Institut des Hautes Études de l'Amérique latine (IHEAL)
Université Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris 3
Salsa: History in Motion
HYSP006
Professor Martha S. Santos
email: martha.santos@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr
Wednesdays, 10 h – 12 h
Classroom: TBA
Language of the Course: English

Course Description:
This class provides students with the opportunity to examine and experience the history, aesthetics, and movement of salsa dancing, from its origins in the Afro-Cuban sacred and profane rhythms and dances of enslaved and formerly enslaved peoples to its modern emergence in the Latino/a neighborhoods of New York during the 1960s and 1970s. Rather than being a purely intellectual exercise, this class makes the embodied practice of salsa dancing a central component of the learning experience. We will analyze how the various dances and rhythms encompassed in salsa emerged within complex histories of enslavement, racism, colonialism, nationalism, immigration, commercialization, urbanization, and globalization in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and New York City. We will also explore the changing ways in which different groups of people have used these dances as vehicles to express identities (cultural, religious, ethnic, gender, national, regional, sexual, and personal) and values (personal and cultural). Through exercises focused on the body movement, isolation, and footwork characteristic of the various ingredients of salsa, we will also discover the evolving aesthetics of salsa music and dance in connection to Afro-Caribbean sources, cultural hybridization, urban sensibilities, technological developments, and cultural commodification. Students will have the opportunity to design their own creative reflective assignments on the salsa scene in Paris, and/or to participate in a showcase dance performance of a salsa routine at the end of the semester.

Course Objectives:
To improve reading skills and the ability to locate and learn the significant aspects of the material read;
To improve writing skills through essay exams;
To improve, through class discussion and debate, skills in orally presenting information and in critical thinking;
To develop a salsa movement vocabulary that students can combine with personal expression and improvisational work;
To develop a general understanding of the historical development of salsa music and dance; 
To develop an understanding of how scholars from the fields of dance, dance history, music 
history, social history, anthropology, and cultural studies approach the history of salsa music and 
dance; 
To cultivate new ethical capacities for understanding and appreciating non-western music and 
dance.

**Required Course Readings:** The required articles and book chapters will be available in the 
isorbonne platform. Students need to print their own copies of all these materials and bring them 
to class on the day when we discuss them. Students can also bring a laptop computer to have 
access to the readings during class time.

Additional readings might be assigned throughout the semester. In such cases, you will get 
plenty of advanced notice as to the due dates for such readings.

**Course Requirements and Grading:**

**Attendance:** Students are required to attend class regularly. A maximum of two (2) absences are 
allowed. Once a student reaches three (3) absences he or she will lose 5 points towards the final 
grade for each absence. Students who miss class are still responsible for all discussion and 
reading material, for watching the films screened in class, and for catching up on the dance styles 
introduced on studio days.

**Participation (25%):** Full participation in each class, both in discussion and dance, is essential 
to make this class a success.

To participate effectively in classroom activities, students need to come prepared to class by 
having done the readings, taken notes, thought about questions, interpretations or other issues 
related to the texts or other assignments. You will also need to actively contribute to discussions 
and other activities in class. Occasionally, you will be asked to write short answers, comments, 
or take unannounced pop quizzes on the assigned readings during class. These exercises also 
make up part of your participation grade.

This class will include a dance component, normally after discussion and analysis of readings 
and short lectures, on most class days. Participation in dance activities is also essential, whether 
you have danced in the past or not, because one of the main goals of the course is to experience 
in our bodies the history that we are learning. If you are unable to dance due to injury or non-
contagious illness, you are still required to observe the dance activities or participate in a 
modified way. Please note that students will not be graded on their skills or abilities as dancers, 
but on their intention and willingness to experience the history of salsa in their own bodies.

Students will also be required to go in an outing to a salsa class or salsa activity in Paris at least 
onece during the course. We will plan the time and date for this outing with plenty of time in 
advance.
Take-home mid-term exam (35%): There will be a take-home mid-term exam which will consist of an essay question in response to a pre-circulated question based on assigned readings. Instructions for this assignment will be given to students well in advance of its due date.

Final project (40%): Students will have the option to write an analytical essay on the salsa scene in Paris, using concepts and ideas from the readings done throughout the course, to write/perform/or create a reflective assignment on the material learned and its personal meanings, and/or to participate in a group choreography project to be performed at the end of the semester. All class participants will decide on what the format the final project will be for the class during the first three weeks of the semester. Instructions for this assignment will be provided well in advance of its due date, once the class has determined the nature of it.

Technical Guidelines for Written Assignments: All written assignments should be typed, double spaced, and use a 12 size, “Times New Roman” or similar font. Use standard margins (1 inch margins at top and bottom, 1 to 1.25 inches on the sides). All written work should be checked for grammar and spelling mistakes. All quotes and paraphrases in your papers must be attributed to their author(s).

Late Policy: All written assignments are to be turned in on the days and times established by the instructor in the syllabus. The standard penalization for unexcused late assignments is 5 points (1/2 a grade) per day that a paper/assignment is late. I will allow for an extension on a deadline only when students can document illnesses or other crisis and when they contact the instructor regarding their particular situations before the time to turn in the assignment.

Plagiarism and academic dishonesty: Plagiarism consists of using (copying or paraphrasing) words, ideas, or materials from another person, or from the internet, without giving proper credit to the source, thus, representing them as your own. Plagiarism in written assignments will result in a grade of an F (0/100) for that assignment. In severe cases of plagiarism or academic dishonesty, a student may receive a grade of an F for the course.

Instructor Email Contact and Reply Policy: Please email me at martha.santos@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr with any questions or concerns regarding the course, course materials, assignments, etc, and for any questions that are not already explained in the syllabus. I would be happy to answer any of your questions. Typically, I will reply to your email within 24 hours on a weekday or 48 hours on a weekend or holiday.

Activities, Readings, and Assignments Schedule

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the course, there might be some date changes, additional activities or readings, or deadlines that are not established in this schedule. Just as the most exciting salsa dancing involves a great deal of improvisation, this class will require flexibility and ability to improvise. The instructor will give you plenty of notice for additional readings or meetings or changes in due dates.

Wednesday, September 22. What is Salsa?
Wednesday, September 29. Ingredients: African Rhythms, New World Experiences

Orichás

Wednesday, October 6. Ingredients: Rumba

Rumba

Wednesday, October 13. Ingredients: Danzón and Son

Son

Wednesday, October 20. Ingredients: Bomba and Plena

Bomba and Plena

Wednesday, October 27. Ingredients: Mambo

Mambo

Wednesday, November 3. No Class
[Take-home mid-term paper due online on Wednesday, November 3, by 17:00]

Wednesday, November 10. Ingredients: Latin Boogaloo (New York City)

Cha-cha and Boogaloo

Wednesday, November 17. Salsa Politics, Liberation, Puerto Rico and El Barrio

Salsa

Wednesday, November 24. The Commercialization of Salsa Dance in New York City

Salsa

Wednesday, December 1. Salsa Music, Gender and Identity

Salsa

Wednesday, December 8. Salsa Dance, Gender and Identity

Salsa

Wednesday, December 15. Final Project due

Selected Bibliography


Daniel, Yvonne. Rumba: Dance and Social Change in Contemporary Cuba. Bloomington:


