-shirts with the school name and logo, they discussed their methodology with me before starting the class, made sure I stretched before and after class, offered me discounts after a certain number of lessons, invited me to try out other dance styles, and made sure to check with me I had left a positive review on Trip Advisor, Airbnb and Google Maps. And most importantly, I would always be reassured that I was in a ‘professional’ dance school, with ‘professional’ teachers. Almost imperceptibly, a shift had happened.

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This paper puts forward a grassroots perspective on Cuban entrepreneurship and newly emerging work models by addressing the increased professionalization of dance teaching aimed at foreign tourists. By analyzing the experiences of dancers and dance teachers in Havana, I discuss the tensions between notions of ‘professionalism’ defined from the point of view of the Cuban state and its institutions that specialize in dance education, on the one hand, and private businesses, on the other, where notions of market, competitiveness and personal branding put forward new understandings of what it means to be professional. My ethnographic fieldwork indicates that professionalism comes to be understood primarily as individual responsibility, ambition and improvement, with internationalization, be it through social media or more direct relations with foreigners, playing a key role in developing the business. At the same time, the relationship between tourism economies, entrepreneurship and politics of (self)representation reveals ambivalent and shifting attitudes towards the state and the emerging private sector.

The paper is based on ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in Havana for twelve months in 2018-2019 during two research stays and draws upon previously conducted research mainly among dancers, dance instructors, owners of private dance schools, performers, and tourists taking part in dance lessons. The main methodological tools I employed were long term participant observation among groups directly or indirectly involved in the creation, development, and commodification of dance-related heritage, as well as ethnographic interviews.

The embodied aspect of dance was key to my fieldwork. I participated in individual and group dance lessons, as well as in workshops organized for tourists and in training sessions before stage performances. Whenever possible, I attended dance events in various locations in Havana, from well-established venues, famous among Cubans and tourists alike, to newly opened spaces or parties organized by the different dance schools I worked with. The first part of the article discusses the reforms introduced by the Cuban government in order to facilitate entrepreneurship and some of the social consequences of these new measures. I focus on the relatively new businesses centered on dance and their position in the processes related to the commodification of heritage. I then move on to analyze the meanings attached to ‘professionalism’ by dancers and dance school owners, discussing the implicit tensions and ambivalence in relation to the state.

## **CULTURAL HERITAGE AND EMERGING WORK PRACTICES**

The collapse of the Soviet Bloc in 1991 determined a series of drastic changes in Cuba, as the country lost the support of its most important economic partner. Cubans faced extreme poverty and changes to the political and economic system became inevitable. Two reforms that occurred in 1993 were of significant importance: Cubans were allowed to own foreign currencies (thus introducing two parallel denominations, access to which would only deepen economic inequalities and social stratification<sup>1</sup>) and to take up private initiatives (*trabajo por cuenta propia* or

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1. The Cuban Convertible Peso (CUC) and the Cuban Peso (CUP) are Cuba’s official currencies. The value of one CUC is roughly equivalent to 1 US dollar and worth 25 times as much as the CUP.

*cuentalpropismo*), which would bring supplementary income to the state budget. The country reopened to foreign visitors and the government invested heavily in touristic infrastructure. Small businesses aimed at renting rooms to tourists were legalized in 1997. Initially depicted by Cuban authorities as a 'necessary evil' (Fernández, 1999), the sector has had a dynamic expansion during the past two decades, becoming one of the main sources of foreign currency and investment. At the same time, although a marginal activity after the victory of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 (Carmona Báez, 2004), *cuentalpropismo* has established itself as one of the key areas within tourism-based Cuban economy. This became especially relevant as the financial crisis intensified, tourism and remittances dropped as a result of the international crisis (Hoffmann, 2010) and the enterprising strategies used to creatively navigate daily hardships came to signal the island's neoliberal turn (Perry, 2016). The broad body of literature addressing recent economic reforms has emphasized public policy towards entrepreneurship and the informal sector (Ritter & Henken, 2015), the social effects of economic adjustment (Espina Prieto, 2004) or the impact of transition on social policy (Mesa-Lago, 2007). However, the relationship between entrepreneurship, commoditized cultural heritage and politics of (self)representation remains under-represented in studies of contemporary Cuba.

