

Between precarity and prestige. Migrant dance labor in times of crisis

This project is an anthropological exploration of professional and personal journeys at the intersection of dance and migration. In analyzing the connection between mobility and artistic work, the project focuses on Cuban migrants who work as dancers and dance teachers in Europe (Italy and Germany will be my main field sites for these case studies). This perspective will be enriched by an analysis of the prerequisites for mobility, by focusing on Cubans who (still) live and work in Cuba and who became involved in the dance business as a potential pathway for mobility.

Younger generations of Cubans, disenchanted with the Cuban Revolution and its promises, having no affective ties to revolutionary ideology, envision themselves as future migrants in a world of better opportunities outside Cuba. Dance careers provide them with an opportunity to access more than just the international dance scene, associated with notions of prestige and success. In many instances, they function as an entry point for the European job market, in an inversion of the global hierarchies that shape dancers' mobilities. Due to widely circulating, stereotypical imaginaries about Cubans, these dancers find it easier than other migrants to establish themselves on the labor market. Salsa dance commerce currently accounts for the largest percentage of the global dance business. In the course of this project, I will examine how notions of success, notoriety, and recognition inscribe Cubans in a tacit hierarchy of migrants in the context of Europe's post 'refugee crisis'. This hierarchy is further accentuated by the value attributed to Cuban masculinities on the sexual marketplace, an aspect which will provide the basis for an extensive analysis of skeptical (and less skeptical) attitudes toward refugees and migrants, in the context of broader considerations on race and ethnicity.

Although Cuban migration is commonly associated with the established Cuban-American community in the US, the European case reveals different dynamics worth investigating. Spain is the main destination for Cuban migration, given the historical ties between the two countries and migratory regimes that allow acquiring of Spanish citizenship. My focus, however, will be on the two other main European destinations for Cuban migrants, precisely because they lack or display fewer of the elements of the Spanish path (family reunification, but also the role of language proficiency in the process of integration) and also because they were two of the most important markets generating tourism to Cuba before the pandemic, which contributed to the emergence of certain imaginaries related to tourists' lifestyles, notions of 'good life', and consumption desires and practices (the Italian case is the most prominent).

My interest in investigating dance-related practices in migratory contexts stems from some of my observations during various stages of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Cuba over the past ten years. The novelty of this project lies in its approach to dance understood as labor in migratory contexts, therefore enriching scholarship on dance which until now has focused on privileged migration or conceptualized diasporic dances as ways of either maintaining or breaking up with tradition. The project contributes to the field of anthropology of migration and recent debates on transnationalism by challenging the assumptions of Cuban exceptionalism, grounded in studies of Cuban migration to the US.

The general research objectives for this project can be achieved during a three-year study project, which will entail twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork (divided between Cuba, Italy, and Germany) and a research stay at the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (Berlin). The project draws on several methodological approaches, such as multi-sited ethnography, embodied research, digital ethnography, and feminist and reflexive ethnography. The main methods for collecting data will be participant observation among Cuban migrants in my chosen field sites, unstructured and semi-structured interviews with elements of life histories for which researchers will be selected based on participant observation and chain-referral sampling, and discourse analysis and review of policy documents/media outlets. All research methods will be employed following the discipline's code of ethics.

The findings of this research project will be disseminated in academic journals and during national and international conferences. In addition, a bilingual publication aimed at a general public will focus on the life histories of my research participants.