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A Very Modern Tradition: Costa Rican *Swing Criollo* as Urban Popular Folklore

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A Very Modern Tradition: Costa Rican *Swing Criollo* as Urban Popular Folklore

by

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Dedication

To my mother, whose endless generosity, tireless work ethic, and commitment to her students never ceases to inspire me; to my father, who I have equally admired for his love of family, respect for honest and honest work, and lifetime of service to his community; to my older sister Jaime and the support and advice she has always offered; and to my younger sister Kati, who has unfairly underrated herself but will soon be outshining everyone. Finally, for whatever it's worth as a symbolic gesture, I dedicate my present and future work on swing criollo to the dancers who have worked to bring this popular dance to national attention and, in doing so, change the nature of folklore.

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Abstract

A Very Modern Tradition: Costa Rican *Swing Criollo* as Urban Popular Folklore

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

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Over the past ten years, the Costa Rican dance style known as *swing criollo* has gone from relative obscurity to acceptance as national heritage. In the 1970s and 1980s, it was considered a dance of the urban working-class chusma, or "riff-raff," because of its associations with the working-class music of *cumbia* and San José's seedy dance salons. Starting in the early 2000s, however, an active campaign of nationalization and folklorization by dance instructors brought the dance to the status of national patrimony. This was achieved through dance classes, festival performances, the creation of a short video documentary, and the work of the dance company *La Cuna del Swing* to canonize the dancers and stages of swing criollo. The folklorization of swing criollo at first seems to be a top-down phenomenon that suggests little agency among working-class dancers; they have been personified in the national imaginary as exotic Others, an urban folk from an earlier generation that now exists only to perform and embody that tradition. On further examination, the folklorization of swing criollo represents a new sort of folklore, one that is highly contested and engages in a different discourse of authenticity, some

influenced by dancers themselves. Swing criollo as a "modern" and "urban" form has allowed for self-mythmaking among the dancers of the self-proclaimed "old guard" that invented the style. It also legitimizes the dance style in its popular form, as opposed to older projections of folklore that that place tradition in opposition to modernity. I examine discourses surrounding the nationalization of swing criollo as well as the negotiations of spaces of culture through which swing's legitimization unfolded. I conclude by suggesting that ethnomusicologists should continue to theorize folklore's changing nature as it is contested and re-defined to include popular, urban, and modern cultural expressions.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

On November 30, 2011, President Laura Chinchilla of Costa Rica signed an executive decree declaring *swing criollo*[1] "one of the dance expressions of intangible cultural heritage in Costa Rica."[2] This is the latest in a long series of events to officially legitimize the style, long associated with the country's working-class "riff-raff." The official elevation or embrace of the culture of a subaltern group is a longstanding trope in the formation of modern nation-states, one that has played out in various processes of folklorization as nationalists struggle to define the cultural roots of a people. But chalking up the legitimization of "native swing" to a one-dimensional process involving the creation of national folklore sells the story of the genre short. There exists in any declaration of cultural heritage a multiplicity of agents, ideologies, and politics, some of which in Costa Rica will be explored here.

I was introduced to swing criollo during a short stay in San José during the summer of 2011. This six-week trip was part of an independent study to complete my Bachelor's degree in music education and Spanish. During an interview with local producer, arranger, and salsa musician Bernardo Quesada, he brought the dance to my attention as an expressive form that, in his words, "only exists in Costa Rica."[3] As a non-dancer myself who stayed in the country for a short time, I was unable to approach the topic meaningfully; it was always an interesting footnote to a trip that I hesitate to call "fieldwork." Later, after learning of the dance's international diffusion, however, I felt a

[1] The term translates to "native swing" or "creole/creolized swing." The implications of the terms "swing" and "*criollo*" in the Costa Rican context are considered in Chapter 2. I will refrain from italicizing the term throughout this report.

[2] Gerardo González, "Es Oficial: El Swing Criollo Ya Es Patrimonio Inmaterial de Costa Rica," *La Nación,* May 4, 2012, http://www.nacion.com/ocio/musica/emswingem-patrimonio-inmaterial-Costa-Rica_0_1266473455.html. Original: "una de las expresiones dancísticas del patrimonio cultural inmaterial de Costa Rica"

[3] Personal interview, Bernardo Quesada. San José, Costa Rica, June 22, 2011.

compulsion to investigate further the means by which it seemingly exploded in popularity within such a short span of time, no more than ten years.

The study of swing criollo has much to teach us about the relationships between cultural policy, class representation, and national identity. While discussing my research with people outside of musicological circles, I have often encountered the argument that *all* dance, or artistic expression more generally, is most vibrant or originates with classes of lower social status. This discourse emerges in the history of swing criollo as well. Through a close analysis of the genre's elevation to national folklore, one can better understand how working-class origins become canonized and fetishized in the production of heritage, as well as how subaltern groups may choose to resist folklorization or incorporate it to their advantage. Since Costa Rica utilizes swing criollo in touristic displays, I also look at the implicit messages in terms of race, class, and environment that the Costa Rican state sends to foreigners through these shows.

Very briefly, I would like to outline the history of swing criollo. As Quesada explained to me, swing criollo is a hybrid style of American swing and cumbia dancing set to the music of cumbia. It was first performed by working-class Costa Ricans who are often described as "*la chusma*," or "riff-raff," a category that includes taxi drivers, domestic servants, factory workers, and prostitutes. According to popular history, the chusma danced US-style swing, a form that was prohibited in the more respectable dance salons, until swing fell out of fashion around the 1960s.[4] By the 1970s, working-class Costa Ricans who still enjoyed swing dancing adapted the dance to *cumbia*, a music originating in Colombia that had gained a strong international reputation as a genre of the

[4] Swing dancing's popularity in Costa Rica stands in contrast to other Latin American countries, where it has not traditionally been as popular. This has not been discussed at length in existing literature on swing criollo, but musician Francisco Tristán suggests that many Costa Ricans were exposed to swing dancing through 1940s war movies that were widely available in the country. The movies often featured swing dancing and big bands such as that of Glenn Miller. (quoted in López and Salazar, 119)

working classes throughout Latin America. Those who danced swing to cumbia in the seedy dance salons of San José during the 1970s and 1980s would later become known as the *vieja guardia*, or "old guard," of swing criollo.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, swing dancing set to cumbia attained its first national exposure through the television show *Fantástico y sus Piratas del Ritmo*, a show that featured many popular styles of dance. One of the performers on this show, Carlos "Gringo" Moreira, who would later become one of the key members of the "old guard," known for his group dancing with several women at once, one of the key elements of early swing criollo. It was also around this time that television shows and dance salons began organizing couples' dance competitions, a feature of swing criollo and Costa Rican television that is still important to this day. Finally, the early 1990s saw the founding of many dance academies in the country, such as Merecumbé, that would later come to be one of the most important spaces where swing criollo (in addition to other popular dances such as salsa, cumbia, and hip-hop) would be taught to middle-class Costa Ricans.

In the early 2000s, dance instructor Ligia Torijano began hosting free dance lessons at the discotheque Karymar, later known as "*La Cuna del Swing*" ("the cradle of swing"). A long-time swing criollo dancer and later researcher, Torijano's performance and educational work has been central to national recognition of swing criollo as urban folklore. The name La Cuna del Swing is now shared between the salon itself and Torijano's dance company. In the last ten years, swing criollo began to receive more attention from national and international institutions, including Costa Rica's *Compañía Nacional de Danza* ("National Dance Company"). La Cuna del Swing has undertaken several international tours and regularly appears at arts and folklore festivals; Merecumbé's dance company has also expanded and now offers swing criollo lessons across the country. The increased visibility of swing criollo resulted in its declaration as

national patrimony in 2011, and international presentations of swing criollo by state agencies now try to attract tourists to the country. Young middle-class Costa Ricans now dance swing criollo in clubs such as Karymar, though most of the old salons where the dance originated exist only in the collective memory of the "old guard." It is the process of nationalization that I investigate here.

This project is not a fieldwork-based ethnography. I do not claim personal experience with swing criollo and will not attempt to analyze much of the physical movement associated with the genre. Instead, I would like to analyze the discourses around this dance's rise in popularity, as well as discourses implicit in the presentation of swing criollo. I focus on the politics of Costa Rican nationalism, especially as manifest through the presentations of swing criollo by the Costa Rican state and swing's endorsement by the Ministry of Culture; the class rhetoric associated with dance academies that began to multiply in the country in the early 1990s; the role that gender, class, race, and region play in performances of swing criollo; and the contestations of space that occur when, for instance, a dance troupe performs a three-part choreography of swing criollo with themes derived from opera, cumbia, and hip-hop sources in a national theater. I write with the following questions in mind: how can a working-class dance style be performed in a manner that recognizes the subaltern roots of the dance in non-exoticizing ways? How does ideology manifest itself visually and sonically in this case? Most importantly, how can future dance and music researchers, in my own country or elsewhere, work to promote cultural policies that respond more effectively to the ethical dilemmas of cultural appropriation? This is not a wholesale endorsement of ethnomusicologists' involvement in government policies, but rather an analysis of the processes of folklorization as they occur in a single Central American country. While nationalist projects of folklore often carry significant ideological baggage, I suggest that

swing criollo's folklorization has been in large part a push-back against traditionalist and primitivist folkloric rhetoric. The performances I analyze reveal the ways in which hegemonic cultural forms are contested in contemporary practice.

I have been trained as a musician, and because music scholarship is generally more abundant than dance scholarship, I will be looking at musical nationalism to inform my analysis. I would like to begin by providing a brief introduction to Costa Rican music literature. Writings on Costa Rican music generally focus on one of three general categories. Some essays focus on the development of the European art tradition, valorizing the struggles of those who, during the last two centuries, have engaged in various projects of perceived cultural uplift. This discourse, which takes as its basis the well-worn trope of European classical music's "universal" appeal, was rejuvenated in the late 1970s when the National Symphonic Orchestra was disbanded and reformed. A second area of analysis is that of indigenous and Afro-descendant Costa Rican musicians who are often considered the country's racialized Others, a foreign anomaly in a country where many people consider the people to be of pure Spanish heritage. More recently, popular music has become an object of writing on Costa Rica, especially popular music of the early twentieth century. All of these topics are explored at greater length below.

COSTA RICAN MUSIC LITERATURE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

To understand music literature in Costa Rica, it is necessary to understand 1) the national narrative of Costa Rica as an exceptional country, with accompanying rhetoric sometimes referred to as a "myth of whiteness," and 2) the formation of Costa Rican national identity in the early twentieth century more generally. In opposition to the tri-ethnic model of cultural and racial hybridity that came to define much of Latin American

racial discourse, Costa Rica has defined itself in terms of racial "purity," locating a national "folk" in the rural province of Guanacaste. In *The Costa Rica Reader*, Palmer and Molina frame these topics as follows:

> In the century after 1880, nationalist historians have forged three myths in particular about [the origin of the nation, myths] frequently repeated uncritically by visitors and American scholars. One is that when the Spanish arrived, they found but a tiny indigenous population in Costa Rica. The second holds that the Spanish conquest of the area was essentially peaceful. The third, more complex, myth of Costa Rican exceptionalism claims that the lack of indigenous people to serve as laborers and the scarcity of precious metals made Costa Rica a poor and marginal colony, a condition from which a society of homogenous yeoman farmers without any meaningful class or racial divisions emerged and flowered in the eighteenth century...The first two of these myths are absolute nonsense. (1997, 9)

Such discourse manifests itself in Costa Rican music literature in various ways, as well as in discourse surrounding swing criollo in national and international contexts. The second theme mentioned above, that of the formation of Costa Rican national identity, is best explained by events in the 1920s which solidified notions of Costa Rican folklore. In 1929, a group of composers visited Guanacaste, charged with "recovering regional music, the little that has survived and risen above the deluge of fox-trots and one-steps that the jazz band of the black José has laid upon us."[5] (Quoted in Vargas Cullel 2004, 236) The resulting collections, three or possibly more collections (*cuadernos*) titled *La música nacional*, defined a certain style of music in 6/8 time as the "national" rhythm of Costa Rica. In my own brief experiences in Costa Rica more recently, I have never heard a rhythm described in such a way, nor have I read about it in later musical studies. However, the imagined folklore of the simple workers of the countryside is a popular

[5] Original: "recoger la música regional [de Guanacaste], la poca que sobreviva y quede a flote sobre el diluvio de fox-trots y one steps que el jazz band del negro José nos ha echado encima." I am not sure of the significance of "the black José," but I am guessing it is a racial epithet similar to "Jim Crow" in the United States. It implies a "corrupting" foreign influence, presumably from US jazz bands, in the regional music that it discusses.

trope that has been utilized both internally and abroad by commercial institutions and music scholars. The invention or raising of "national" traditions has also been a form of state control, as Vargas notes. (2004, 20) Rural imagery associated implicitly with Guanacaste, whose folkloric status was forged at this time, has become important to state displays of swing criollo, as I explore in the second chapter.

Another important turning point in the history of Costa Rican music took place in the early 1970s. Under the direction of then-Minister of Culture, Youth, and Sports Guido Sáenz, the entire membership of the National Symphonic Orchestra was dismissed, then replaced with a large number of classically trained musicians from Europe and the United States.[6] This act, and simultaneous reforms in music education, represent but one in a long history of acts suggesting ideological conflict or tension among Costa Rican musical elites. Many of the publications discussed here acknowledge that although Costa Rican elites have wanted to elevate the status of Costa Rican national music, attempts to reform classical music education and performance have long been tied to leadership by European band and orchestra leaders. Elites have often tried to demonstrate the level of "sophistication" in the country, but institutionalized classical music programs on a national level are a fairly recent phenomenon. It is in these various discourses on music, race, class, and folklore that I frame Costa Rican music literature.