Self-employment in Cuba allows a shift from the state sector to the private sector, reshaping work relations and becoming a symbol of economic and political transformations. This is due to the meanings attached to the legalization of independent work, with *cuentalpropistas* being regarded as facilitators of the transition from socialism to a free market economy (Phillips, 2006). Self-employed workers, although they remain under strict regulations and taxation from the state, are characterized by a distinct position outside the state-regulated work, defining new market relations that place them between the state sector and the private sector. New spaces and forms of economic activity as well as emerging work practices, common for post-socialist transitions, create the premises for individual explorations of new spheres of decision-making and self-reliance. While self-employment may not necessarily lead to entrepreneurship, the specificity of the Cuban context and state regulations make development of the enterprise possible only through self-employment (Peters, 2015). Furthermore, its peculiarities lie in the fact that it has been shaped by state socialism and its 'second economy' (Pérez-López, 1995) which grew to provide goods and services the state was unable to provide, thus becoming a structural feature of Cuban economy.

As discussed by Ritter and Henken (2015) in their analysis of Cuban entrepreneurship, restrictions on the private sector have either resulted in a classic 'brain drain', pushing some of Cuba's most educated and skilled citizens abroad, or in a particular form of 'insile', forcing them out of their field of expertise and into much better remunerated work, although perhaps not as socially beneficial. Such downward mobility, which saw doctors, lawyers and teachers working as taxi drivers, waiters or managing private accommodations, happens because professional activities are still prohibited, as well as private business in sectors like education or healthcare. However, some exceptions, although still heavily regulated, have opened the doors for innovation and created the premises for capitalizing on cultural heritage both in Cuba and outside of it.

The above mentioned downward mobility has a counterpart in the cases I am addressing in this article: with no other capital required except for bodily capital, Cubans who become involved in the dance business experience an upward mobility, financial and symbolic, due to the imaginaries and narratives about dance and dancers, created mostly outside the island. By adopting and adapting these narratives, Cubans subject themselves to a 'self-folklorization' process (Klekot, 2014), thus emphasizing the inequalities of international tourism which are made and remade in social practices. For tourists, dance practices become 'embodied souvenirs' (Ana, 2017) which make Cubanness available and, in a way, portable through the body that experienced it. In this way, dance comes to function as a key symbol of cultural tourism, employing the 'rhetoric of the Caribbean body' (Scher, 2011) understood as lightheartedness and sensuality. Not only does dancing provide the venue for the articulation of neo-colonial imaginaries, but it also creates idealized versions of the practice and its practitioners. The island came to be regarded and depicted by international media and the tourism industry as a living history museum, leading to the commodification of Cubanness in its entirety, a phenomenon that can only be regarded in relation to class, gender and racial hierarchies which are deeply rooted in colonialism (Stoler, 1995).

With music and dance at the core of Cuban popular culture, their transnational moves and popularity abroad brought about processes of commodification that are simultaneously cultural and political and played a key role in the development of the tourist sector. Anthropological studies have discussed artistic forms beyond their local anchors, and particularly in the field of dance it was possible to observe the creation of transnational 'social spaces' around specific genres (Waxer, 2002; Pietrobruno, 2006; Davis, 2015). While in the Cuban context the dance business itself is by no means comparable to well-established private initiatives like *casas particulares* or *paladares*<sup>2</sup>, it does occupy a central position in processes related to commoditization of heritage and it illustrates the standardizing regimes that situate dance between cultural heritage and leisure commodity (Pietrobruno, 2009). Performances and transmission of dance traditions become part of the touristic and political uses of culture, strongly determined by economic factors, and operating with essentialist concepts and definitions of identity. Intangible heritage creates socio-economic revenue and the moving body becomes the main tool for accessing tourism economies. Economic realities and social inequalities that stem from contact with foreigners result in creative approaches for financial gain, perpetuating expectations about Cuban fantasies, as dancing bodies become transactional through the maximization of bodily capital (Wacquant, 1995).

Images of 'authentic' music and dance have come to shape to a great extent the touristic modes of visualization and experience, revealing at the same time the processes of commodification and standardization which stand behind these images. Ultimately, they also contributed to the creation of a rapidly growing market for dance and dance teaching.

Over time, dance practices on the island started functioning also as an interface for more complex networks of alternative economies, revealing the rising inequalities and social stratification that arise as direct effects of market socialism (Morris, 2008) creating new spaces, forms, and means for revenue. In the next section I discuss how, against this background, the processes of institutionalization of Cuban dance reveal the fluid relations which stem from encounters on the dance floor between Cuban dancers and foreign visitors and reshape the notion of professionalism.

