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## **26. Body, space and authenticity in Shakira's video "My Hips Don't Lie"**

Anamaria Tamayo Duque

Released in 2006 as the second single from the album *Oral Fixation Vol. 2*, the song *My hips don't lie* was performed by Shakira with Haitian singer Wyclef Jean, directed by Sophie Muller and filmed in Los Angeles, California.<sup>1</sup> In this video Shakira presents herself in diverse manners each one appealing to different pop-music markets. In this chapter I will address the ways in which her body creates and re-creates her persona to address and enter the United States English-speaking market and, at the same time, asserting her identity as exotic, non-white , Latina to keep her space in the Latin American music market. Each body presented in this video, is creating a new layer of significance that makes the singer's corporeality an overflow of meaning and each body presents itself as "authentic". This corporeal multiplicity speaks about how the interconnected, fluid and relational identities circulate in the public sphere

### **Multiple Bodies**

The video starts in a outdoors setting like a parade with people sitting at the sides; a colonial old town feel, crumbled and washed out walls, with figures of the Barranquilla carnival dancing in the center, cutting to Shakira's torso dressed in golden scales.

This is Shakira's first body, the one omnipresent in the video, appearing for brief moments during the duration of the piece. The only thing we see is a naked back adorned with golden scales, golden hair and golden-sparkling skin.

This female torso softly oscillates with the music with sinuous movements from one side to the other and few glances towards the camera. She is the serpent-like goddess, mysterious, she

doesn't reveal all and do not speak or sing. She never sings in this dress, only moves softly with an "out-of-this-world" glance. Her body is immanent, ideal, perfect.

The second body is the carnavalera's body; she is dressed all in red with her hair flowing wild, bare arms and flowy ruffled skirt, the very incarnation of the sexy Latina. She is resting against a wall, painted with bright colors resembling the Colombian flag, but this paint has a washed out old look. The setting is easily recognized as placed in a street of a low income neighborhood in Barranquilla, her birth place, -in the video she is placed in this neighborhood even though Shakira belongs to the upper classes in Barranquilla social structure.

Sitting in a chair or sometimes standing, she is dancing sensually, open and closing her legs, isolating her torso, rotating her head, touching her lips. These enticing movements are directed to Wyclef, who is placed in a similar location, a little shack as weather-beaten as Shakira's neighborhood, but in his place, all references back to Haiti. Both appear to be connecting from their places of origin, in parallel socio-cultural contexts in Barranquilla and in Haiti; both places rich in with long traditions of carnival celebrations and both located in the Black Atlantic. (Gilroy 1995:58)

When she dances in this piece, the moves used are the ones popularized in her early works in Colombia and Latin America, as a way to connect with her Spanish-speaking longtime fans, doll-like moves of her first albums and belly dancing used in previous videos reference her past, and also these movements make Wyclef to take some interest in the Spanish language. Shakira's dancing moves are the ones that make visible the Spanish-speaking Latin America, at least for Wyclef it was devoid of interest prior to Shakira:

I never know she could dance like this

She makes a man want to speak Spanish

Como se llama... Shakira! Shakira!

This sexy latin Shakira sings to Wycleff looking at him and dancing for him, most of the time ignoring the camera, and giving her body and her movements the possibility to speak truth

Oh baby when you talk like that

You make a woman go mad

So be wise and keep on

Reading the signs of my body

In this moment she points at her hips shaking them with short and rapid movements and also swinging them from side to side... those are the signs of her body, Wyclef must constantly read the signs she is sending through her corporality.

Both spaces change and Shakira and Wyclef are in a place filled with light transparent pieces of fabric, and they play with the fabric layers, that later can be recognized as *mosquito* nets, a staple in Caribbean town, looking for each other but unable to encounter. Meanwhile, the lyrics intensify the sense that only through dance could their mutual sexual attraction unfurl.

Clearly, dance is the medium to get noticed and to establish some kind of agency and presence. Once again, the lyrics emphasize the power of the body to convey the truth and assert her presence in a space, her moves are the ones that give her the possibility of action.

Shakira also notices Wyclef when he directs his gaze to her, and just like he desires her, she also express her desire for him—as she sits opening and closing her legs, and moving the torso side to side. The background colors compose a Colombian flag that frame her red dress. Both singers are presented as –mildly- wild creatures, exotic others filled with passion, equals as outsiders pining for each other.

Shakira cannot express with words her feelings, is this why she asks to read the sings of her body? Every time Shakira sings this phrase about her body there is an obvious emphasis in a very segmented movement of the hips, where her truth lies.

Suddenly a chorus of “baila en la calle de noche, baila en la calle de dia” (dance in the street at night, dance in the street in daylight) cuts to Shakira being the center of a circle of carnival characters from Barranquilla, clapping and dancing on the streets. Her outfit is not one of the traditional carnival characters, rather, she keeps her belly dancer reference and middle eastern descent with bustier, trouser and belt with veils. She sings with the rest of the group “Baila en la calle de noche, Baila en la calle de día,” an invitation to dance on the streets day and night.

The street is finally the place of encounter, Wyclef is also in the street but on the other side and is accompanied by the characters form the Haiti carnival. As they sing, they come closer together as two carnivals become one. The carnival traditions of Barranquilla and Haiti and the flows and circuits of the Black Atlantic are the commonnalities that bring these two together, but in order to this encounter to happen, Shakira first had to prove herself via her moves and her hip shaking.

Another proof of her authenticity as Colombian and a Caribbean woman is needed, so Wycleff asks her to prove her “Colombian moves”:

*Senorita, feel the conga, let me see you move like you come from Colombia*

With a clarinete melody signaling a cumbia rhythm, the scene changes and Shakira is dressed all in white, surrounded by white-skinned and white-dressed dancers. She is dressed with a pants-dress combination and is dancing the Cumbia, a dance known as the national dance in

Colombia for the last 50 years. The choice of white for the color of the dress creates a strong contrast with the red dress of the Caribbean Shakira, specially given that usually the cumbia dancer attire is made with red and white gingam fabric or with a variety of prints in vibrant colors.

In a semi-circle, she is placed in the middle, torso very upright, dancing soft and slow in contrast with the strong sudden movements of belly dancing and hip hop portrayed in other parts of the video. Here the hips are also emphasized as a source of power and affirmation but in a subtle way, slow and delicate oscillation; coupled with a strong, direct, kind of challenging way of looking in Shakira's case.

Cumbia is the embodiment of the Colombian nation's creation myth. Born of a love story between a black man and an India (indigenous woman). She is the womb of the nation, giving birth to the prototype of the Colombian *mestizo* population. Even though the cumbia dance is to be danced as a couple, in the video there are only women, presented angelical as their whiteness is emphasized with the dress. This fact cannot be overlooked because it reifies the mestizo project of whitenization of the modern nation in Colombia, and presents cumbia dancers as an homogeneous group, all light-skinned and mestizo looking, erasing differences present in Colombia's diverse population.

*Mira en Barranquilla se baila así*, say it!

*Mira en Barranquilla se baila así*

"That is how one dances in Barranquilla" exclaims Shakira while moving her long wide skirt side to side loosely resembling the cumbia moves.

The fact that Shakira danced cumbia in the video attracted a lot of attention from the Colombian media, and was seen as a strategy to ascertain her colombianess locally and abroad. Ever since her international success, Colombian fans felt betrayed by Shakira's international face and, in her pursuits of the anglo market, her first fans felt forgotten. This cumbia-dancing Shakira is a way of present her ancestors, state her authenticity as Colombian and reconnect with the local market and fans,

How exactly one dances in *Barranquilla*? This phrase uttered in the video created some controversy in YouTube where people responded to her video posting their own ideas about how “really” one dances in *Barranquilla*. Most of these responses highlighted the values invested in the ideas of tradition and authenticity. The video responses were of all kinds and portrayed different scenes of what people considered Barranquilla's style of dancing: spontaneous dancing in a Christmas gathering, an older couple dancing in a bar and another one dancing champeta (Afro Caribbean rhythm) in the street. The one that obtained more commentaries and more “like it” was the video of an anonymous *tambora* dancer in one of the celebrations of the Barranquilla Carnival. On this video there is a body framed most of the time from the neck down, shaking hips, shoulders, head and torso, the dancer's body creating a dialog with the drums, having fun and smiling while dancing on a plastic table surrounded by a ring of other dancers clapping and cheering<sup>2</sup>.