Composer Bernal Flores' *La Música en Costa Rica* (1978) attempts a complete overview of Costa Rican music, one of a number of books published in the 1970s with subjects such as "Painters of Costa Rica" and "Sculpture in Costa Rica." Flores begins

[6] The reason for this, as explained to me by Quesada, was a lack of rigorous classical training programs within Costa Rica itself; the Ministry of Culture wanted to create a self-sustaining culture of classical music, but this had to be achieved through more highly trained foreign musicians. At this point, the Symphonic Youth Orchestra was founded as a feeder organization to the National Symphonic Orchestra, so that within a generation the orchestra could be populated with well-trained Costa Rican musicians. Part of the new NSO agreement was pedagogical: foreign musicians were required to teach music lessons to young Costa Rican musicians.

with an overview of pre-Columbian music and music of the conquistadors for the first two chapters before dealing exclusively with Western art music of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with chapters such as "Opera, operetta and zarzuela during the nineteenth century," "Bands, orchestras and choruses during the twentieth century," and "Institutions of music education during the twentieth century." His purpose is to examine the individual and cultural forces that worked to cultivate an appreciation for Western art music. Emphasis later in the essay on institutions of education that thrived in conjunction with the construction of new theaters and concert halls serves another purpose, namely to encourage continued government support for the arts at the university level.

Where Flores deals with all manner of Eurocentric orchestral, choral, and band organizations, Pompilio Segura Chaves's *Desarrollo Musical en Costa Rica Durante el Siglo XIX: Las Bandas Militares* (2001) deals more exclusively with the origins of band culture, pointing to the influence of Nicaraguan conductors at the head of nineteenth-century Costa Rican military bands. Chaves discusses military bands on a province-by-province basis, including much information from archival sources on the origins, instrumentation, and the directors/members of early bands. The author notes that many band members were forced into the role of performer in such groups and credits military cruelty as one reason that a dynamic band culture failed to develop nationally. Like other Costa Rican writers on band and orchestral traditions, he attempts to pinpoint specific reasons for the success and failure of particular ensembles; however, his investigation suffers from a Eurocentric, outdated model of cultural evolutionism that becomes evident in his discussion of the "primitive" instruments of African origins (unlike other sections of the book, for the chapter on the predominantly black province of Limón begins with a description of these "primitive" instruments).

An important historiography of Costa Rican musical identity during its period of modernization is María Clara Vargas Cullel's *De las Fanfarrías a las Salas de Concierto: Música en Costa Rica (1840-1940)*. (2004) Vargas's treatment of the search for a national folklore in Guanacaste forms the basis for my discussion of "folkloric" swing criollo presented by Costa Rica for the *Juegos Centroamericanos*[7] in 2013. More than other writers discussed here, Vargas deals with changes in private music consumption in the late nineteenth century, as well as new forms of musical sociability. She examines the effects that increased wealth from exporting coffee, as well as the formation of more explicit notions of national identity, had on Costa Rican elite musical culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Costa Rican literature on indigenous music has dealt almost exclusively with organology, folkloric music and dance, and (in a rather structuralist fashion) on the functions of music in indigenous society. Bernal Flores deals with indigenous music only in the first chapter of his book. Because is the content of his work deals primarily with European-derived repertoire and is arranged chronologically, he implies that indigenous music has either ceased to exist or has not changed since the early colonial period. The author maintains that Costa Rica was barely populated when the Spanish arrived (21), but that during the colonization process music played an important role in both cultures; the specifics of this role are mostly unspecified. (31)

Jorge Luís Acevedo's *La Música en Las Reservas Indígenas de Costa Rica* (1986) perpetuates a similar myth of indigenous culture: that it exists in the present but is essentially locked in the past. His project involves searching for the cultural "roots" of indigenous groups, collecting melodies and transcribing dances, and determining to what

[7] The *Juegos Deportivos Centroamericanos*, or "Central American Games," are a quadrennial sporting event similar to the Olympics held in Central America. The 2013 version was held in San José, Costa Rica.

degree such traditions have been "corrupted" or changed. Interestingly, Acevedo published another book that same year, *La Música en Guanacaste*, in the same style (descriptions of traditional rituals, diagrams of folk dances, discussion of pre-Columbian musical retentions, and colonial cultural influences that have impacted indigenous communities). The nationalist rhetoric of the study puts it in direct dialogue with that of Flores, who writes in the prologue to La Música en Guanacaste: "We see [in this author] a Costa Rican concerned with what is national, and traveling without rest from San José to Guanacaste many times to recover the most lively and genuine expressions of national reality."[8] (quoted in Acevedo 1986a, 9) Costa Rican musical nationalism thus glorifies the efforts of the folklorist, in some ways more than the expressions of the folk.

Writings on black/Afro-descendant Costa Ricans in music, or black/Afro-derived music in Costa Rica, can be partly defined by where it is not present: in the rhetoric of nationalist artists of the 1970s and 1980s. In Segura's work, the black population of the province of Limón, on the Caribbean coast, is mentioned in terms of its "primitive" instruments and the failure of its first military band. Like Acevedo's *La Música en las Reservas Indígenas*, an organological study of the region's instruments is undertaken. Segura's understands black music in Limón in terms of religious music ("popular music that is really important for blacks, practiced in temples"); calypso, the dance known as *cuadrilla*; and in jazz ensembles that existed in the early twentieth century. Composer/researcher Manuel Monestel has recently written on calypso in the province of Limón, an area that he states has been largely ignored by scholars. His *Ritmo, Canción e Identidad* (2005) is partly a work of folksong collection, as he includes musical and

[8] Original: "Vemos a un costarricense ocuparse de lo nacional, y viajar sin descanso, de San José a Guanacaste, durante muchas veces, para recoger las expresiones más vivas y genuinas de la realidad nacional."

lyrical information for calypso songs; and part ethnomusicology-style analysis of ethnicities present in Limón and their musics.

Recently, work on popular music has begun to appear. Mario Zaldívar has published a book of interviews with Costa Rican musicians (2006) who were active in the 1940s and 1950s. However, his book lacks ethnographic data; the questions he poses focus primarily on the names of particular performers, on dates associated with the establishment of particular groups or venues, and related connections between musicians in commercial orchestras. Zaldívar's study would have benefited from more open-ended questions in the interviews and a discussion of the musicians' importance to the local music industry. Juan José Marín Hernández's short publication, *Melodías de Perversión y Subversión: La Música Popular en Costa Rica, 1932-1960* (2009), treats the issue of sexuality in music as a source of subversion of Costa Rican elites. His understanding of a single subaltern class needs to be refined; the binary model created between a class and an amorphous group of subaltern cultures leaves much to be desired.

Costa Rican music scholarship is a relatively small field, due, mainly, to the small size of the country. Ethnomusicology in particular has been scarce. I would speculate that the lack of U.S. ethnomusicology on the country is related to its status as a tourist destination: many ethnomusicologists are still uncomfortable recognizing the similarity between their own methods of operation and the behaviors of cultural tourists. Although there are endless styles of music that merit further research, I hope that the benchmark for measuring the progress of such an endeavor will not be simply expanding the realm of musical cultures that become legitimized as objects of inquiry, but instead increasing cooperative, dynamic efforts to create multi-vocal, ethical presentations of ever-changing music and dance styles. I am thankful that in support of my inquiries, much of the history of swing criollo has recently been written in the form of a *licenciatura* thesis at the

University of Costa Rica, “Brincos y vueltas a ritmo de swing” (2010) by Claudia Lucía López and Paola María Salazar. Their analysis of the various institutions and individuals that have shaped swing criollo’s trajectory from its beginnings in the 1970s to its current national status is, to my knowledge, the only major anthropological analysis of swing criollo.

Much of the historical overview provided here is taken from that of López and Salazar. As I have not witnessed swing criollo performed or danced live, I draw on the many available Youtube videos of its performance in various spaces, including the now-famous salon Karymar, dance academies such as Merecumbé, and concert stages in the national theaters where dance companies have given presentations to seated audiences. Another video-ethnography to which I am heavily indebted is Gabriela Hernández’s 2003 documentary *Se Prohibe Bailar Suin*. This film predates the dance’s rise to international prominence by some time. It is also cited as an inspiration for López and Salazar’s investigation.

Although I am aware of the potential problems of using secondhand video as a replacement for ethnography, what I am attempting to analyze here are individual presentations and how they may dialogue with certain notions of Costa Rican national identity. The question of which performances are recorded and uploaded, by whom, and under which titles as I undertake in this report is itself an important inquiry. A heavy reliance on one’s own presence at events, by contrast, may risk a fetishization of “authentic” viewing that is not necessarily helpful in a case where different forces are vying for control of “authenticity”; such is the case in Costa Rican presentations of its “native swing.” Thus, I hope that my analysis of discourse around swing criollo based on commonly occurring tropes and imagery will not suffer too much from a lack of firsthand fieldwork.

ISSUES IN SWING CRIOLLO

It is important to understand the history of swing criollo as an urban, working-class phenomenon that first emerged in the 1970s. Rather than a chronological detailing of swing's history and the introduction of cumbia to Costa Rica, López and Salazar frame the dance's early history in terms of several phenomena and traits contributing to swing criollo's development. They suggest that early swing criollo was defined by 1) improvisational dance moves; 2) spaces of prohibition, both of swing criollo and broader social prohibitions which prevented elite and middle classes from entering these spaces; and 3) a class of dancers known as "*pachucos*,"[9] united not through a similar profession so much as a common experience of stigmatization.

The prohibition of swing dancing in certain San José establishments in the 1970s and 1980s has become a legendary story among swing criollo advocates such as music aficionados and local media, and is frequently retold and sometimes reimagined. The sign once posted in front of a dance salon that read "Prohibido Bailar Swing," or "Se Prohibe Bailar Swing," has played a crucial role in the formation of discourse surrounding swing criollo. I argue that this is not an isolated incident, but in fact part of a global process by which nations appropriate the music and dance cultures of subaltern groups; the dance's subaltern origin, I believe, is actually central to its appropriation by the middle classes. The most common figures to emerge in the early swing criollo narrative are the taxi driver and the prostitute. Others among the "chusma" include maids, thieves, and factory workers.

The 1990s saw two major forces at work in the legitimization, nationalization, and spread of swing criollo. In 1988, the television program *Fantástico y sus Piratas del*

[9] The figures of "la gente pachuca" is related to the discourse on "la chusma." A pachuco is a person who wears flashy clothing (usually zoot suits for men) and generally acts flamboyantly in public, with implications of self-styling, while "la chusma" refers to a larger subset of people based on their class status.

Ritmo started airing the music and dance; according to López and Salazar, this show aided in its spread and commercialization. (128) For many middle-class Costa Ricans, it was their first introduction to the dance style and the first step in its appropriation as a national dance form. The show aired through 1996 and influenced the style of swing dancing as well through the flashy style of dress that dancers wore.

In addition to this television program, dance academies also proliferated in the country at this time. Through the promotion of popular dance including swing criollo, they opened up avenues for new segments of the population to learn them. The academies, however, also brought with them a distinct methodology to swing criollo dancing, one in which the steps were far more codified than in the improvised style of what would become framed as the "old guard" dancers (those involved in the original dancing in less reputable salons of San José). This transformation in swing criollo's social context and style is described by López and Salazar:

> …one should evaluate, from an analytical perspective this process of systematic teaching of popular dance, as a key moment in the reinvention of original swing criollo… [At this time] it loses the empirical character associated with the dance salons and becomes an object of methodical study and practice by both professional and amateur dancers.[10] (2010, 131)

It is important to discuss again the role that improvisation plays in swing criollo. There is a visible difference between the highly improvised style of the old guard and the somewhat more rigid style of those taught in the dance academies. Like popular dance styles such as salsa, the step pattern of academic swing criollo leaves much room for individual interpretation. The improvisation of the "old guard," however, often does not follow a prescribed pattern but is instead a more general sort of bodily movement to the

[10] Original: "Es por esto que se debe retomar, desde una perspectiva analítica, ese proceso de sistematización de la enseñanza del baile popular, como llave de entrada para una reinvención del swing criollo inicial en tanto deja su carácter empírico de los salones de baile, para convertirse en un objeto de estudio y práctica metódica por parte de bailarines y bailarinas profesionales y aficionados(as)."

particular music style. Swing criollo can thus be an improvised style or a highly prescribed one, both of which carry implications for the dancer's class background.

Dance academies, especially Merecumbé, have continued to expand their locations throughout the country and are arguably one of the most important factors contributing not only to the nationalization of the dance but also to the translation of swing criollo's historical narrative into a form easily recognizable by much of the Costa Rican populace. There is an international aspect to the dance instructors' translations that I will discuss in the following chapter; as mentioned, it was directly responsible for my first encounter with the dance.

In the twenty-first century, swing criollo has continued to gain international recognition. The film *Se Prohibe Bailar Suin*, originally made for Televisión América Latina, was screened across much of Central America and Mexico. Dance companies, often associated with academies but sometimes as part of tourist marketing, have brought presentations of the dance to the world stage. In the Central American Games of 2013, hosted by Costa Rica, a version of swing criollo was danced as an expression of Costa Rican national identity (the announcer described it as "the dance we bring to the world"). This international publicity has predictably generated some backlash against the tourism-driven depictions of swing criollo on international stages and resulting attempts to sort the "authentic" from the "commercialized" swing tradition.

SWING CRIOLLO – DISCOURSE, SPACES, AND SUSTAINABILITY

My goals in this project are twofold. First, I believe that an exploration of representation in swing criollo is necessary to understand both the internal nation-building exercise of reinventing folkloric/popular traditions and the touristic, or otherwise

international, gaze under which traditions are forged. The emergence of new narratives of folklore may signal a shift in the cultural logic of national musical heritage, or it may reveal a twenty-first century resurgence of tropes of folkloric and primordial subaltern "roots," many of which have already proven surprisingly resilient across spatial and temporal boundaries. My second agenda involves the project of cultivating vibrant dance and music scenes with sensitivity to the ethical implications of cultural appropriation. "Middle-class" social prohibitions around certain forms of dance and other behavior have often been accompanied by the subsequent appropriation of those behaviors through phenomena such as blackface, or other forms of consumption. I look to various projects of distinctly anti-folkloric swing criollo for the possibility of circumventing this cycle of prohibition and appropriation/consumption. I believe that the appropriation of swing by dance academies and its promotion by instructors such as Ligia Torijano has been accompanied by an attempt to legitimize popular dance as a category, instead of legitimizing specific popular dances by reimagining them as folkloric. Legitimizing the category of "popular," while not revolutionary, would encourage more multi-vocal approaches to cultural policy that acknowledge living people's agency.