## THE BUSINESS OF DANCE: WHAT MAKES A PROFESSIONAL?

In 2010 the Cuban government announced it would reduce work in the state sector while at the same time introducing new policies that would facilitate self-employment. The private sector was ultimately supposed to absorb the 'redundant' workers in the state sector, which proved to be rather unrealistic, especially given the stigma that still surrounded the private sector. The list of permitted activities was published in *Gaceta Oficial* no. 12 in October 2010 and included 178 categories (some of them extremely detailed, such as piñata seller or umbrella repair), to be augmented to 181 in 2011 and 201 in 2013, and again reduced to 123 in 2018 through the reorganization of 96 activities under 28 categories. With the new laws, hiring of labor was liberalized and it was permitted to rent facilities from either the state or other citizens in order to set up small enterprises. While all professional activities were still prohibited, there were some exceptions – and under number 101 the list read '*Profesor de música y otras artes*' (Teacher of music and other arts). The first half of 2011 saw a change of tone in official media, and self-employment stopped being deemed a temporary solution. Instead, it was encouraged and by 2014 the number of self-employed workers had tripled compared to 2010 (Henken & Ritter, 2015: 162). The Cuban state intended to introduce a radical overhaul of the Cuban economic system that would favor *cuentapropistas* (Pérez Villanueva, 2015) which was however brought to a halt in August 2017 when the government suspended issuing new licenses to certain businesses until 'the self-employment system has been brought to perfection'.

It was in this climate of uncertainty that I found my friend Mireya in March 2018, worried about the future of her business and the insecurity that came along while waiting for new regulations from the government. For the past four years she had been quite successful in running a dance school owned by her brother, who after a few years spent abroad had returned to Cuba and reclaimed his business. She had lost any source of income and even though she had found a place for a new school, she could not hire people who wanted to work for her because they could not apply for a dance teacher license.

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2. Restaurants run by self-employers.

Two of the teachers who had worked with her in her brother's school chose to follow her and started training the future teachers, so that they would be able to start working once they got their license. In order to be able to register her new business, Mireya had to change her documents so that the address of the new school would appear in her ID as her residence. Despite the hardships she had to navigate, Mireya managed to organize her new school and even receive the first groups of dancing tourists (in other contexts, this would have been labeled as a form of neoliberal governance which compels – or 'empowers' – people to consider themselves entrepreneurial subjects). 'There is no need to wait for the state to give you anything. I am *empresaria* (entrepreneur), I make all the decisions, and the government has no saying in this as long as I pay my taxes', she told me one day in front of the school, while handing out leaflets to passers-by. She did however express her support for another measure which was rumored would be included in the new laws, namely allowing only one license / person. 'It's not normal to have five or seven licenses, you can't cook here and dance there, you either cook or you dance'.

Later that year, on July 10<sup>th</sup>, *Gaceta Oficial* no. 35 would shed some light – and cast a lot of doubt – on the new laws and regulations regarding self-employment. The vice minister of Work and Social Security, Marta Elena Feitó Cabrera, clarified during a press briefing that the new measures did not mean self-employment was taking steps back, but it was being carried out in a more orderly manner (Figueredo Reinaldo & Extremera San Martín, 2018): 'There are workers who own a cafeteria and at the same time they have a license for manicure or for producing and selling shoes. In practice, this person is the owner of several businesses and this is neither the essence nor the spirit of self-employment, which consists of workers carrying out their activities on a daily basis'. In her support of the government's decision to limit the number of licenses one could have, Mireya expressed a certain degree of trust in the regulatory framework of the state, yet with labor security shifted towards the individual and instability of income she found herself in a position to somewhat circumvent regulations.

As far as the activity of dance schools and dance teachers was concerned, the new regulations described it as following: it is forbidden for teachers of music and other arts to constitute schools or academies, they cannot issue graduation certificates, work is individual therefore they cannot contract the services of other teachers or instructors, nor organize events with or without a competitive character.

The new dispositions came into life as of December 7<sup>th</sup>, but already in November they were all everyone ever talked about in the schools where I conducted research. In a display of distrust that characterized much of everyday life under socialism (cf. Verdery, 1996) the actual legislative text was deemed less important and relevant than its various interpretations which circulated widely among dancers, who would voice their concerns over what they had heard from their peers about the new laws. Mireya expressed these worries one afternoon after a group lesson which involved ten of her dancers: 'Only three of my teachers have licenses. And now they say that they will check who is a trained dancer and who is not. I think it's because the government didn't get enough money from the dance schools, we pay taxes in Cuban pesos so it's not profitable for them'. The only bright side she saw, in the eventuality they would be allowed to continue without the requirement of trained dancers, was that she had managed to change her documents and thus appeared to be renting out the space to the dancers teaching in her school. In this way, in case of control from authorities, it would be easy to justify that they are in fact doing 'individual work', thus complying with the rules. Sofia, the owner of another dance school, found a different way to circumvent regulations: 'Most schools will have to shut down because there are these new requirements for teachers to have graduated from ISA<sup>3</sup> or from ENA in order to work in dance schools. But this is not a problem for us, 70% of my dancers graduated from one of these institutions. I always said I wanted professional dancers, long before the new laws were announced. Now, if an inspector comes to check, even if he spends the entire day at the school, instructors who are not graduates can be presented as assistants, so it is not a problem'. Their reactions illustrate the type of accommodating relation that arises as total avoidance of the state is seldom possible (de Soto, 1989). But they also indicate the role of the state not just in legalizing a particular activity, but in legitimizing it and making it more profitable through the sense of security and responsibility implied by the notion of 'professional'.