The commentaries on the YouTube page compared the “authentic” dancing *mulata* with the “whitewashed” dancing companions of Shakira's video. The video responses to Shakira's “My Hips Don't Lie” redress a process of erasure introduced by a climate of social ambivalence towards the historical facts of the black experience in *Colombia*. Ironically, this diversity

engenders a process of erasure and assimilation of blackness in *Colombia* ( Wade, 2009 and Cunnin, 2003).

The YouTube response videos suggest a new way to locate the national body in *Colombia*. Dance and musical movements like *champeta*, *salsa* and “traditional” dances like *mapalé*, populated with aesthetic sensibilities of the African diaspora, are being gathered to answer *Cumbia*’s citational processes which silence the hips with a false benign multi-ethnic body-past.

After the *cumbia* dancing scene Shakira returns to the street finally meeting with Wyclef. Shakira and Wyclef find each other and sing in the middle of the street crowded with dancers from both carnivals (*Haiti* and *Barranquilla*) and from hip hop dancers as well.

She's so sexy every man's fantasy a refugee like me back with the Fugees from a  
3rd world country

Why the CIA wanna watch us?

Colombians and Haitians

I ain't guilty, it's a musical transaction

No more do we snatch ropes

Refugees run the seas 'cause we own our own boats

The idea of a pan-Caribbean identity connects the criminalization of Colombians and Haitians in the U.S., both singers are refugees “from a third world country” for different reasons, migrating in search of the American dream. This narrative show both Colombian and Haitian not so different since the sameness is in the body, in the moves; the afrocaribbean heritage present in festivities, dances, traditions and ways of living. That is why Shakira sings in the chorus that



“this is perfecto”, is the perfect match of two communities, in this case two individuals in the same situation, trying to succeed in the anglo market being labeled as exotic, non-white other. In this case the video looks like a test for Shakira, to see if she is authentic enough, Caribbean enough but also transnational enough to deserve Wycleff support, since by the time the video was released, he was a known face in the English-speaking music scene in United States. Paul Gilroy shows how authenticity enhances the appeal of selected cultural commodities and has become an important element in the mechanism of racialization necessary for making non-European and non-American musicians acceptable items in an expanded pop market. The discourse of authenticity has been a notable presence in the mass marketing of successive black folk-cultural forms for white audiences.(Gilroy 2001: 98)

Oh, you know I am on tonight and my hips don't lie

And I am starting to feel it's right

The attraction, the tension

Baby, like this is perfection

## **Conclusions**

The bodies then, are taken for vessels or sites of production and re-production of culture; objects and subjects to be guarded, reglamented and closely observed. In Shakira's video “My Hips don't lie “ (2006) the body is the place of authenticity, is home base, and a place of encounter. This song constantly places truth and authenticity in the moving body, because, “my

hips don't lie" and also presents it as a source of communality, placing side by side *Haiti* and *Colombia* connected in a pan-Caribbean identity united through carnivals.

In this video four different bodies are being constructed. Each addresses issues of ethnicity, identity, racialization, gender, national identity and transnational spaces.

These bodies allow the circulation and re-creation of meanings that dance around the concept of authenticity, in this case, as Shakira points out, the "signs of my body."

They are inscribed in the narrative tropes associated with *latinidad*, exotism, and the panethnic other (Molina and Valdivia, 2004:206)

The first body is the exotism embodied, the mysterious and dark other, animalistic, unattainable; this is the body of the excess, sexualized and objetivized. It is placed in a way to allow the gaze, and object to look at, rarely displaying any agency since almost doesn't look at the camera and only at the very end sings.