In Chapter 2, I explore discourses around the words "swing," "criollo," and the music/dance genre of cumbia, all of which I feel are central to understanding the narrative of swing as it is recalled in dance academies, largely responsible for the legitimization of the genre. The term "swing" plays into a specifically U.S.-centric, and perhaps cosmopolitan, framework of music and links it to nationalized subaltern expression (jazz as "America's classical music" perhaps relates in some way to Costa Ricans' imagining of their own national tradition). "Criollo" as a term evokes a particular colonial-era model of racial/cultural lineage. In this case, it works to legitimize a national narrative placing the province of Guanacaste at the center of Costa Rican folklore, as

seen in performances at the Central American Games in 2013. The last concept I explore, that of cumbia as a popular dance/music and its influence in Costa Rica, brings a dynamism to presentations of swing criollo that would otherwise be missing in the folkloric versions. My argument here is that part of the dance academies' project of a culturally sustainable swing criollo involves framing it as a pan-Latin dance. Swing is often taught alongside other popular dances such as salsa, cumbia, and merengue.

In Chapter 3, I examine what I believe to be the spaces of nationalization for swing criollo. Drawing from folklore studies on "heritage" and theories of the contestation of public space, I look at two distinct styles of staged swing criollo: those of the arts festival and the national theater. Repetition and standardization that occurred in the festivals during the 2000s, I argue, led to the legibility of swing criollo as national folklore, and the presentation of Torijano's "Permiso…viene el swing" ("Excuse me…here comes swing!") at the moment of swing's official recognition as national patrimony allowed Torijano to definitively establish the canon of actors and important events in swing criollo. Rather than simply a static, top-down imposition of "heritage," I consider the staged swing criollo of La Cuna del Swing to represent a contestation of cultural hierarchies from the perspective of dancers themselves.

There are two terms that I leave untranslated in most instances: *el baile* and *la danza*. Both of these translate into English as "dance," but their usage differs in a way that I would like to highlight but do not wish to theorize in an extended manner. *La danza* has tended to be used in swing criollo when referring to folkloric or artistic performances, while *el baile* seems to refer to popular forms of dance. How these words unfold in the rhetoric of different parties, with different investments in swing criollo's history, would be an interesting query for future analysis. Generally speaking, my theory is that *el baile*

is used by those when trying to elevate swing as a *popular* dance style, while *la danza* is used to lend it artistic merit in a more classical mode for cultural value.

Ultimately, I advocate for a greater understanding of swing criollo as a product of many discourses and ideologies, one that has diverged into several distinct forms. The reason for this understanding is to reform and promote programs of education surrounding dance, music, and culture. Ken Gourlay once urged us to think of ethnomusicology "not only [as] a psychology of music but [as] an applied, purposive social psychology of music, not research for the disinterested acquisition of a spurious entity called objective knowledge, but positively directed, value-guided practical discovery of what is beneficial to humanity." (413) With this in mind, I hope that my preliminary analysis is of some use, either as part of my own future projects or to those of others whose goal is the enrichment of lifestyles through dance and musical expression.

Chapter 2. Swing, Criollo, and Cumbia: Mapping Class Ideologies

In this chapter, I examine the intersection of several discourses in narratives and visual/sonic representations of swing criollo. Terminology is rarely a neutral marker of classification, and the words "swing" and "criollo" are particularly loaded, fraught with national and transnational implications that resonate in both the transmission and reception of the genre. I consider the ideology surrounding both "swing" and "criollo" central to staged presentations of the form, and also consider a third discursive rhetoric posturing swing criollo now as a pan-Latin dance, or more specifically, a dance of localized Latin American origin that has become a vehicle to express a postmodern Latin American identity (albeit rooted in middle-class aesthetics). All three of these discursive tendencies represent processes by which the dance has been rhetorically appropriated by (or for) a larger group: the middle class, the Costa Rican people more broadly, or (as is asserted by Liliana Valle, director of Merecumbé) everyone. Each of these positions is of course fraught with the ethical dilemmas associated with any form of appropriation.

In the first section, I examine the discourse around the concept of "swing" as an ideological statement, suggesting that there is a jazz-derived aesthetic at work in declaring swing criollo a dance of the "*chusma*". In this understanding, there is a split between "authentic" styles of expression and their appropriation by the middle class; the split reifies both the subaltern position of those who develop such forms and the social prohibitions against them policed by the privileged classes. The "criollo" or "native" label, by contrast, has been used by the Costa Rican state to promote Costa Rica as a classless, rural society. Besides downplaying class difference, "criollo" imagery also serves the touristic end of presenting Costa Rica as rural, white, and "safe" or "family-friendly." The last rhetorical stance I examine deals with swing's "hybrid" status, an

appropriation based on "postmodern" or transnational signifiers in dancehalls such as Karymar. I believe that positioning swing criollo in this way has allowed it to avoid the folklorization inherent in staged productions, making it more relevant currently to young middle-class Costa Ricans, but still facilitates its appropriation.

"SWING": COSMOPOLITANISM, MODERNITY, AND THE "CHUSMA"

On the sixth of May 2012, the dance company La Cuna del Swing, directed by Ligia Torijano, presented their program "Permiso…viene el swing" in the *Teatro Nacional de la Danza*. It was the second time La Cuna del Swing had presented this show in Costa Rica, which premiered at the *Teatro Popular Melico Salazar* a year earlier. The show served the purpose of educating Costa Rican audiences about the history of swing criollo while canonizing distinct styles involved in the hybridization process. Thirteen distinct scenes were choreographed: the first was an American style of wild swing dancing involving flailing arms, acrobatic jumps, and turns. Later scenes included Colombian cumbia dancing, the development of a hybrid form of swing associated with the "old guard," and a mock dance competition in which Torijano chooses a winner based on audience feedback. In the final scenes, the show included a meta-presentation during which a large group of dancers forms lines and Torijano leads them step by step, recreating for the theater audience the style and atmosphere of contemporary dance lessons in academies and salons where instructors, such as Torijano herself, continue to teach swing criollo to the next generation.

Figure 1: La Cuna del Swing demonstrating swing criollo's group dance style.[11]

Inherent to this presentation and to the rhetoric surrounding swing criollo presented in Costa Rica, I feel, is a cultural trope or logic of local swing music that carries with it a certain ideology of how class, modernity, and cosmopolitanism work. The swing aesthetic here implies a form of music and dance development that first appeared in U.S. writings on jazz music in the 1920s and 30s. Jazz was said to have first been played in brothels before finding its way northward to Chicago, a myth very similar to the story of the working-class taxi drivers who first swing danced swing criollo with prostitutes in San José's disreputable dance salons. In *Body & Soul: the making of*

[11] *Espectáculo: Del Swing Prohibido Al Permitido, de La Cuna Del Swing*, 2010, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xm6KTubaYqk&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

American modernism, Robert Crunden recognizes the brothel as the center of an American racial exoticism associated with early jazz: "The heart of that [early jazz] community seemed to be Storyville, the fabled vice district where prostitution was legal and white money could end up in black pockets in exchange, among other things, for the excitements of a new and sometimes wildly disturbing music." (2000, 147)

Important to both jazz and Costa Rican swing mythology, then, is the concept of a primordial, sexualized class of people among whom the style emerged. However, jazz was both transformed by, and in turn transformed, concepts of class and culture in the United States. Part of this transformation occurred with the renaming of "jazz" as "swing," divorcing it from its stigmatized, but also exoticized and coveted, past. As in Costa Rica, the United States of the 1920s and 1930s struggled with the formation of its own cultural heritage, pitting "high culture" concepts from Europe against forms developed at home. The 1920s became a flashpoint for changes in "highbrow" and "lowbrow" cultures; both David Savran and Guthrie Ramsey recognize jazz as central to subsequent transformations of U.S. culture. Exploring early rhetoric and reception of jazz, Ramsey writes "[such] literature shows that writers could not celebrate or criticize this music without coming to terms with the fact that the cosmopolitan [European-derived concept of culture]/provincial [American-derived concept of new forms] split did not hold up well." (36) This meant that jazz and other popular musics had to be reinterpreted in a way that acknowledged highbrow and lowbrow expressions as partially constructed by each other. Jazz's acceptance in elite circles did not happen *despite* its affiliation with subaltern groups; rather, its subaltern status was a large part of its appeal. The taxi drivers and prostitutes of San José are equally important to swing criollo's elevation.

Another key element in the aesthetic that would come to be known as "swing" in the United States was the standardization of jazz that allowed for not only mass

production, but the exposure of musicians to regional styles across the country. Music notation served as a *lingua franca* for the acquisition of jazz. Of this, Kenneth Bindas says:

> The success of swing, so tied to the modernization of recorded popular music, helped lead to a homogenization within the music itself...The Kansas City Style was not limited to the musicians growing up in the region, but included the entire country through road shows, radio, and records. Theoretically, then, a musician growing up in Kansas city had as much of a chance of playing the Chicago style as kids growing up in Chicago. (34)

The national appropriation of swing, then, required a homogenization of style, a de-coupling of the music of "jazz" from its racialized roots, and its dissemination through popular media. I bring this up not to compare Costa Rican swing mechanically with its North American counterpart, or to suggest that swing criollo's story is derivative of jazz. Rather, it seems to me that the overall trend is part of a cultural dialogue that predates jazz and begs an interpretation as a hemispheric phenomenon. Alejandro Madrid and Robin Moore have suggested a circum-Caribbean spread of the Cuban *danzón* led to the stylistic trends present in early jazz. They state that "[i]n framing jazz as an exclusively North American phenomenon rather than part of broader hemispheric artistic trends, the mainstream jazz community may have created fundamental obstacles for itself in terms of such historiography." (2013, 117) Because swing criollo's history has unfolded in a similar manner to jazz history with similar rhetoric attached to its elevation as an art form, it is worth investigating a "swing" aesthetic as a similarly transnational phenomenon.

Figure 2: Ligia Torijano directing swing classes in "Permiso…"[12]

It is for this reason I feel justified in proposing that narrative tropes of "swing" music and dance as understood in the United States apply in the case of swing criollo. The projection of dancing ability and improvisational skill onto a subaltern group, the sexualization of the dancers through the trope of their involvement with prostitution, and a later standardization of dance moves all represent recurring themes in contemporary swing criollo commentary. These trends can be seen as part of a hemispheric phenomenon, or can at least be read as a discourse found in many dance styles throughout the Americas. Raziel Acevedo Álvarez, a compiler/transcriber of traditional music in the province of Guanacaste, notes that "indeed, many dances transformed in the Americas managed to transcend the slums, streets and small-town halls, reaching the European courts of higher rank."[13] (2007, 20) In the remainder of this section, I hope to

[12] "La Cuna Del Swing -- 12 Melico Salazar 2012- Clases de Swing Criollo.wmv," 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NrixpX2nVx0&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

[13] Original: "Precisamente, muchas danzas transformadas en América lograron trascender de los arrabales, calles y salones pueblerinos, hasta las cortes europeas de más alta alcurnia."

demonstrate how the origin trope of subaltern transcendence plays out in middle-class Costa Rican rhetoric about swing criollo.

The romanticization of the style of the "old guard," the urban working class, and the sense that swing criollo's "flavor" can only be found in certain spaces or among certain groups, manifests itself in most writings about swing criollo. For instance, López and Salazar begin their analysis of the history of the form not chronologically, but with discussion of a common stylistic element: the "Improvisation of steps." (118) In their estimation, the fact that swing dancers were able to improvise choreographically was tied to their subaltern status. Thus, the social prohibitions that prevented middle-class patrons from entering early performance spaces are understood as allowing for the development of the style. In fact, some middle-class commenters who came to the dance later ascribe to theories of all dances as originating among the riff-raff. According to swing dancer and Costa Rican musician Francisco Tristán, "…all dances start among la chusma, and…let's say, the prostitutes and taxi drivers and people like that, they were the people who danced swing."[14] (quoted in López and Salazar, 125) This is echoed in the rhetoric of dance instructor Ligia Torijano, who said of the dance salons where swing was practiced, "we're not talking about salons like Corobicí, these were places of doubtful reputation; where people would meet after leaving a long day of work, where they knew that they could go and be with "*compas*,"[15] prostitutes, taxi drivers are who we were talking about, workers, maids…"[16] (quoted in López and Salazar, 122) This narrative is often repeated

[14] Original: "Yo lo que siento es que el baile se popularizó. Es decir que... todos los bailes comenzaron en las chusmas, y comenzaron en la chusma y solo, digamos, lo que eran prostitutas y taxistas y gente así, eran los que bailaban el swing. Es más, era hasta prohibido, en un salón era prohibido bailar el swing."

[15] "*Compas*" is slang for *compadres*, or "buddies/pals."

[16] "…estos desde el principio siempre fueron lugares de baja categoría. O sea, no hablemos de salones como el Corobicí, eran salones de dudosa reputación; donde se metían digamos la gente después de salir de una jornada de trabajo, donde sabían que podían llegar ahí y encontrarse entre 'compas', prostitutas, taxistas que era lo que hablábamos, obreras, empleadas domésticas."

in the dance salon Karymar itself. In *Se Prohibe Bailar Suin*, Karymar's disc jockey José explains why he chose to call his *discomóvil* (DJ sound system) *La Canalla* ("the riff-raff"): "Why is it called La Canalla? Because that was the type of people who I worked with, it was people like laborers, taxi drivers, including prostitutes, the people that liked cumbia here in Costa Rica and that danced swing criollo." (Hernández, 2003)

Swing criollo's co-optation by dance academies, as in jazz's mass production and rebranding of "swing," begins with a process of standardization and codification. This formalism allows middle-class aficionados to learn the style without being steeped in the working-class culture surrounding swing criollo. As with other appropriated subaltern styles, people often consider that the dance style has lost something "authentic" through such a transformation. Numa Chacón, a dancer of the "new guard" of swing criollo, notes that "[i]n the dance academies they always form a line back and forth, or something similar. Instead in the salon…it's not as simple as that in the academy, it's more original. Everyone does what they want on the dance floor, you only have to keep hopping."[17] (quoted in López and Salazar, 134) The notion of an essential swing criollo style, especially as related to the international swing craze of the 1990s and early 2000s, was reiterated by Torijano in 2003 before swing criollo's acceptance as national heritage:

> There's a boom right now, the whole world wants to learn to swing dance. Karymar has now become a center of attraction for salsa dancers, dancers from dance academies, they come to Karymar to learn it, to practice it, to learn new moves…The basic idea that they need to understand is that the academies are excellent, they have their way, their methodology of giving classes, *but the flavor of swing can only be found in working-class salons*. (quoted in Hernández 2003, emphasis mine)

[17] "En las academias siempre llevan una línea de adelante y atrás, o sea siempre lo mismo. En cambio en el salón es como más de uno, no sé cómo explicarle pero no es tan básico como el de academia, es más original. Cada quien hace lo que quiera en la pista, sólo hay que mantener el brinquito... ahí todo el mundo lo baila como sienta la música."