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3. Instituto Superior de Arte and Escuela Nacional de Arte are two of the most prestigious schools for the arts established by the Cuban government.

This became particularly relevant in the past years, with the increased demand for ‘experiential tourism’ (Salazar, 2011). Cultural practices and symbols that ensured recognition and revenue gained meaning both locally and internationally,

A few years ago I noticed that whenever I was being offered dance lessons in a dance school the main argument put forward in order to convince me was that of the license. ‘I am a dance teacher, I have my license and everything’ was the usual conversation opener. But as more dance schools started functioning especially in Havana, the argument of the license stopped being enough. Unlike *casas particulares* and *paladares*, legality was no longer the main concern nor the main argument used in order to attract potential new clients – professionalism was. This was explained by Daniel, a dancer who shortly worked with Mireya’s school, through a failure of the state to control and regulate some key aspects of self-employment: ‘Anyone can be a dance teacher in a school, you don’t have to prove your expertise or your qualifications to get a license. But I have all my papers at home, I can prove at any moment, to anyone, that I am a professional, I graduated’. A similar point of view was expressed by Rogelio, choreographer and owner of a dance school: ‘Nobody asks for any proof or documents [of formal education in the field of dance], you just go and say you want a license to be a teacher of music and other arts. And they did this in all sectors, cell phone repair, hair dressers – nobody checks your skills. Nobody but the market. When people realize that you don’t know your job, they will stop seeking your services. But with dance it’s more difficult because sometimes tourists don’t know if they were taught well or not. Especially beginners can’t tell the difference between a professional and a fraud, they can be tricked easily’.

Rogelio’s comment draws the attention towards the regulatory mechanisms of the market, which can establish and confirm one as a professional where the state fails to acknowledge the differences between practitioners. In fact, one’s ability to understand the market and the demands that come from tourists is understood as the key towards achieving success and is very often presented in opposition to the state’s lack of flexibility and capacity to innovate. Two of the dancers who followed Mireya at her new school pointed out the differences between two models of running the business, the ‘socialist’ one and the ‘capitalist’ one, making it clear that from their point of view a private business should adopt a capitalist model. Tania described the situation of another school they used to work with: ‘The only ones working were the two of us, the rest were all the time on their phones, if I said let’s make a video, let’s do something to promote the school, they said not now, later. And the owner did not know how to run a business. So even though it was a private school, she wanted to run it like a socialist one’. She then went on to explain that if she had no clients for a few days, she would usually go out dancing, while at the same time handing out leaflets and business cards. But when clients eventually did show up, the school owner would assign them to the dancers who had been the longest without any work. Eduardo, Tania’s partner at the time, made the point that ‘when you have a business which does not belong to the state you need to have a capitalist way of thinking, you need to think more about the business than about the personal problems of the people who work for you. Let’s say we both work for the same school and you are a much better dancer than I am, you teach better, but I constantly have problems and I’m complaining to the owner, so she will give me all the clients and leave you with no work for days because I have problems. This is very unprofessional’<sup>4</sup>.

Functioning outside the state-regulated system, many of the self-employed dancers and dance school owners enjoy a new found independence and a sense of freedom that the state sector lacks. But at the same time they bring their contribution to the creation of new social norms characterized by increased individualism and autonomy (Ewick & Silbey, 2003). The ‘self-steering’ capacities of the individual designate new rules for everyday life: initiative, ambition, personal responsibility, in an attempt to maximize one’s human capital (Rose, 1996).