The second body, the Caribbean carnavalera, utilizes the tropicalism trope of the sexy loud Latina. Seductive, using red colors, with curvaceous bodies and long wavy hair. Her sexual desire and availability is on display, as the camera centers its attention in the navel, hips, and torso oscillations. Shakira portrays the sensual stereotype of the Latina women, sex incarnate, popular class, still with some wild undertones, she is barefoot and dances in a space very much like the lower neighborhoods of a Caribbean town. She is the one born from the *pueblo*, the "authentic" Latina. As Molina and Valdivia point out, *Dance, especially the type involving movement below the waist, is often racialized and sexualized withing mainstream U.S. culture and not surprisingly linked with the dynamic construction of latinidad.* (2004;213) This stereotyped concept of *latinidad* operates both ways, homogenizes and erases specificities of Latin American migrants in the United States, but at the same time creates a common ground of

encounter for dissimilar Latin American population. This Caribbean carnavalera displays the “common denominator” in Caribbean countries and highlights the cultural flows of the Black Atlantic.

In contradistinction with the sexy, red, devilish carnavalera, the cumbia dancing Shakira is all dressed in white and surrounded by young virginal looking-dancers. What is particular about Shakira’s cumbia dancing style and her outsider/insider status as Colombian, is the place of her version of Colombian identity.

The idea of *Colombia* as a nation, and Colombian nationalism, like many in Latin American countries has been eroticized and constituted in gendered terms, utilizing “fictional strategies” (Sommers, 1991) that invisibilize gender, race and class conflicts, like the discourse on *mestizaje* on the Cumbia myth. Cumbia can be seen as a cultural practice that reproduces ideals of modernity, assimilation, upward mobility and urban citizenship, especially as practiced in the Barranquilla Carnival. If the hip gyrates, or moves from side to side; if the beat is played before the movement or if it is softly distributed throughout the movement of the oscillating of the hips.; the way in which the shoulder movements respond to and interact with the drums, or how softly or strongly one moves: all of these are social cues about *cumbia*’s ethnic identity. The shoulders, the hips, the oscillating hips, the synchronicity between movement and rhythm, the ways the space is used and the interaction between the dancing and the music are factors that racialize the dancing bodies, setting them within a specific racial structure of the Colombian Caribbean.

Shakira’s cumbia uses strong accents on the hips and soft, almost imperceptible torso movements. The dancers in the back adopt the aloof and soft gaze and positioning of the head, while Shakira contrast this with a fierce look toward the camera. This is somewhat contradictory,

since while trying to display her authenticity, chooses to set herself apart from the cumbia dancers adopting her own style of cumbia. Is this particular style what created the controversy about Barranquilla dancing style?

The choice of dancers and dress clearly speak of a upper class barranquillera cumbia, akin with the whitenization and europeization of Colombia but the You Tube responses were always showing the “other side”, not the upper class, white-mestizo take on cumbia, but the dancing style of the popular classes, the social dances in bars and in the street. Not the Cumbia myth displayed in official ceremonies or festivities but the everyday dancing practices.

The fourth body could be called the "transnational pan-caribbean ambiguous other.” This is a more palatable other than the first goddess-like body, less stereotyped as the carnavalera body and not as essentialized as the cumbia dancing body. This one circulates easily between many ethnic demoninations. Shakira’s ambuguos body can belly dance, dress as an odissi dancer, sing a south Africa pop song (waka waka) and in short, she can occupy the space of the tame exotic other in the western popular culture. Her multiple body, produces a fluid identity, shaped by migrations (of people, music and dances), marginalization and mobilities.

Her body is marked as non-white and categorized and “we the refugees” by Wycleff Jean, but at the same time is whitenized, hair highlighted and language changed. Her personal choices in love interests also contribute to her transnational mobility and whitenization. Her identity is as fluid as her torso movements, it resists classification.

This is the body that operates in the west always as a body of color, marked and exotic. Capable of many ethnic and racial denominations but not determined by any of them. Is exotic and mysterious but not dangerous, unknown nor wild as the others. In a way this is a acceptable difference, a tamed otherness. Shakira states over and over in the song that she has the truth, the

authenticity in her exotic body, specifically in her hips. Even though this may be the claim of the song it is not an issue of truth or authenticity, because, if Shakira's dancing body is the place of fluidity and multiplicity, it cannot be labeled authentic or true to anything. It will never be constructed as authentic but as continually shifting and ambiguous. Let's keep on reading the signs of her body then.

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<sup>1</sup> (www.sonymusic.com accessed December 10th, 2012)

<sup>2</sup> Some video responses to the phrase “en Barranquilla se baila así” are:

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