Figure 3: Karymar DJ José in his discomóvil "La Canalla"[18]

In addition to the working-class "riff-raff" mythology, swing ideology necessitates the symbolic transcendence of a subaltern culture to a broader populace. López and Salazar note that "[with the creation of specific steps] swing criollo is recognized as a *baile* that has symbolically prevailed in Costa Rican society." (128) An acceptance of the dance in spaces of elite culture, such as the National Theater, is conflated with a legitimization by society as a whole; a specific middle-class public is conflated as "the public." Many have acknowledged that the incorporation of this popular, subaltern form of expression into spaces of "high" culture would historically

[18] Gabriela Hernández, *Se Prohibe Bailar Suín* (Televisión América Latina, 2003), http://tal.tv/video/se-prohibe-bailar-suin/.

have been an affront to Costa Rican elites; Yalena de la Cruz, a dentist, wrote in the newspaper *Nación*, "I imagine that, for those who initiated the construction of our National Theater, it would have been unthinkable to imagine the possibility of seeing, on its stage, a dance of swing criollo, a rhythm originating in Limón…and prohibited everywhere that was deemed 'respectable'."[19] The incorrect location of Limón, a primarily Afro-descendant province (or perhaps the city of the same name located in this province), as the site of swing's origin strengthens my belief that the subaltern status of swing criollo is in fact necessary for many people's understandings of its current successes; its linking to the black costal population fits within the cultural logic described here.

"CRIOLLO": RACE, NATION, AND THE FOLK

In 2013, San José hosted the Central American Games, a quadrennial sporting championship. At the close of the event, a salsa group known as Son de Tikizia played an original song titled "*Mi abuelo y swing criollo*," or "My grandfather and swing criollo," a relatively slow-tempo cumbia with accordion accompaniment. As the opening strains played, yellow, pink, and blue spotlights converged on the center stage, where an elderly gentleman in black and white attire donning a white fedora danced with a young girl in a white and pink floral dress, complete with a flower in her hair. The announcer opened the presentation by saying "the *danza* that we bring to the world, swing criollo, promotes

[19] Yalena de la Cruz, "Se Prohíbe Bailar Swing," *Nación*, September 20, 2010. Original: "Imagino yo que, para quienes impulsaron la construcción de nuestro Teatro Nacional, habría resultado impensable la posibilidad de ver sobre su tablado un baile de swing criollo, ritmo originado en el Limón de la Yunai y prohibido en todo sitio que se dijera 'respetable'."

closeness among all ages."[20] A woman announced in English, "Swing criollo is heritage that identifies Costa Rica!"

After this "homage to swing criollo," lasting about a minute and a half, Son de Tikizia started into a second slow cumbia as a greater number of relatively light-skinned couples took to the stage, each wearing color-coordinated outfits in a similar style to that of the young girl in the opening song. The constantly repeated chorus of "*Swing Tiquicia pa' bailar*," ("Ticoland Swing for dancing") as singer Alfredo Poveda declared, was followed by the musical declaration "a *baile* was born in Tiquicia for dancing…"[21]

Far removed from the "chusma" imagery and seedy urban origins rhetoric surrounding swing criollo, the presentation described above appears to be more heavily invested in emphasizing the "criollo" side of "swing criollo." Here, I would like to discuss what "criollo" means in a Costa Rican and Caribbean context, the Costa Rican "myth of whiteness," and other forms of ethnic and class homogenization inherent in the nation-building process as they relate to the Costa Rican state's official presentations of swing criollo. Locating rural Guanacaste as the site of national folklore has been crucial to the projection of official Costa Rican identity; although swing criollo clearly originated in the capital of San José, its nationalization has hinged on a supposed rural classlessness that has been mythologized throughout the country. The term "criollo" is most commonly used to refer to a person of Spanish heritage, born in the Americas. After further

[20] Original: "La danza que llevamos por el mundo, el swing criollo promueve la cercanía feliz de todas las edades."

[21] The use of *baile* instead of *danza* seems to be dissonant with the presentation of *la danza* that is announced by the narrator, indicating either that my very rough understanding of *baile*/popular and *danza*/folkloric is inaccurate, or these two terms are used to purposely contest the meaning of swing criollo in subtle ways. I analyze Son de Tikizia's performance in folkloric terms not because they are a folkloric group or because their goal is to promote Costa Rican nationalism, but simply because the dance at the games is a particularly touristic scene. There are other layers of meaning when one takes into account Son de Tikizia's success as a salsa band in the country. My suggestion of the uses of *el baile* and *la danza* is based on encountering the terms in texts and videos, but I have not been able to investigate Costa Ricans' own theorizations of the terms yet.

analyzing the associations of "criollo" as they relate to Costa Rica, I consider its relation to Son de Tikizia's presentation of "Mi abuelito y swing criollo" at the 2013 Central American Games.

The concept of "criollo" is tied to notions of race, but also to authenticity. It is a multifaceted word that can also be interpreted as "creole" (hybrid), "local," or "born in the Americas," depending on local contexts and ideologies. This slippage in meaning has often resulted in rhetorical contradictions. Given these possible meanings, I choose to analyze "criollo" as is has been employed in nationalist mythology that aligns itself with European origins. I think this is closest to the Costa Rican model being espoused in official swing criollo performances. In the context of the Cuban zarzuela, Susan Thomas has argued that the criollo character type, a white, lazy, womanizing peasant from the countryside, "while [he] may also be involved in a love affair (or more than one), [is] primarily identified with the Cuban countryside itself." (172) The *criollo* archetype is frequently attracted to the *mulata*, or woman of mixed African/European heritage, and both are intimately connected to Cuban land and Cuban nationalism. (Thomas 174) It is interesting that in the zarzuela, a genre that Thomas argues was transformed in Cuba with the bourgeois female gaze in mind, the criollo is opposed to the *galán*: an elite, educated, and arrogant city-dweller. The *galán*'s voice type is almost always tenor, reflecting "his mannered education, and at the same time…a lack of engagement and emotional commitment." (156)

This supposed lack of emotion of the modern privileged male city-dweller is contrasted with the simplicity and emotional sincerity of the rural population. But such social constructions often constitute a form of symbolic violence against rural populations. Historian Karl Hagstrom Miller has evaluated the formation of U.S. folklore studies as a project of segregation along black/white racial lines and along the

geographical line of North and South. Folklorists such as John Lomax traveled the rural U.S. South looking for what Theodore Roosevelt romanticized as "crude home-spun ballads" of "the back country and frontier," a refreshing departure from the ubiquitous commercialized "music hall songs" associated with turn-of-the-century industrialization. Lomax's resulting collection, *Cowboy Songs*, "was not designed to be an accurate depiction of the complex lives of contemporary cattle drivers. Rather, Lomax attempted to portray an image of a separate world, one that shared very little with turn-of-the-century American politics and popular culture." (Miller 85-86) This romanticization of isolated folk survivals, and especially of the special essence of subaltern musics removed from the "pollution" of commercialization, is part of the "possessive investment in whiteness" that George Lipsitz criticizes in remembrances of Robert Johnson:

> Audiences and critics want to "own" the pleasures and powers of popular music without embracing the commercial and industrial matrices in which they are embedded; they want to imagine that the art that they have discovered through commercial culture is somehow better than commercial culture itself, that their investment in the music grants them an immunity from the embarrassing manipulation, pandering, and trivialization of culture intrinsic to a market society. (122)

In *Nationalizing Blackness*, Moore suggests that "[c]ompositions of the middle classes that incorporate 'folk' genres transform these musics discursively and stylistically, presenting them in new contexts. They refashion the past of subaltern expression so that it appears to share historical ties to the 'legitimate' musics of the majority." (115) Subaltern musics, then, can be cordoned off spatially and temporally as representing a survival of the past in a "primitive" region, such as Miller suggests of the U.S. South, and further divided by race; they can also be incorporated as part of national folklore with the subaltern elements of their origins erased, as Moore notes. In the case of swing criollo's presentation at the Central American Games, both processes occurred. The subaltern

presence of the "chusma" was erased; however, the nationalist ideal that it stood in for was tied to a folk that modernity seemingly left behind. It is the simultaneous elevation, homogenization, and folklorization of swing criollo that allows the state to present the radically altered style of music and dance as "the *danza* we bring to the world." I believe that at the Central American Games what was presented was essentially a rural image of Guanacaste, derived from a paradigm of "criollo," pure or largely Spanish descent, something untarnished by modernity (refer back to the 1920s Costa Rican nationalist task of "recovering regional music, the little that has survived and risen above the deluge of fox-trots and one-steps that the jazz band of the black José has laid upon us" mentioned in the introductory chapter). In analyzing the "criollo" paradigm here, admittedly similar to the "swing" narrative discussed above, I distinguish the two in several ways. Although envisioning swing criollo as "swing" romanticizes the "chusma's" subaltern status as a primordial root for local dance and forges a cosmopolitan ideal out of localized expression, envisioning it as "criollo" evokes different associations. It conjures up a national rural folk, plays down contemporary class difference, and erases the perceived messiness or impurity of urban cultures in the national imaginary. Though no backstory is mentioned in "Mi abuelo y swing criollo," it is the absence of such a narrative, together with the visual story discussed below, that implicitly defines swing criollo as rural.

The visual representation of imagined rural swing criollo manifests itself in dress and in dance styles. First, folkloric dress, whether or not historically accurate, has been associated with Guanacaste in the Costa Rican imagination for some time. In *La Danza Popular Costarricense* (1989), Lía Bonilla, founder of the *Conjunto Cultural Folklórico Veinticinco de Julio*, includes a number of photos from the province of Guanacaste showing folkloric ensembles in their "typical" dress style. These photos show a

surprisingly similar folkloric display to that of the Son de Tikizia performance two decades later.

It is also important that the group dance choreography that became a key feature of swing criollo, in which a man dances with multiple women, is not present anywhere in this spectacle. All dancers are paired up, their outfits coordinated, and they never switch partners or dance as a group. This, I believe, is an attempt to desexualize swing criollo as "folk" dances have been desexualized to represent an element of simplicity or primitiveness, "*la/o sencilla/o*." Bonilla stated in 1989 that "it was important in the educational sense and for the resident of Guanacaste who enjoyed his traditions of *sencillas danzas* of TWO FIGURES and TWO MOVEMENTS, It was totally impossible to present them in their 'native' purity to foreign audiences and tourists used to seeing grand artistic spectacles." (14, capitalized in original) I place emphasis in the original quote here on *sencilla*, which can be translated as "simple," "easygoing," "quiet," "naïve," or "primitive."[22]

Figure 4: Swing dancing couples at the *Juegos Centroamericanos*.[23]

[22] Original: "era importante en el sentido educacional y para el guanacasteco que gozaba de sus tradiciones con las sencillas danzas de DOS FIGURAS y de DOS PASOS, era totalmente imposible presentarlas en su pureza 'autóctona' ante los públicos extranjeros y turistas acostumbrados a ver grandes espectáculos artísticos."

[23] Flores, Walter. *"Mi Abuelito Y Swing Criollo" Homenaje Al Swing Crillo*, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pNeTUABXwm8&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

Setting aside Bonilla's belief that traditional, primitive, or simple dances cannot be presented to a foreign audience without spectacle, it appears that in performances such as this one the opposite is true: a dance style associated with urbanity and the flashiness of television and dance clubs has been "simplified" and folklorized by the Costa Rican state for public consumption. The other aspect of simplicity that Bonilla alludes to, the insistence on *couples* dancing with two steps, also manifests itself in the Central American Games performance. One of swing criollo's most distinguishing features is its group dancing, in which one man (usually) will dance with several women, up to five or six at a time. However, this aspect of swing criollo performance is nowhere to be seen in the dance for "all ages" as staged at the Pan-American Games. Rather, the presentation of "criollo" there involves a de-sexualization of the dance. Compared with the "chusma" origin story described earlier of prostitutes and taxi drivers, the presentation of "all ages" swing features two people construed as family members: a young girl and presumably her grandfather. Rivers-Moore notes in her sociology of sex tourism in Costa Rica that the state has aspired to mark spaces of sex work as "foreign, dangerous, and immoral, [so that] the rest of the city (and the nation) can remain, in contrast, defined by morality, safety, family values, and national values." (2010, 128) Desexualizing swing criollo serves not only national narratives, but international reputation, as the growing tourism industry profits from Costa Rica as a "safe," family-friendly destination.

There are also musical markers in the representations of swing criollo staged for the Central American Games that reference the rural "criollo," especially as something evoking past generations. The presence of the accordion is significant, as the accordion is not part of the normal instrumentation in Son de Tikizia. Its presence in this case might be linked to nostalgia and a certain type of working-class aesthetic of the mid-twentieth century. Helena Simonett, speculating on the accordion's branding as "the little man's

'piano,'" notes that after its introduction to the Americas, it became a "popular folk music" instrument in many regions of the world due to the fact that it was "loud and durable and therefore ideal for outdoor performances." (2012, 8) She also suggests that "the perceived 'simplicity' of the accordion may [account for its frequently] negative popular image…With the shift in the instrument's status from enormously fashionable to outdated, the accordion in the Americas became equated with immigrant, ethnic, and working-class expression – the music of the rural, poor, corny, and uneducated masses." (8-9) Bandleader Walter Flores's choice of an accordion to accompany Costa Rican swing criollo dancing can thus be seen as a symbol of rurality and also of "criollo" identity in the sense of European descent, as the instrument carries markers of both "Old World" origins and a hardy, "outdoors" development in the Americas that the Costa Rican state projects onto its working class.