Another recurring aspect in discussions around the professionalization of dance teaching is the increased flexibility and readiness to adhere to an ever-changing schedule, based on the demands

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4. My findings converge with those of Rosenberg Weinreb (2009), who in her study of Cuban ‘consumer-citizens’ points out that while abandoning an analysis built around binary categories might turn out to be an appealing intellectual endeavor for a retrospective analysis of the former Soviet Union, these binaries are still somewhat present and relevant in the daily lives of Cubans and in fact characterize this transition.

of the clients. Whenever I would apologize for being late for a dance lesson (having somewhat internalized a more relaxed approach to time and schedules), my teachers would explain that while the client can be late, the teacher cannot, as this would be considered unprofessional and be reflected in the reviews left by the clients. As opposed to being employed in the state sector and therefore having a somewhat fixed schedule, work in the private sector means adapting to a different kind of lifestyle, one that puts the clients and their needs ahead of one's private life, personal plans and priorities. Labor routines suffer restructuring and the changes in work discipline erase the lines between work time and free time (Chelcea, 2014).

Many of the dancers I worked with pointed out that their free time had become practically inexistent, since the time they didn't spend teaching was dedicated to finding new clients. Such was the case of Merced, owner of a dance school and *casa particular*, whom I'd meet quite often at salsa parties in one of the most popular venues in Havana: 'I am a professional, I graduated from ISA, and at times I can be a week without anyone. If you don't have a [travel] agency or a foreigner to send you students, your only option is to be out in the street all the time'. For Merced and for many other dancers, having graduated from a state institution is an extra legitimization which should at least theoretically ensure a steadier flux of clients, this differentiating them from the teachers who lack this kind of formal training. However, in most cases dancers cannot rely on their expertise or experience alone to build their client base, and it is widely acknowledged that international cooperation with a travel agency or a dance school abroad can increase the number of clients (especially given the rising popularity of 'dance trips' or organized tours that place a strong focus on dancing and include lessons and parties in the program). The desired / targeted client is the tourism organizer who would ensure a steady and significantly higher income, but in reality many schools rely on individual clients who find information on the Internet or simply happen to be passing by the school, asking for dance lessons on the spot or making appointments from one day to the next. Social media came to play a very important part in running the business: before opening the new school, Mireya had already made sure she had hired a team of professionals to build the school website and manage social media accounts; reviews on Tripadvisor and Facebook comments were carefully monitored by school managers, who would sometimes employ strategies the dancers themselves disapproved of, just to make sure the clients would be content. Sofia recalled such a situation during one of our interviews: 'When one client couldn't have his lesson as planned, I offered him two free lessons, as a proof of courtesy. And I had to explain the teachers that even if the client doesn't pay, they still get their money, but this is a way to make sure the client leaves happy and writes a good review. Most of the times they don't understand how this works, because they just want their money, they don't care about anything else'.

These professionalization strategies discussed above were ultimately aimed at ensuring international visibility (most often measured in reviews, popularity on social media, and reservations coming from tourists who had either seen videos of the teachers dancing, or had come across the school's website) and a somewhat constant workflow, at least during high season. But at the same time the growing demand for dance re-emphasized a differentiation between two groups of practitioners: those who learned to dance from family and friends, and those who acquired it through formal instruction (McMains, 2013). This, in turn, generated a series of ambiguities around the very notion of professionalism and rendered the apparently clear-cut distinction between state and private somewhat less clear-cut, as I discuss in the following section.

## **BAILARÍN, BAILADOR, CALLEJERO, INFLADOR**

In 2012, while doing research among rumba practitioners in Matanzas, one of my closest acquaintances at the time shared with me the good news of her grandson Omar being admitted into ENA. 'We are all empirical dancers in this family', she told me, 'and he has been dancing ever since he was very little. But he is the first of us to get into ENA, even though others have tried before him'. As I returned to Matanzas in the following years, she would often criticize the knowledge being passed on to her grandson and his colleagues, since in her opinion the teachers were superficial in explaining Afro-Cuban folklore, to which she referred as 'our heritage, our roots'. However she did point out that as a *bailarín profesional* (professional dancer) he would have more opportunities to find work in a dance company after graduation.

Six years later, I met Omar on the set of *Bailando en Cuba*, a TV program / competition aimed at finding Cuba's most talented young dancers while at the same time promoting the island's dance heritage. He was going to perform with some of his colleagues and then he was off to work in one of the hotels in Vedado, one of the more affluent neighborhoods in the capital, major tourist attraction with a bustling nightlife. 'I work as a choreographer for a dance company and we have shows four times a week, it's going really well. Before this I was in another company, we would train a lot but there was no work'. Omar was not the only one to draw a clear line between trainings and actual work. Many of the dancers I worked with pointed out that being in a dance company means - in the best case scenario - a salary of a few hundred CUP and additional money when the company is contracted for a show. This kind of insecurity led many of them to seek employment with the somewhat more profitable dance schools aimed at foreign audiences, where, as explained by Danaysi, 'you don't have to wait for the end of the month to get your money. And besides, clients take you to places you can't afford, because they are too expensive. As a teacher you work a lot, but it's not the hard work of a *bailarín profesional*'.