An analysis of the main thematic statement of "Mi abuelo" also reveals a signifier of nostalgia. Although the song is a cumbia, its strict use of acoustic instruments marks it as different from the electronic cumbia popular in clubs today. More importantly, the rhythmic cell being repeated is that of the *cinquillo*, an Afro-Cuban rhythmic pattern associated with the Cuban genres of *contradanza*, *danza*, and *danzón*. As danzón has been reimagined regionally in terms of nostalgia, I find an interesting connection to the concept of simplicity being expressed in the rhythm, style, and melody in this song.

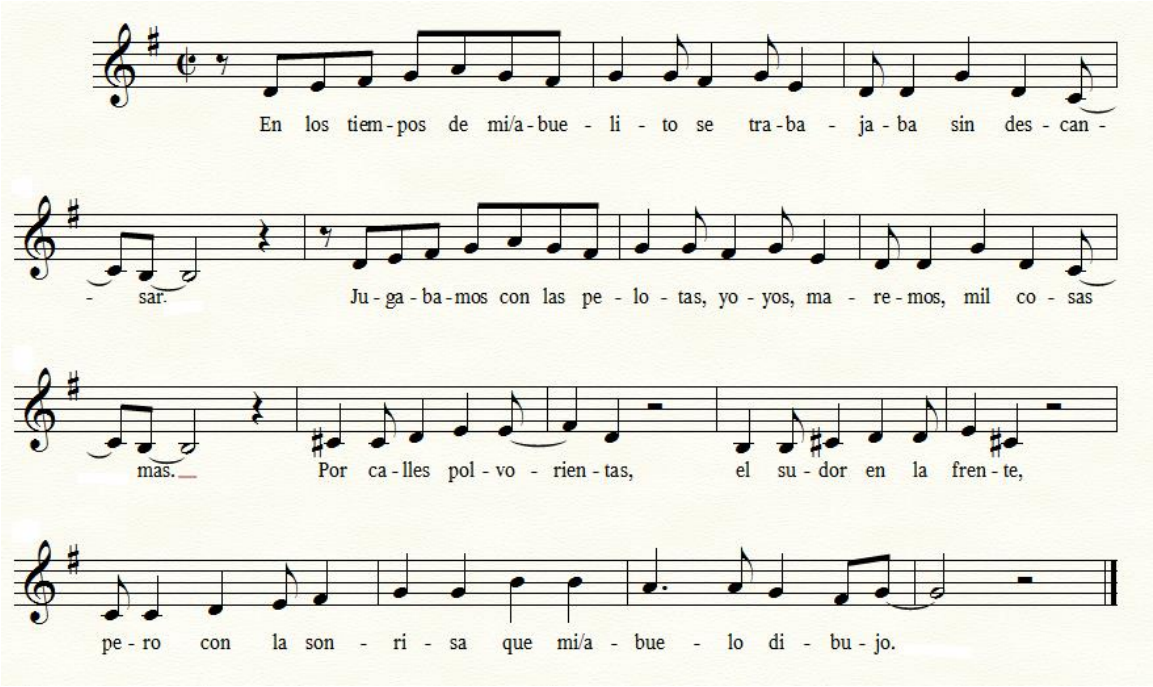

Figure 5: Melody of "Mi abuelo y swing criollo." Transcription by author.[24]

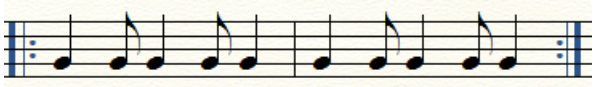

Figure 6: *Cinquillo* rhythmic cell.

To recapitulate, "criollo" as it is conceived by the Costa Rican state is a rural phenomenon, a form of local yet largely Spanish (European/white) heritage, simple and elegant, desexualized, and synonymous with "Costa Rican" identity. Symbols of this sort serve the nation as further evidence of its exceptionalism, as a country perceived as free of ethnic or class conflict, and to this end also promotes tourism. If the "criollo" in the Cuban zarzuela can be viewed as connected to the countryside itself, as well as to notions

[24] Transcription taken from recording: *"Mi Abuelito Y Swing Criollo" Homenaje Al Swing Crillo*, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pNeTUABXwm8&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

of Cuban nationalism, then the "criollo" image projected here rhetorically stands in for the Costa Rican people as classless, hard-working, easygoing European descendants in the New World. There is no place in such a construct for San José's urban working class, modern rural life, current conflicts over labor laws, or the contributions of Afro-descendant people in the province of Limón or elsewhere in the country.

It is important to note that Costa Rica's reputation-building exercises, such as state-sponsored displays of swing criollo, serve tourist ends as well. Dance companies such as La Cuna del Swing imagined swing criollo as "urban folklore," and it has been officially recognized as such; however, as in the Central American Games, the folkloric images of the dance promoted by the Costa Rican state has drawn on tropes of rural simplicity. The construction of "criollo" I have identified in this section promotes Costa Rican exceptionalism not for its own sake, but instead for immediate financial gain: it benefits the tourism industry by offering swing as a cultural commodity and a reassurance of the nation's safety and "family values."

"CUMBIA": SWING CRIOLLO AS "POSTMODERN"

In a swing criollo dance competition at the famed salon Karymar, on January 18, 2012, a couple announced as Richard and Katherine entered the packed salon in highly elaborate costumes: they were each attached to a set of rods that allowed them to control two life-size puppets in front and behind them. Flashing, disco-style lighting accompanied their opening routine. As they danced to the Village People tune "YMCA," the crowd gathered around them cheered them on. Every one of their dance moves sent their four combined puppets dancing as well: when they jumped, the puppets jumped; when they spun, the figures whirled. The music switched quickly between a number of

styles – disco, merengue, hip-hop, and cumbia, among others. Halfway through their dance they shed their puppets and danced swing criollo as cumbia blasted through the sound system. The couple whirled and jumped to a number of popular cumbia songs until the end of their routine, about six minutes total. This bizarre presentation took first place in the January competition.

Figure 7: A dancer controls two puppets in a swing criollo competition.[25]

[25] Karymar. *Final de Concurso de Swing En Karymar 18/01/2012 - Richard Y Katerin (Primer Lugar)*, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-JHGlc8gj0&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

This swing criollo competition style, in which a couple dances a choreographed set that riffs off U.S. and Latin genres such as salsa, merengue, cumbia, hip-hop, rock, and operatic themes, is often seen at the club Karymar. Many acts begin with an opening theatrical element, such as the puppetry featured in Richard and Katherine's performance. Some feature more gothic, occult-style elements (tongue-in-cheek, of course). Manuel and Andreina, for instance, began their dance in hooded robes, staring menacingly into the audience before the opening musical theme transitioned to a hip-hop beat. I believe that these and other dancers are expressing an element of "postmodern"[26] Latin American identity. In this final section, I hope to explore the roots of this striking style of swing criollo competition, which I believe once again stem from the rhetoric and performances of the dance academies, specifically Merecumbé. I consider such expression vis-a-vis other localized forms of global Latin dance, such as salsa and cumbia, whose dance and musical expressions have lent themselves to various sociopolitical and cultural projects. Finally, I weigh what I consider to be the ethical issues surrounding "postmodern" readings of regional dance and music.

The dance academy Merecumbé promotes itself as involved in all manner of popular dance. Instructor Liliana Valle sees one of the powers of *el baile* as:

> to take codes from other cultures, adapt them, recreate them, and arrange new products. That is to say, a turn is done in merengue and that turn probably encourages technical work that's interesting, expressive, etc., in that genre; but it becomes a tool [for swing criollo], an acquired form of corporal and psychological knowledge, so I can use that knowledge when I try to dance another *baile*".[27] (quoted in López and Salazar, 164)

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[26] I am using "postmodern" expression to refer to performances "of connection or interpenetration," "when a work's juxtapositions involve an eclectic inclusion of material from disparate discourses." This definition comes from Jann Pasler's definition in *Grove Music Online*.

[27] Original: "sacar otros códigos de otras culturas, adaptarlos, recrearlos y ajustar nuevos productos… Es decir, se hace una vuelta en merengue, esa vuelta probablemente estimula un trabajo técnico interesante, expresivo, etc., en ese género; pero se vuelve una herramienta [para el swing criollo], un conocimiento

From Valle's perspective, it is easy to see how swing criollo has been transformed into a popular club dance. Popular dance can adapt moves from any dance style; these moves come to represent a form of individualized expression which, in signifying these moves, also comes to represent Latin dance identity. Merecumbé's website declares hybridity or mixture as essential to a Latin American experience: "In Latin America the mix of African, European, and indigenous cultures permitted the creation of a new corporal language, with new forms of music and dance."[28]

Various ideas of mixture, hybridity, or syncretism have defined popular thought and scholarship on Latin American dance and music for at least the past century. Processes of mixture have variously been described as transculturation, hybridity, *mestizaje*, or fusion; each comes with its own intellectual baggage. Valorizing hybridity can stigmatize the "non-hybrid"; it can also reify the very existence of "pure" forms. When discussing racialized cultures, as Merecumbé does here, "hybridity" often relies on essentialisms about culture based on essentialist views. Shalini Puri identifies the term hybridity as serving at least three functions in the Caribbean: 1) legitimizing nationalisms through "a syncretic New World identity, distinct from that of its 'Mother Cultures'"; 2) displacing discourses of equality to secure bourgeois hegemony by downplaying the reality of racial difference; and 3) "managing racial politics – either by promoting cultural over racial hybridity or by producing racial mixes acceptable to the elite." (2004, 45)

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adquirido corporal y psicológico, entonces se puede recurrir a ese conocimiento cuando ya logro interpretar ese otro baile"

[28] "Bienvenidos a La Academia Merecumbe Online de Costa Rica," accessed March 9, 2014, http://ticochoppers.com/customers/merecumbe/index.html. Original: "en América latina la mezcla de culturas africanas, europeas e indígenas, permitió la creación de un nuevo lenguaje del cuerpo, con nuevas formas musicales y dancísticas"

It is certainly possible to read Merecumbé's statement as a move to downplay class, racial, or national difference in popular dance. In a "hybrid" cultural form, expression becomes mapped onto nothing larger than individual choice or more specific than the genre; while all musical styles are recognized as having unique histories, power differentials in particular dance expressions become flattened. Swing criollo as a "postmodern" dance, one in which many styles and moments are signified simultaneously, has the potential to once again privilege the white middle class. As the new dancers of swing, have full command of its corporeal vocabulary but also perform and reference beyond its specificity.

However, my belief is that swing criollo competitions in venues such as Karymar serve to promote a greater equality of expression among participants. Dance academies have legitimized the role of dancing for middle-class Costa Ricans, and although their rhetoric is sometimes couched in problematic terms such as the mention of the "tri-ethnic" racial mixture described earlier, their overall effect on Costa Rican culture is to de-stigmatize dancing. This will hopefully offer an alternative forum in which middle-class white Costa Ricans can participate in dance cultures while subaltern classes are neither stigmatized nor folklorized as the source of "authenticity." The dynamics of class in swing criollo inside and outside of Karymar, however, merit further investigation and an ethnographic approach. A short phenomenological approach to an ethnography of Karymar was published by López and Salazar in the journal *Cuadernos de Antropología* in 2008, but a closer examination of the opinions of working-class dancers not affiliated with Karymar or La Cuna del Swing might reveal much about the popular dance's still-contested nature.

It is worth remembering that swing criollo (or *swing costarricense*, as Valle prefers to call it)[29] owes its existence to the transnational flow of cumbia. Hector Fernández L´Hoeste argues that part of cumbia's ability to create local meanings is due to its weak ties to Colombian nationalism. This has allowed for cumbia to be "especially adaptable to popular nationalism in various nation-states, a vivid illustration of how transnational flows create local meanings." (2007, 360) In this case, as mentioned, swing criollo's official recognition has been as folkloric, localized, as far removed from cumbia as it can be while still retaining cumbia as its musical base.[30] The imagining of swing criollo as pan-Latin places it even more firmly in the transnational flow of Latin dances, a local form that draws from global sources.

The transnational roots of swing criollo relate in many ways to those of salsa, another dance that has been appropriated by dance studios and has become a middle-class phenomenon in many areas. Hutchinson notes that "studio salsa now functions as cultural capital because its originators had already transformed social salsa practices to fit middle-class, cosmopolitan aesthetic principles." (2013, 13) Like swing criollo, salsa has undergone a standardization of steps through institutionalized instruction over the past couple decades. Though swing criollo does not enjoy the international popularity of salsa and therefore does not have the same variety of regional variants (it still exists as an almost exclusively Costa Rican phenomenon), it does, like these dance/music genres, lend itself to a great variety of interpretations and ideologies.

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[29] López and Salazar mention this but do not elaborate or speculate on what this dissonance in terminology might mean. Valle defines her own project in opposition to the tourist spectacles in hotels that present a heavily exoticized, tropical Latin America. (López and Salazar 151) The use of the term "swing costarricense" might be a way to distance herself from tourist spectacles, reaffirm the dance's localized existence, or counteract the neatly packaged idea of a homogenous swing criollo.

[30] The use of the *cinquillo* rhythm in the melody, a pattern that is occasionally associated with cumbia but not usually identified with the genre, also marks the song's distance from commercial cumbia.

When the dance company associated with Merecumbé performed at the *Teatro de la Danza* in April 2009, the second part of the set included a three-part medley of songs and dance styles. This medley began with the "Fortuna Imperatrix Mundi" movement of Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* cantata. One performer danced her way to the center of the stage, where she gracefully dropped to the floor. The other dancers, cloaked in black hooded robes and white masks, fell to the floor in a circle, then rolled to the center where they rose to their knees, collectively lifting the lone dancer into the air. She then stood, removed her hood, twirled around several times as the other hooded figures scattered into the distance at the climax of the musical excerpt. The sound track then segued into T-Pain's 2008 single "Low" as the dancers returned to the stage, robes removed to reveal black and silver dress clothes. The group danced in a stylized version of hip-hop for about a minute, facing forward on the stage, before the beat transitioned into cumbia and the dancers began a choreographed group performance of swing criollo.

I believe that performers in this context take part in the same dialogue of swing criollo not as a single hybridized style but as a syncretic heterogeneous form, in which styles overlap and are incorporated based on the needs of the performers. The transition between a theme recognized as operatic or occult, such as Orff's "O Fortuna," and a popular hip-hop tune such as "Low" carries with it a set of assumptions about not only dance's appropriateness, but about the staging of culture itself. It does not seem to suggest that hip-hop's music and dance virtuosity is "on par" with that of elite art traditions. Instead of engaging with elitist notions of virtue, it valorizes the democratizing potential of dance as a source of legitimization.

CONCLUSIONS

I have attempted to show three discourses of appropriation associated with swing criollo, all with distinct ideologies of race, class, and culture. In the discourse surrounding "swing," cosmopolitanism is forged in relation to a middle-class white modernity; forms of popular expression appear to start in an "authentic" form among the "chusma" and are later appropriated through standardization and codification of the dance style. While this rhetoric acknowledges the role of working-class Costa Ricans in forming the dance, by limiting swing's "authenticity" and creative potential to the working class, it reinforces dominant classes as invariably appropriating the expressive forms of Others. The second discourse, that which centers on the "criollo" aspect of Costa Rican swing dancing, attempts to portray Costa Rica as ethnically and economically homogenous; it projects "family" values and nostalgic imagery onto the Costa Rican tropical landscape. The third discursive stance I have examined, one defined by postmodern signification of various pan-Latin dance genres, encourages the elaboration of an expressive style that can be described as "cosmopolitan," with the white middle-class privilege inherent to that term. However, notions of cosmopolitanism also open up the opportunity for the emergence of new dance expressions based on genres from varying class backgrounds, lower and upper. Perhaps this will encourage a diverse dance culture which, as in the case of the global salsa movement, allows for creative interpretations based on the local in dialogue with the global. An ethical representation of dance expression is one that allows for inclusion in both creation and re-creation; credits the contributions of originators without folklorizing their lifestyles; and recognizes the power dynamics inherent to the particular expressive culture without fetishizing the subaltern.

Chapter 3. Spaces of Permission: Staged Swing Criollo as Contested Folklore

The cultural form that came to be known as swing criollo has, for the past ten years, been performed frequently in what can be considered spaces of nationalization or spaces of folklorization. I suggest that these areas spaces necessitate a translation of form for swing's staging; through the repetition of imagery and narrative, they allow for its legitimization as Costa Rican folklore in both national and international contexts. Specifically, the company La Cuna del Swing has performed frequently in two spaces I hope to analyze. The first is the arts festival. Adapting to the structure of the festival allows La Cuna del Swing to bring their dance on international tours by presenting their dance in a style that is easily recognized as folklore. It also contributes to the standardization of the swing criollo dance style. The second performance space I examine is the theater. National theaters owned by the Ministry of Culture and Youth have been utilized by the same dance company for the purpose of reconstructing swing criollo in its various "stages" or "eras." In addition to the canonization of the old guard of swing dancers and associated repertoire, La Cuna has used the National Theater to present dancers in a "reconstruction" of one of the original dance salons, most of which no longer exist.

By focusing on La Cuna del Swing, the company that has been the most visible actor in promoting swing criollo as national heritage, I hope to examine the ways that the style became folklorized through its inclusion in formalized spaces of culture such as national theaters and arts festivals. I believe that canonization of swing's original dancers (the old guard), as well as the attempt to reconstruct the archetypical early "dance salon" in the space of the *Teatro Popular Melico Salazar*, allow La Cuna to promote their performances as heritage that needs to be protected. Thus, a culture that is supposedly no

longer sustainable is preserved as a "value-added" form. Swing criollo gains value by its supposed unsustainability, since early dance salons no longer exist; by presenting this form of swing criollo as a relic of a bygone era, La Cuna ensures that the dance will be valued as national folklore, an exotic form of the past.

In a similar vein, La Cuna del Swing's performances in arts festivals internationally and in workshops (*talleres*) closer to home position the dance as currently relevant. On one hand, arts festivals reify swing as folkloric performance. On the other, the group's participation in local festivals contests traditional hierarchies of elite culture. I look at the plaza itself as a contested and sacred space as it has been constructed in Latin America, through the work of William D. Estrada and Setha Low, with special attention to the plaza as a space of cultural contestation. I believe that La Cuna del Swing's performances in all such spaces represent a contested form of culture, one that can appear folkloric while not succumbing to strictly preservationist rhetoric.

I conclude the essay by emphasizing that La Cuna del Swing's performative version of swing criollo, while appealing to neoliberal demands for a particular kind of folklorized heritage, does not satisfactorily fit a one-dimensional mold of heritage construction but instead holds many different meanings for dancers. Swing criollo's establishment as national heritage has led to the national recognition of popular dance as a legitimate investigation; it also serves as a source of income for some dancers of the "old guard," an alternative education regarding Costa Rica's class history, and a source of economic sustainability for the dance salon Karymar. I will not argue here that La Cuna del Swing in any way disrupts neoliberalism's increasing commodification of culture, nor do I argue against the idea that "[w]hen instrumentalized into a given festival, tourist initiative, museum, or any other creative industry, 'culture' is objectified and almost always hierarchically ordered". (Dávila 2012, 4) Nonetheless, given the vibrant dance

culture still to be found in places such as Karymar that have benefited from the nationalization of swing criollo, I feel that there is something disingenuous in dismissing spaces of folklorization. I argue that these spaces, too, leave room for agency in the mythologizing of swing criollo and Costa Rica's dance history.

SWING CRIOLLO AS A STAGED SPECTACLE

By the time of swing criollo's official declaration as national heritage in 2012, it had already seen a long history of unofficial integration into social events. This is made quite clear in the tone of newspaper articles such as the one cited earlier that announced La Cuna del Swing's reprise of the program "Permiso…viene el swing" in the *Teatro de la Danza*. In the same article, Torijano declared her intentions in presenting the dance: "That's what we want to remember [that the dance was considered vulgar, of the chusma], because few people knew it. We want to make clear the effort of the dancers of that era [the 1970s] to not lose swing."[31]

Outside of the theater context, La Cuna del Swing has also been strongly present in international festivals. In 2011, the ensemble completed a tour of summer festivals linked to the *Consejo Internacional de Organizaciones de Festivales de Folklore y Artes Tradicionales*, traveling to England, the Czech Republic, and Switzerland.[32] The company has also performed in Peru, Ecuador, Mexico, and Chile, among other places, [33]

[31] Katherine R. Chaves, "Con Saltos, El 'swing' Criollo Cuenta Su Historia En Costa Rica," La Nación, September 6, 2013, http://www.nacion.com/archivo/criollo-cuenta-historia-Costa-Rica_0_1364463550.html. Original: "Justo eso es lo que queremos recordar, porque poca gente lo sabe. Queremos dejar en claro el esfuerzo que hicieron los bailarines de la época para no perder el *swing*."

[32] Yendry Miranda, "La Cuna Del Swing Regresa Satisfecha de Su Gira Por Europa," *La Nación*, September 13, 2011, http://www.nacion.com/ocio/farandula/Cuna-Swing-regresa-satisfecha-Europa_0_1219678049.html.

[33] Katherine R. Chaves, "El Incomparable Swing Criollo Enloqueció a Perú," *La Nación*, October 29, 2013, http://www.nacion.com/ocio/incomparable-emswingem-criollo-enloquecio-Peru_0_1375062547.html.

as well as the International Festival of the Arts held in the Costa Rican province of Alajuela in 2008.[34] These festivals can be state-sanctioned, but many are privately supported as well. On a more local level, the La Cuna del Swing troupe has been an integral part of Costa Rican summer life, giving a swing criollo workshop in the *Parque España* in 2011, for instance. Sponsored by the Ministry of Culture and other official organizations, they have apparently given similar classes throughout the city on several other occasions.

It is safe to say, then, that swing criollo has been part of a national culture industry for some time, and that La Cuna del Swing has been influential in shaping and promoting its image internationally and at home. Working toward swing's acceptance as folklore has earned Torijano recognition via the Ministry of Culture's National Award of Traditional Popular Culture. It has also resulted in commercial recognition for Torijano and her group: dancers associated with La Cuna del Swing appear frequently on Costa Rican television programs and other national media.

The coupling of swing's acceptance as national heritage with its commercialization is neither incidental nor unique to Torijano's presentation. Swing's commercialization seems to me to have been central to its folklorization. It bears repeating that before swing was considered valuable heritage, it was commodified and to some degree exoticized by media in the country in the late 1980s by the program *Fantástico y sus Piratas del Ritmo*. (López and Salazar 128) One can see some of the very same faces in the program, such as that of Carlos "Gringo" Moreira, individuals who still perform with La Cuna del Swing today. Even in this earlier period, "Gringo" was performing his famous group dance with multiple women. In 2003, less than ten years

[34] Doriam Díaz, "Alajuela Bailó Y Se Carcajeó Con El Festival de Las Artes," *La Nación*, April 14, 2008, http://www.nacion.com/vivir/Alajuela-bailo-carcajeo-Festival-Artes_0_970302987.html.

after *Fantástico* went off the air, Gabriela Hernández filmed the short documentary *Se Prohibe Bailar Suin*. In the opening scene of the documentary, Carlos, driving his taxi through the city, recounts the story of the dance salon that prominently displayed the sign "Prohibido Bailar Swing" in its doorway.

It is perhaps not surprising that a Costa Rican wrote last year of his experiences at a tourism exhibition in Germany:

> Amid this hyper-reality, I could momentarily feel "at home". The Costa Rican Tourism Institute (ICT), to attract attention to its booth, organized a short swing criollo event. A professional couple taught how to dance it and invited the public to emulate them (with the promise of giving them an exotic experience). Swing, despite being to my knowledge a form of intangible patrimony, is a little-known element of our society, both for ourselves and for foreigners. However, the dynamic [at this event] managed to create [a balance] between being a spectator and becoming part of the spectacle [*mirada y paisaje*].
>
> Also, the exoticism of Tica [Costa Rican] nature and of its swing dancing constituted a heterotopia. Some visitors to the exhibition probably assumed that Costa Rica is a jungle where everyone spends their time dancing swing: the utopia of the world's happiest country, turned outward, contrasted, and repackaged.
>
> Swing, this cultural expression in its own moment forbidden and erased, brought me to see such a non-place as a closed port. Once the music ended, I couldn't stop wondering how many will come to our country in search of swing, trying to bridge the gap between fiction and reality, between utopia and heterotopia. [35]

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[35] Ignacio Castillo Ulloa, "El 'swing Criollo' Como Recurso Heterotópico," *La Nación*, March 20, 2012, http://www.nacion.com/archivo/emswingem-criollo-recurso-heterotopico_0_1257474246.html. "'Swing criollo'. En medio de esta madeja hiperreal, pude sentirme momentáneamente 'como en casa'. El Instituto Costarricense de Turismo (ICT), para atraer atención a su stand, organizó una breve función de swing criollo. Una pareja profesional mostraba cómo bailar e incitaba al público a emularlos (con la promesa de darles una flor exótica). El swing, pese a ser –hasta donde sé– patrimonio intangible, es una faceta poco conocida de nuestra sociedad, tanto para propios como para extraños. Empero, la dinámica logró crear la ficción adecuada entre mirada y paisaje.

También, el exotismo de la naturaleza tica y el swing constituyeron recursos heterotópicos, dado que bien pudieron haber razonado los visitantes que Costa Rica es una jungla donde todo el mundo se la pasa bailando swing : esa utopía del país más feliz del mundo, invertida, contrapuesta y representada.

El swing , esa expresión cultural en su momento prohibida y tachada, me trajo en mi derivar por tanta no–lugaridad a puerto fijo. Cesada la música no dejaba de preguntarme cuántos llegarán a nuestro país en busca del swing , tratando de salvar la distancia entre ficción y realidad, entre utopía y heterotopía."

Such is the interesting scenario in which a commercialized form of swing criollo became part of folklore, and the folkloric version, rather than the popular one, then served commercial ends. The intertwining of the "commercial" and "authentic," the "folkloric" and the "popular," and the national and international can also be seen as central to the construction of culture in neoliberalism, whereby American swing dancing set to Colombian cumbia can come to represent the national urban folklore of Costa Rica. Given that almost any cultural form can be construed national or international, authentically traditional or internationally postmodern, why did swing criollo in particular become national heritage? The answer, as I understand it, can be found in the actions of Torijano and others who adapted the expression to particular formats and national spaces.

THEORIZING SPACES OF CULTURE

I would like to briefly theorize the concept of "heritage" as it relates to "tradition." The existence of pure traditions has proven elusive since the positioning of tradition in opposition to modernity in the nineteenth century. While folklorists of the early and mid-twentieth century sought to separate "corrupting" modern influences from "traditional" cultures, the categorization of "heritage" itself has come under attack in more recent years. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues that "[w]hile it looks old, heritage is actually something new. Heritage is a mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past. Heritage thus defined depends on display to give dying economies and dead sites a second life as exhibitions of themselves." (1998, 7) Kirschenblatt's analysis of heritage as a cultural imperative of the present reiterates many of the criticisms from earlier works such as Eric Hobsbawm's *The Invention of Tradition*.

(1983) Analyses of the heritage and culture industries reveal that traditions believed to be outside the commercial realm are in fact often constructed by them.

But heritage, far from a one-dimensional commodification of difference, serves multiple ends, and commodified heritage should not be dismissed only on grounds of its commercial nature. Folklorist Charles Briggs has suggested that instead of advancing postmodern critiques of nationalism, scholars in the Hobsbawmian tradition may "deepen modernist projects" while contributing to the domination of subaltern communities. (Briggs 1996, 463-464) In other words, by claiming that all traditions are "invented" they risk denying the legitimacy of subaltern groups for whom certain traditions have real value. The denial of authenticity of musical productions for tourists can also be read as a denial of the right of musicians from subaltern communities to engage in musical labor for profit, as ethnomusicologist Jennifer Ryan has noted in discussing the fetishization of poverty in Nashville blues. (2011)

Musical appropriation has been of central concern to those involved in cultural rights: among other forms of intangible cultural heritage, recorded music's character as a sound object makes it easily susceptible to the process of "schizophonic mimesis," or the separation of sound from its social context, as ethnomusicologist Steven Feld has theorized. (1996) Dance-based expressive forms require a different understanding. Despite the possibility for a dance to be commodified and dispersed through mass media such as television, it is still "supremely susceptible to localizing processes." (Hutchinson 2013, 7) The imagery of dance cannot be divorced from the body.