A few days later I met Omar again at Casa de la cultura in the neighborhood of Centro Habana. I was there with a group of tourists from Poland who had come to Cuba to take part in dance, music, and personal development workshops, organized by Anna, a dance teacher I had taken classes with a few years ago in Warsaw. Omar was there to help his friend Yordanis, who would lead the class together with Anna. Just like Omar, Yordanis works as a choreographer for a dance company and for this occasion he had to find five other male dancers, so that every woman in the group would have a partner. Before the lesson started, I asked Anna why she didn't choose any of the salsa schools for her project. 'I know Yordanis and his work, but I also know how they work in those dance schools and I am not interested. I wanted professional dancers for my women, not some random guys from the street who say they are dance teachers'.

The lesson had a different structure than the one I was used to from the dance schools: there was no warm-up, no exercises to prepare the body, no breaking down of the basic steps into smaller sequences. After the lesson Yordanis explained that none of these things made sense and they were just inventions for tourists, because Cubans learn how to dance without stretching their muscles before and after class. Halfway throughout the lesson he asked his fellow dancers to lead better and stronger, because the women didn't know how to dance, so they didn't understand their partners' signals. He went on to tell them that this was not real dance learning because time was too short and the point of the lesson was to give the women an idea about Cuban culture. On our way back to Old Havana, Anna told me: 'I didn't want to say anything to Yordanis because I didn't want to spoil the mood, but I specifically asked for professional dancers. And you saw, some of them didn't even know how to lead'. A few days later I met Yordanis at the end of his training session with his dance company. We talked about tourists, dance, and teaching, and he explained: 'Teaching tourists is monotonous and repetitive and not challenging enough for a *bailarín*. Sometimes *bailadores*<sup>5</sup> are better for teaching tourists because *bailarines* don't know. They will teach you what they learned, they have very good technique, *pero no bailan callejero* (their dancing does not have the street style)'.

In the previous section I discussed issues related to legality and the roles played by the state and by the emerging dance market in defining a professional. But for many Cubans involved in the dance business, notions of professionalism are strongly related to formal training and to an education completed in a state institution (this also holds true, to a certain extent, for more generalized perceptions, not only those of the people involved in dance teaching). While in some cases professionalism is understood as a marker of an entrepreneurial self, in many others it has less to do with business and more to do with the chosen career path of someone who decided to pursue a degree in dance. From this perspective, there is a clear cut distinction between the two categories mentioned by Yordanis: *bailarín* is the professional dancer with a formal education, whereas *bailador* is a dancer who has not benefited from formal training, but the notion itself does not imply any qualitative judgment on the skills and abilities of the *bailador*. What Anna expected when she asked Yordanis for professional dancers was, in fact, highly skilled *bailadores*. Yordanis made sure he offered what she had requested (as in the end this was a business opportunity he did not want to miss). Professionalism was what sealed the deal - but their ideas and understandings of the notion did not coincide.

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5. While both *bailarín* and *bailador* can be translated as 'dancer', the meanings attached to them differ, as I explain further on.

Just like Yordanis and Omar taught tourists from time to time while still focusing on their careers as choreographers / dancers, Lianet, who teaches at ISA, told me she would work with travel agencies every now and then, thus earning in one hour the same amount as she received from the government for a month of teaching. She also pointed out that for a *bailarín profesional* there is no professional development in just teaching tourists – although it's easy money, a professional will have a career to think about, new choreographies to create, and will seek out performances that give more visibility. At the same time, the dance market is not necessarily compatible with the background and formation of professional dancer: 'Salsa<sup>6</sup> is not something you are being taught at ISA or ENA. It's a popular dance and even if you have such classes they are usually superficial, just to have an idea. Because these are dances that Cubans learn at home, or with our friends, everything you see happening in dance schools now is a methodological invention. It exists because there is a market for it'. While teaching foreigners is a remunerated activity and more often than not more lucrative than dancing professionally, there are other financial aspects that draw the line between the universe of *bailarines* and *bailadores*. They were clarified by Rogelio after a lesson, when he also explained what he believed to be the essential difference between the two categories, and added a third one: *el bailarín* comes from the school, from academia, has theoretical and practical knowledge; *el bailador* knows how to dance, hears the music, knows when to start<sup>7</sup>, he comes from the street (*viene de la calle*) but is not the same as *callejero*, who usually doesn't know how to dance, hears the beat but starts whenever he wants without paying attention to the musical phrase. 'Havana is definitely a city for *bailadores*', he told me. 'The dance schools are constantly looking for teachers, all the festivals are looking for teachers, a *bailador* goes to a festival and is content with free admission and with showing his dance skills. Even if they don't come from academia, they are usually good dancers and have many students. They are out every night, they need to be in this world all the time. For a *bailarín*, dancing is his job – he wants money for his work, and usually there's no money for this'.