Because dance's local meaning is contingent on the specifics of any given performance, the space where it is performed is crucial to its understanding. More specifically, La Cuna del Swing's presentation of swing criollo in the space of the dance salon has a specific meaning, intended audience, and specific meanings its creators

intended to disseminate. It serves a function for Torijano outside of the immediate event: to promote swing criollo as, as she has called it, "urban folklore." She is aware of the dissonance between her version of folklore and audience expectations of folkloric performances: after La Cuna's performance in Peru, she said of the event, "when talking about folklore, people expect to see those typical costumes with long skirts and when we came out in miniskirts, they were thrown off guard. Later, I told the audience that it is Intangible Patrimony of Costa Rica and it all made sense to them and then they were totally taken by the *baile*."[36] To understand how La Cuna del Swing is able to promote swing as folkloric heritage, it is necessary to examine these contested spaces of culture in Costa Rica, Latin America, and the Americas more generally. Spaces of culture such as national theaters and arts festivals, rather than monolithic sites for imposition of elite forms, are actually contested areas of social expression. However, repetition of swing criollo in these spaces possibly generates a folkloric style that, as Kirshenblatt explains of folkloric performances more generally, "take forms that are alien, if not antithetical, to how they are produced and experienced in their local settings … with repeated exposure, cultural performances can become routinized and trivialized." (64)

I draw from anthropologist Setha Low's *On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture* (2000) for much of my interpretation of the contested nature of public spaces of culture. Low's book is based on fieldwork in San José, during which she documented the activities and histories of the *Parque Central* and the *Plaza de la Cultura*. Taking for granted the plaza's identification as a symbol of civic power and public expression (as opposed to the generally privatized North American plaza), the

[36] Chaves, "El Incomparable Swing Criollo Enloqueció a Perú." Original: "Cuando se habla de folclor, la gente espera ver aquellos trajes típicos con enaguas larguísimas y, cuando salíamos nosotros, con minifaldas, se quedaban desubicados. Luego, yo le explicaba a la gente que es Patrimonio Intangible de Costa Rica y ya entendían todo y hasta se involucraban totalmente con el baile"

author examines the contestation of public space that, from the plaza's earliest days in the Americas, has led to conflicting uses. Importantly for my purposes, she examines the very architecture of the plaza as a contested terrain: although Eurocentric scholarship has focused on Enlightenment-era influences in the design of the plaza, Low cites Angel Gracia Zambrano's work in revealing Pre-Columbian cultural practices embedded in the concept of the plaza. (Low 2000, 105) She also notes that the plaza has been subject to constraint by neoliberalists, with rhetoric of reforming the plaza for the "common good" being used to obscure their capitalistic motives. (181) The performances I examine took place in venues in or near the plaza that Low examines, which still serves as a point of cultural contestation.

The spaces of nationalization and folklorization of Costa Rican swing criollo are directly related to programs and initiatives of the Ministry of Culture. I first analyze La Cuna del Swing's performances in the parks around the city center, including the *Parque Nacional* and *Plaza de la Cultura*. I hone in on the *Parque Central*, comparing La Cuna's presentation at the open-air Transitarte festival to their previously discussed historical performance at the *Teatro Popular Melico Salazar*. I then examine La Cuna del Swing's "Permiso…viene el swing" staged dance event as an in-situ recreation of intangible cultural heritage, during which the theater functions as a sort of museum for older styles of swing criollo as they are danced by the "old guard."

BLATHER, DANCE, REPEAT: FOLKLORIZING SWING IN THE PARKS OF SAN JOSÉ

PROJECT NAME:

Transitarte

OBJECTIVE:

> To energize the northern part of the city of San José through art and culture. Activity was especially concentrated in the Parque Morazán, Parque España, and Parque Jardín de Paz and their vicinities.
>
> DESCRIPTION:
>
> Transitarte utilizes public space as the ideal stage for developing artistic, literary, recreational, artisanal, audiovisual, and culinary activities and sports during weekends ... Transitarte is a solid platform for designers and artists to showcase their work to diverse audiences. It is a showcase that takes the pulse of national [artistic] production. In this way the Municipality of San José exhorts artists to improve and innovate, promoting cultural enterprises and offering paid workspaces while streamlining the cultural guild.[37]

The Transitarte National Festival is an annual summer event that started in 2004. Over the course of a weekend, it takes over the parks in the center of San José, Costa Rica to stage concerts, art shows, dance performances, and other spectacles. Although it showcases local artists, it also aims to attract tourists and gringo expatriates as well, as its advertisement in the English newspaper Tico Times suggests. The Transitarte Festival ficha referenced above also lists its intention to promote "San José as a cultural tourism destination [and as] a safe, traversable, and accessible city." Artist lineups in previous years have included moderately successful Costa Rican groups such as Editus, a jazz trio that has toured internationally as a backup band for Rubén Blades; Son de Tikizia, a Grammy-winning salsa group whose leader, Walter Flores, has arranged for Rubén Blades; and Sonámbulo, a psychedelic tropical fusion group with members from Costa

[37] María José Callejas Capra, "Ficha Transitarte," accessed March 22, 2014, https://www.msj.go.cr/informacion_ciudadana/cultura/SiteAssets/fichas_cultura/Ficha%20Transitarte.pdf. Original: NOMBRE DEL PROYECTO: / Transitarte / OBJETIVO: / Dinamizar el eje norte de la ciudad de San José por medio del arte y la cultura. La activación se concentró especialmente en los parques el Parque Morazán, Parque España, y Parque Jardín de Paz y sus inmediaciones / DESCRIPCIÓN: / Transitarte utiliza el espacio público como escenario ideal para desarrollar actividades artísticas, literarias, recreativas, artesanales, audiovisuales, gastronómicas y deportivas durante un fin de semana. Transitarte es una plataforma sólida, para que creadores y artistas nacionales muestren su trabajo al público más diverso, es una vitrina que toma el pulso de la producción nacional. Por este medio la Municipalidad de San José impulsa a los y las artistas a mejorar e innovar, promoviendo las empresas culturales y ofreciendo espacios de trabajo remunerado dinamizando el gremio cultural.

Rica, Cuba, Colombia, and El Salvador. Such acts are presented in tandem with a number of lesser-known music and dance acts and miscellaneous interactive events, such as dance classes, all of which are provided for free. Each year, organizers choose a new festival theme, some of which correspond closely with local political interests. In 2010, for instance, the year Laura Chinchilla became the first female president of the country, the festival theme was "the contribution of women" to the nation. Other themes have included the relationship between the city and nature (2009), "linking cultures" to promote tolerance and diversity (2011), and the use of public space as an impetus for "coexistence, security, and culture."

On one hand, the Transitarte project reveals the ways in which these events blur the line between artistic cultivation and for-profit ventures. The use of the corporate buzzword "innovation" and the push to promote Costa Rica as a tourist destination can be seen as a corporatization of culture, especially in light of Low's argument that the Costa Rican plaza has been subjected to increasing gentrification in recent years. The state has also angered prominent musicians in the past with its alleged mistreatment of local musical groups in favor of international artists.[38] It can also be argued, however, that in a country as small as Costa Rica, state sponsorship of popular local artists, however inadequate or unbalanced, is necessary for the survival of certain culture industries. Rock musician Inti Picado of the band El Parque mentioned to me in a 2011 interview that the small number of venues in the country and the small market for new music prevents rock

[38] Malpaís. "Malpaís estará ausente de inauguración del Estadio Nacional," February 18, 2011. http://www.grupomalpais.com/noticias/2011-02-18.php. In 2011, during the opening of the National Stadium, the popular nueva canción group Malpaís decided not to accept the invitation to play at the inaugural concert. The concert featured twenty Costa Rican groups that would each play for twenty minutes during the presentation, but Malpaís was told that there was little money available to support national groups. This was seen as insulting to national groups when the popular Colombian pop artist Shakira was scheduled to appear the next day.

bands from succeeding financially.[39] Dance instructor Liliana Valle of Merecumbé also saw the diminishing number of dance spaces as a serious problem for popular dance cultures.[40] Thus, the festival can be read in several different ways regarding the politics of state sponsorship of the arts, cultural sustainability, and the culture industry.

When La Cuna del Swing appeared in the Transitarte Festival, specifically at the *Parque Nacional* on March 4, 2012, they seemed to be responding to various interests, presenting their dance simultaneously as an individual artistic statement, a tourist attraction, and as a manifestation of recently minted national heritage. The show included a bit of everything: Walter Cupido Morales of the old guard performing group dancing; the rest of the company wearing flashy purple, silver, and black outfits; and dance routines set to other genres such as *bolero*, *mambo*, and *chachachá* to complement their famous swing style. The choreography was more spaced out across the stage than many of the group's performances in other venues. Their dance moves tended to be spread out as well. Musically, the set tended toward more electronic-sounding cumbia, with a heavier bass and more prominent electronic percussion part than what is present in many of their indoor spectacles. Each routine, most of which were several minutes long, was prefaced by a booming announcement about the significance of swing criollo to the country.

I would like to briefly speculate on some of the factors that may affect these performances on practical and ideological levels. Practically speaking, the festival performance is affected by the need to present a spectacle for a large, diverse audience. Unlike the more intimate setting of the theater that I discuss later, festival performances (which may or may not have video projection) require dancers to take larger steps in

[39] Personal interview, Inti Picado. San José, Costa Rica, June 15, 2011.
[40] Personal interview, Liliana Valle. San José, Costa Rica, June 28, 2011.

order to be seen by those farther away. The need for large dance moves prevents the subtle display of different "styles" or "phases" of swing criollo. Instead, the tendency, it seems, is toward displays of a potpourri of contemporary dance styles such as cumbia, chachachá, bolero, and danzón. Still, La Cuna del Swing's primary emphasis on festival performances is their own brand of swing dancing. There is little room for drawn-out storytelling in a park when people may come and go freely; instead of a lengthy narration, the dance must "speak for itself."

It is my opinion that while swing criollo was made legible as commodified heritage through its iteration in international festivals, its repetition was also made possible through its commodification. In other words, international tours such as La Cuna del Swing's recent trip to Europe standardize their performance practice because the festival model requires choreographies and music with unique features that can be easily "plugged in" to any festival context. The standardized form facilitates future tours and performances and comes to stand in for the entire phenomenon of swing criollo.

Figure 8: Ligia Torijano and Walter Cupido Morales at the 2012 Transitarte.[41]

I do not want to dismiss the festival's potential for contestation and negotiation of culture from the perspective of performers themselves. Although it is now considered folklore, swing in the festival context (and perhaps even beyond it) blurs the lines between a folkloric performance and popular dance. The choreographic improvisation so central to the style is not entirely absent in festivals either: in between the younger dancers' routines, old guard dancers such as Walter Cupido Morales and Torijano herself often improvise onstage. The blaring cumbia soundtracks to such shows, much of it is from the 1970s or 1980s, are far removed from the more low-key music that has accompanied indoor performances by the group and other presentations such as that of the Central American Games. In general, the presence of electronic percussion samples

[41] *Swing Criollo de Costa Rica-Mix Juana La Cubana-Ligia Torijano14, 2012*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhZXm2TMLUE&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

mark the whole performance as one of popular dance, not accompanied by the more sencilla music of "folkloric" dances. And of course the setting of the festival encourages participation by popular music acts and more informal, participatory activities such as workshops.

The Transitarte performance by La Cuna del Swing is only one example of how nationalized cultural displays leave room for contestation of their hierarchical nature. At the 2011 Transitarte festival, Merecumbé performed a more prop-driven routine where they danced cumbia and swing while "reading" newspapers in American swing-era suits;[42] like other performances by this group, the routine blended a sense of high artistic vision and choreography with popular dance styles. Torijano has also given informal swing classes to beginners in nearby parks such as the *Parque España*.[43] Because of the blurring of different levels of more prestigious artistic forms and choreographies and popular forms of culture, I believe that the forging of swing criollo as national folklore represents a contested, rather than monolithic and "top-down," approach to the creation of tradition. The dance is continually presented in a form that, as Torijano mentioned of its presence in the Peruvian festival, is illegible as folklore because of the modern outfits and music. Yet it is embraced onstage as an urban, modern folklore.

THE THEATER AS MUSEUM: RECONSTRUCTION OF DEFUNCT SPACES IN LA CUNA DEL SWING'S "PERMISO…VIENE EL SWING"

The *Teatro Popular Melico Salazar* is one of the most prominent theaters managed by the Ministry of Culture and Youth, charged with very literally performing

[42] *BAILAMOS O QUE?, MERECUMBE, FESTIVAL TRANSITARTE 2011 (SWING CRIOLLO)*, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WlrcqJOMGGM&feature=youtube_gdata_player.
[43] La Cuna Del Swing - Enamoráte de Tu Ciudad, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9NnV9M3u_2Q&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

Costa Rican identity. If one walks east along Avenida 2 a few blocks, one encounters popular tourist attractions such as the National Museum of Costa Rica, the Pre-Columbian Gold Museum, and the National Artisans' Market, where buses drop off visitors to haggle with merchants over a few thousand *colones* (a few dollars) for hammocks and colored wooden frogs. Another popular tourist attraction and historical site is the nearby *Teatro Nacional* where one can often go to hear classical music by the National Symphonic Orchestra or Symphonic Youth Orchestra. Across the street from Melico Salazar is the *Parque Central*, one of the smaller parks in the city center today and also one of the oldest, dating to at least 1761. (Low 2000, 65)

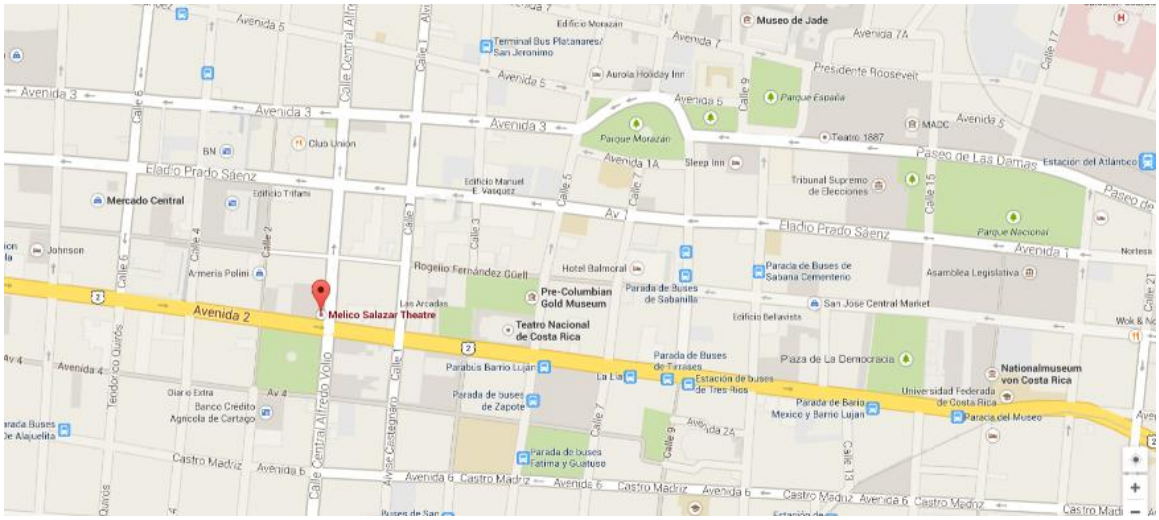

Figure 9: The *Teatro Melico Salazar* and central San José parks. Google Maps.