Nighttime entertainment, centered on music and dance events, provides the venue for further delimitations and constant negotiations of identity. Night-time interactions in Havana, juxtaposed with an imagined, fantasized Cuba, and images of romantic love created and communicated through dance, make tourists susceptible to being seduced by the scripted performances (cf. Grazian, 2008) articulated in spaces of cultural interactions of tourists and locals.

Especially since tourism reinforces the idea that in Cuba everyone dances, dance schools usually take the responsibility of creating 'safe spaces' for their clients also outside class. In such contexts, professionalism gains yet another meaning: taking responsibility for the client, making sure they do not become the target of *infladores* – self-professed dancers / dance teachers with no knowledge or skills but with a strong presence which can quite often be deceiving. Just how deceiving was explained to me one night at a party where Noel had accompanied one of his clients: 'Sometimes I go out with my clients and I tell them it is fine if they want to dance with someone else, but if you want to leave with the guy, you need to let me know. Of course I know many of them [of the men who usually attend salsa parties], you can find respectful people, but many times girls don't understand that guys have other intentions, that they want money, or sometimes just to be with a foreigner. There is a difference between *I love you* and *I like you*. *I like you* pretty much always means I like your money, I like your phone'.

Such protective behavior is seen as a professional obligation, but it becomes the carrier of multi-layered messages, open to identities in the making, because more often than not the strong discourse around professionalization is built not so much around what a professional is, but around what a professional is not: 'A professional dancer is not one of those guys from the street who always look for girls. This kills the image of the professional', was a comment made by Ricardo, one of my dance teachers from Sofia's school. In this way, responsibility for one's clients is not only a strategy for defending the image of the business and ensuring an overall positive experience, sheltered from the nuisance that may occur as a result of random street interactions. It becomes a means of self-affirmation and ultimately self-esteem for the dancers and for how their subjectivities are understood and articulated.

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6. The term is used by Cubans to refer to a dance style otherwise known on the island as *casino*, which came to be known internationally as *Cuban salsa*, and was adopted as such especially by dance schools aimed at foreign tourists.

7. In salsa, the basic step is done to a quick-quick-slow, quick-quick-slow rhythm on beats 1-2-3, 5-6-7 of an 8 count, and what is referred to as 'knowing when to start' means finding the beat for taking the first step, informally known as 'finding the 1'.

These themes, which are central to the way dancers and dance teachers perceive themselves and their work, relate to the phenomenon of *jineterismo*, widely discussed in Cuba and often considered a consequence of tourism (Rundle, 2001; Simoni, 2016). The term literally means horseback riding, but it is used to define hustling and / or prostitution. The persons engaging in *jineterismo* (called *jineteros* or *jineteras*) offer sex, company, guidance and sometimes goods (usually cigars but not only) in exchange for money, meals or a night out. Often such engagements with tourists are expected to lead to marriage and, subsequently, the possibility of leaving the country. The phenomenon is also perceived as a very delicate issue for the country's socialist government, constituting an affront to revolutionary morality. Relationships are seen as either purely sexual – usually between Afro-Cuban women and male tourists (cf. Fusco, 1998) or romantic, lacking economic connotations (Fernandez, 1999). When it comes to Cuban men and foreign women, such relationships are often framed as 'romantic involvements', although not excluding the economic component, and they reinforce sexualized racist fantasies that attract female (sex) tourists to the Caribbean (Kempadoo, 2004; Simoni, 2015).

But *jineterismo* brings about not just issues related to economic inequalities, it reveals divisions related to class, race, and gender, and is frequently framed as challenging to Cuban notions of morality. In explaining the distinction between *bailarín* and *bailador*, Lianet referenced the low cultural level as a differentiating aspect between the two: 'They [*bailadores*] have a very low cultural level and many times they are in the business for what comes along with the dance: the money, finding a foreigner and leaving the country, so teaching salsa is rarely about teaching salsa'. The late 1990s appear to have made the moralizing argument against *jineterismo* a dominant one (Kempadoo, 1999): usually white, middle class Cubans tend to consider it a manifestation of a 'low cultural level' (*bajo nivel cultural*), in general ascribed to Afro-Cubans, thus revealing the racialized ideas of morality and behavior.