The area that eventually became the Teatro was purchased by a Spaniard in the early twentieth century; he constructed the theater between 1927 and 1928 with the intention of using it to stage zarzuelas and operettas. Later the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports (today the Ministry of Culture and Youth) purchased the building in the early 1970s and renovated in the 1980s to become a "specialized cultural institution"

of the Costa Rican state. Today, the Compañía Nacional de Danza, a troupe founded by the Ministry in 1979 and transformed into an "artistic program of the Teatro Popular" in 2000, uses its performances there to "form a style of dance expressing Costa Rican identity through a technical corporeal language and a contemporary aesthetic." The theater also hosts the Compañía Nacional de Teatro, formed in 1971. Other artistic initiatives associated with the theater include the National Program for the Development of Scenic Arts (PROARTES) and the Taller Nacional de la Danza, a program that offers courses in popular contemporary dance.[44]

It was in the Teatro Melico Salazar on May 6, 2012, that La Cuna's first performance of swing criollo's history "Permiso…viene el swing" was staged; it would be reprised the next year at the Teatro de la Danza. As the newspaper Nación noted, the event corresponded perfectly to the official declaration of swing criollo as national patrimony. "Permiso…viene el swing" recounted the history of swing criollo, as well as another Costa Rican style called "bolero criollo," in thirteen scenes. The first scene featured American swing dancing, showed a single couple dancing to Glenn Miller as the man lifted the woman into the air and spun around in a style reminiscent of lindy hop; both danced with reckless abandon. In the second scene dedicated to Colombian cumbia, about nine well-dressed dancers formed very loose couples, dancing as much individually as with each other; everyone maintained a discrete distance from their respective partner. Hanging from the ceiling on the stage, intended in this segment to look like a salon with a jukebox, tables, and a bar, was a sign that read "SE PROHIBE BAILAR SWING." This setup remained the same as some dancers left the stage for the fourth scene, "classic bolero." In the fifth part of Torijano's presentation, "swing criollo" was finally

[44] Ministerio de Cultura y Juventud, "Teatro Popular Melico Salazar," accessed April 2, 2014, http://www.teatromelico.go.cr/Portal/.

introduced. In place of the "SE PROHIBE" sign, the salon's sign now read only "SALÓN CAÑAVERAL." The old guard of swing criollo, who had just danced the "classic" styles of bolero and cumbia, now danced their signature style of swing criollo to the occasional encouraging shouts of audience members. After a similar display of "bolero criollo" and some banter by Carlos "Gringo" Moreira, the dancers began a routine in which they traded partners: this proved a simple way for a group with an odd number to continue dancing in couples (note that couples consisted exclusively of one man and one woman, never same-sex couples). The eighth scene reenacted a swing dancing competition such as those held in the salons of the 1970s or on Costa Rican television today, with each couple dancing about a minute. The old guard then danced again in the "competition" together to great applause. Torijano herself decided the winner after the audience in the theater voted through their applause. Finally, as part of this scene, Moreira began to dance with four women simultaneously. The ninth scene revealed that bolero criollo, too, can be interpreted in this style: Walter Cupido Morales, a dancer of the "old guard," danced with Torijano and another woman of the old guard in a close three-person dance. Scene ten featured a more electronic style of cumbia music as "new guard" dancers took the stage along with the older generation, demonstrating their updated dance style, a more reserved version of the dance without as much jumping or stylistic variation. The most elaborate part of the "staging" followed, with more people than ever seated around the props of the "bar" and tables as the electronic cumbia continued. In the penultimate scene, after more staged banter between Ligia and Cupido, Ligia leads the newer dances in "classes" of swing criollo; Ligia presented moves while other dancers, forming lines horizontal to the stage behind her, copied her as they practiced the dance. The spectacle concluded with everyone dancing to bolero criollo as a song with a strong Latin rock feel plays in the background.

Figure 10: The "old guard" dancing swing criollo in "Permiso…viene el swing"[45]

One function of telling the history in this way is to canonize the "old guard," a process that has been occurring since the documentary *Se Prohibe Bailar Suin* first appeared in 2003, and a year after Torijano began dance lessons in the salon Karymar. The phrase "old guard" dates back to at least this documentary, when Moreira uses it to position himself in his first appearance on screen. The canonization of the first generation of performers establishes the legitimacy of swing criollo as folklore. The description of the Facebook page associated with the event best reveals the connection between authenticity, canonization, and the language of the old guard:

> Permiso…viene el Swing is the story of Swing told and danced by its very dancers. We have characters [personajes] like Gringo, Cupido, Campanera, Primo, Fao and Jaime of the Old Guard, of the 31 dancers we have onstage…it's the story of Swing from its beginnings all the way to its declaration as Intangible Cultural Patrimony. This spectacle is unique in style and is very criollo and authentic. General entrance is 5000 colones [slightly less than 10 U.S. dollars].[46]

[45] La Cuna Del Swing -- 05 Melico Salazar 2012- Swing Criollo Vieja Guardia.wmv, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KHuYJ2RBDGs&feature=youtube_gdata_player.
[46] "Permiso...viene El Swing.," accessed March 15, 2014, https://www.facebook.com/events/341410142580792/.

In addition to delimiting the old guard and giving swing criollo a number of easily recognizable stages of development, Torijano's presentation serves the function of inserting her own projects into the canon. The introductory dance classes taught at places such as Karymar now become a part of the story of swing criollo, a new mode of transmission. Canonization can also be seen as adding distance: even though the "riff-raff" categorization is recognized as a stereotype, the staged history of the dance still emphasizes a temporal split between the "authentic" origins of swing and its later iterations.

More than a simple acknowledgement of a specific group of original swing dancers, the recreation of a salon in a theater is also an indirect form of anthropological exhibition, an *in situ* museum piece featuring dancers of a traditional style whose culture, it is assumed, is no longer viable. "If heritage as we knew it from the industry were sustainable," remarks Kirshenblatt, "it would not require protection." (150) Placing the old guard in a defunct theater implies that the salon culture is in danger of extinction. Protecting "heritage" is thus done through staged performances and public decrees.

The relationship to prohibition is not incidental to swing criollo as a staged spectacle. Presentation of the two salons in "Permiso" reveal interesting aspects of ethnography of subaltern groups and its relation to entertainment and spectacle. In this case, prohibition is central to exhibition; the spectacle is enticing because it allows audiences who might balk at entering a seedy dance salon a look into such a space. Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* has set the tone regarding the "discursive explosion" around sex after the Victorian era, arguing that the proliferation of discourse on sex and sexuality is directly related to Western "repression" of sexuality. (1988) The recreated dance salon can be seen as an iteration of this "discursive explosion," a glimpse into a

fantasy of unrepressed bodily freedom for those whose cultural background prohibit them such freedom.

It is also worth briefly considering who has been incorporated as part of the "old guard." Moreira has remarked that many of the women who used to swing dance in the old salons are no longer doing so because of either drug addiction problems or family commitments. (López and Salazar 183) Because many dance salons are now closed and because many old dancers (of both sexes) are no longer active, there remains only a small (visible) group of older dancers in the remaining salons such as Karymar: this has become the "old guard." Perhaps the relatively small number of currently active dancers has made their canonization inevitable.

Figure 11: The *protagonistas* of swing criollo[47]

I have so far approached "Permiso" as a top-down display of cultural heritage, but I believe that Torijano's agenda represents a reconfiguration of culture in this space. Rather than view La Cuna's recounted history of swing as that of folklorization of a dance genre, I want to reposition it as a medium for self-canonization on the part of

[47] *PERMISO VIENE EL SWING*, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJJp5SPmS5k&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

dancers such as Carlos and the legitimization of popular dance by Torijano. The Teatro Popular Melico Salazar serves symbolically to reinforce high "culture," to present a prescriptive form of the "popular" and its "people," and to claim the proper representation of *la danza* of the Costa Rican populace; however, as with other semi-public spaces that serve hegemonic ends, it is worth questioning their monolithic character to avoid reinforcing it.

Although the performance does contribute to canonization, it is also worth repositioning "canonization" as "self-mythmaking." Members of the old guard are not silent re-enactors, but write their own contribution into the story of swing criollo. The first way they do this is through swing's official narrative: Moreira has repeatedly claimed group dancing as his own innovation, one that happened spontaneously during a club outing in which the club's gender ratio was skewed toward women and, perhaps naturally, several women wanted to dance with him at the same time. (Hernández 2003) While this story is not without its implicit machismo, Carlos can legitimately lay claim to at least this particular style of group dancing. A video of *Fantástico y Sus Piratas del Ritmo* from 1994 shows Carlos dancing with multiple women in the same style he would later use for presentations such as Torijano's.[48]

Dancers also style themselves corporeally and visually in a manner distinct from folkloric paradigms. The swing segments of "Permiso" are highly individualistic and not rigidly choreographed: they leave much room for individual interpretation. Thus, early dancers use the stage not to demonstrate stylistic unity, but instead the diversity of styles they embraced which eventually came to be called "swing criollo." Dress style also varies greatly from person to person: the lack of standardization in dress and choreographic

[48] *Fantástico Canal 7 Costa Rica, LOS PIRATAS DEL RITMO*, Swing Tico EL GRINGO.

style, especially compared to folkloric dance performances in which outfits and routines are often highly choreographed, invites the audience to accept a diversity of imagery without the support of narrative context. In other words, "Permiso" presents difference and variety without fetishizing it.

Torijano also challenges the official notion of "culture" in various ways through "Permiso". As a swing dancer since the age of seventeen, she is easily positioned within the old guard of swing criollo; she also stands at the crossroads between the dance academies' style and the less formal salon style, the former of which she left after a brief time to pursue dancing in the salons (López and Salazar 86). Because of her Karymar connection, she is able to profit from swing's heightened visibility. Swing's legitimization has also helped La Cuna del Swing to secure performances at international festivals, as mentioned.

Torijano, I believe, contests elite forms of culture in "Permiso" by blurring the lines between the commercial and folkloric, suggesting that urban popular folklore is a legitimate field of inquiry, inherently deserving of study in its own right. There is no attempt to erase the commercial nature of swing's origins or contemporary status. Instead, swing is recognized as both: a dance that originated in the transnational flows of two other styles, was popularized on television shows and through salon competitions, and exists today in multiple forms.

To recapitulate, I view La Cuna del Swing's performance at the Teatro Popular Melico Salazar as an act of canonization of swing criollo's relatively recent historical narrative, an attempt to legitimize its history, its main actors, and to some degree, valorize popular dance as an art form. The reconstruction of a defunct salon as a stage backdrop, within the logic of the theater, confirms that swing criollo needs to be protected/celebrated as intangible cultural heritage. Far from reifying notions of heritage,

however, the dancers' performances contested the notion of static traditions through corporeal expressions and self-mythmaking that emphasized the highly individualistic nature of their approaches to dance. Torijano's history of swing criollo was therefore able to work within the confines of national heritage production while creating new spaces for the acceptance of individualized expressions of popular dance.

CONCLUSIONS

Swing criollo underwent a decade of nationalization from about 2003, with the filming of Se Prohibe Bailar Suin, through 2012 when it was officially recognized as intangible cultural heritage and celebrated with the history "Permiso…viene el swing." Performances on national and international stages led to a standardization of the dance style, a canonization of actors central to its official history, and a forging of a mythology of swing criollo so that it could be read as national heritage. La Cuna del Swing, as they performed swing criollo in festivals, also contributed to the standardization of the nationally recognized style. The canonization of the old guard was also crucial to its legibility as a tradition.

I refrain from reading swing's nationalization as the embalming of a dying heritage or the folklorizing of living actors; instead, I find that the ways swing is performed on stage contests hierarchies of culture and blurs twentieth-century categories of "folk," "art," and "popular" cultures. Elements of each can be found in La Cuna del Swing's presentations. The working-class San José dancers known as the old guard are not objects of dance investigation, but have engaged in the mythmaking and self-canonization of swing's history in ways similar to those of the state. Older dancers benefit from the exposure brought to them through canonization: cultural expression

should thus be considered a form of labor and its commodification can be seen as part of this labor.

Finally, unlike many other forms of "folk" expression, swing criollo has remained viable outside the festival and the theater. The same actors that have brought the dance to official recognition have ensured both swing's continued performance in San José clubs and the acknowledgement of its working-class roots without a fetishization of its subaltern status. It remains to be seen whether the gentrification brought with tourism will wipe out remaining dance spaces in the country as urban space becomes increasingly privatized, but swing's legitimization as a popular modern expression will perhaps highlight the importance of ample dancing spaces for new generations of living dance traditions. I believe that the rhetoric blurring the lines between folk and popular, and recognizing the need for "traditions" to continue in "modern" forms, has contributed to more dynamic forms of popular expressions that will continue to benefit Costa Rican dance culture.

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