For many dance instructors, it became important to emphasize their opposition to *bailadores*, *jineteros* or *infladores*, and at the same time to point out that simply being immersed in music and dance is not enough for tourists to learn how to dance. Instead, more and more schools started including in their offers the service of 'taxi dancer', thus giving clients the possibility to be accompanied at dance parties or concerts by a teacher, for a fee that covers entry tickets to the venue chosen by the client, drinks, and a few hours of dancing (usually from two to four). This would help tourists practice what they learned in class but in a safe, secure environment, which would not only protect them against possible deceit, but would be a guarantee for the quality of the dancing (most of the dancers I worked with explained this as an attempt at avoiding a scenario where tourists would go to a party and only dance with people with poor dancing skills<sup>8</sup>). I discussed this with Isabel one day and she promptly commented: 'The only difference between taxi dancers and *jineteros* is that *jineteros* don't have t-shirts with a logo. Besides, *jineteros* can always choose how far they want to go, how much time they spend with tourists. Dancers don't have this possibility, they are like *jineteros* hired by the dance school, and they probably get less money anyway'. While financially such activities do pay off, giving dance instructors the possibility of earning in one night the equivalent of half a month's state salary (prices for taxi dancing usually start at 15 CUC), night work is inscribed in an ongoing circle of objectification, (mis)representation and emotional entanglements, shedding light on the ways in which the individual is locked into a mode of constant promotion, while the self becomes commodified in social spaces of self-affirmation.

## CONCLUSIONS

With heritage and tourism functioning as collaborative industries (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998), they offer the venue for the negotiation of memory, identity, and social mobility, articulated in spaces of cultural interaction of tourists and locals where 'authenticity' functions as a tool for legitimizing and validating the tourist experience. Music and dance become part of a set of key symbols

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8. This strategy employed more and more often by many dance schools caused quite a stir among *balladores* and split the dance school world in two, as most salsa venues became populated with groups belonging to dance schools, where people would usually stick together and only dance with the people they came with. This was criticized by some dancers as a deterioration of the dance scene which became less interactive and lost its fun and spontaneity. As far as dance schools are concerned, some were adept of the 'dancing with everyone in order to really learn' strategy, while others insisted one should try to dance as much as possible with people who know how to dance.

that define the tourist experience before it actually happens and during the experience itself. While for the tourism industry and for tourists themselves the representational emphasis is more on the imagined attributes of the island, Cubans use aspects of this discourse in order to promote and develop initiatives deeply rooted in pragmatic motivations. The main aim is to have access to foreign currency, in a country where access to legal employment in the tourism industry is the fastest way towards the accumulation of capital.

Against this background, the institutionalization of dance related practices (and particularly teaching aimed at foreign tourists) is related to the (re)conceptualization of work and productivity within emerging small businesses. The reforms introduced by the Cuban government, allowing self-employment, brought along a strong discourse of professionalization and new work practices in the field of dance. Becoming a dance teacher in private school aimed at international tourists has a twofold outcome: on the one hand, it gives access to foreign currency, therefore making it possible to earn more than in state jobs (as some of them simply do not possess the capital required to set up a different kind of business which would require greater investment).

On the other hand, this type of mobilization of cultural resources through tourist encounters creates the premises for capitalizing on cultural heritage both in Cuba and outside of it. At the same time, it illustrates a certain dynamic that to a certain extent mirrors the downward mobility experienced by highly skilled professionals in the state sector who choose to work in the more profitable private sector. While this is true mostly in the case of trained dancers coming from academia, dance aficionados without a formal training experience an upward mobility, which is simultaneously financial and symbolic. This prestige and symbolic capital are reinforced by ideas that circulate around Cuban dance and by the ability of dancers themselves to quickly adapt, adopt, and capitalize on these narratives. Through these processes, a certain ambivalence towards the state emerges: with dancers displaying similarities to other self-employed workers in their ability to circumvent regulations and navigate an intricate legal and taxation system, they also rely on the state as a legitimizing tool. While for other self-employed workers the relation with the state is usually only a matter of legality or formalization of their activity, dancers turn to the state in order to emphasize their professionalism, as a result of proper training in one of the higher education institutions. In this way, the lines between notions of state and private become more blurred and the processes related to the commodification of heritage reveal the inner tensions that arise in the wake of political and social change.

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